



***Ten ways you and your community can save energy, keep warm, and stay healthy this winter***  
*From energy tips and help with bills for residents to clean energy for schools and businesses*

**Media Contact:** Dan Thiede, CERTs Communications and Director, 612-626-0556 or [thie0235@umn.edu](mailto:thie0235@umn.edu)



*There are proven ways that people can save energy at home, save money on bills, and stay cozy through the winter. Credit: Kishivan/Shutterstock.com (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)*

**Thursday, October 1, 2020** – The days are getting shorter, the air is getting crisper, and the leaves are changing colors—all familiar cues that winter is around the corner. It also means that the heating season is nearly upon us, and with more Minnesotans staying home and concerned about finances than ever before, energy bills could have a major impact. This makes looking into energy-saving opportunities more important than ever.

The Clean Energy Resource Teams, or CERTs, a group that helps Minnesotans move forward with energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, say there are things that everyone can do to save energy, keep warm, and stay healthy this winter.

“Most people don’t know that October is Energy Awareness Month, and that’s okay,” shared Dan Thiede with CERTs. “What’s important—especially right now—is that they know they’re not alone. Many people are worried about bills and having to choose between heating their home or buying food and medicine. Everyone wants to be comfortable and safe at home in the winter, and we hope these tips will help.”

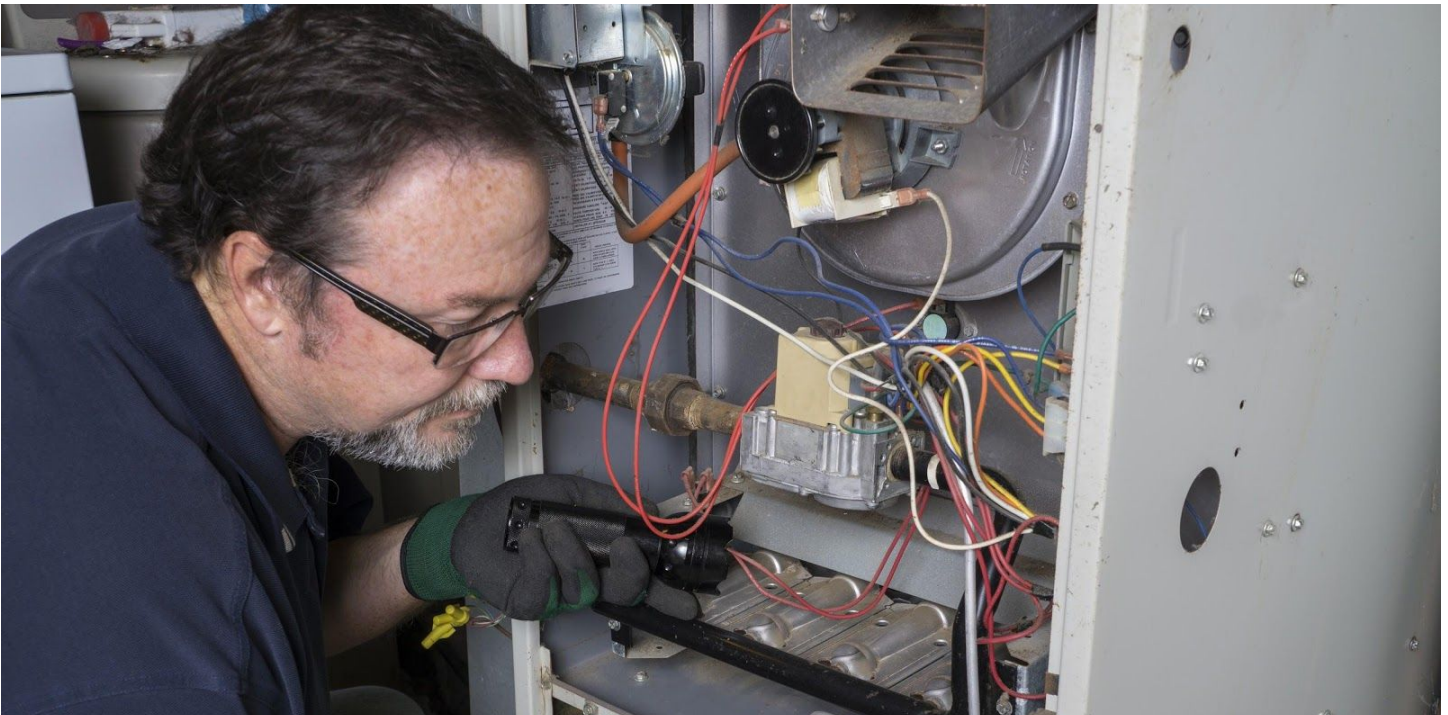
“After you learn what you can do in your own home, check in with your neighbor or a friend or family member that might be feeling particularly isolated so that they can find ways to reduce their energy bills this winter,

too,” Thiede stressed. “The same goes for local businesses, farmers, and schools that could benefit from learning more about their energy options. We’re all in this together.”

### **1. Take steps at home—whether you own or rent—to save energy and money this winter**

Quick heating tips: In the winter, set your thermostat at 68°F during the day and lower it at night and when you are away. Open window curtains or shades during the day to let the sun help warm your home, and close them at night. Also remember to close windows and doors when running the furnace and make sure your air registers are clear of furniture or other obstructions so that air can circulate. You can also seal your home from cold winter drafts with plastic film on the windows and draft snakes, sweeps, and weatherstripping for doors.

If you can, avoid using electric space heaters. They are an expensive way to heat your home, and some are a fire hazard. If it’s difficult to heat your home to 68°F without one, it’s a good sign that improvements are needed to your heating system or insulation.



*Heating systems should be inspected and tuned every year to keep them working well. Credit: Indy Edge/Shutterstock.com (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)*

Maintain your heating system: Heating and cooling account for a little more than half of the energy used in a typical Minnesota home, the largest energy expense for most homes. Your heating and cooling systems should be inspected annually and maintained. Consider replacing your furnace or boiler if it’s nearing the end of its expected life (15-20 years for furnaces, 20-30 for boilers), it requires expensive repairs, or it is inefficient.

Steps you can take for even more savings in your home (or discuss with your landlord if you rent):

- Get an energy assessment to see if you need more insulation (more on that to come)
- Install a programmable or smart thermostat
- Replace furnace filters every month
- Install ENERGY STAR heating and cooling equipment and appliances

- Install water-efficient faucet aerators and showerheads to reduce hot water use (look for the WaterSense label)
- Turn down the thermostat on your water heater to 120°F to reduce energy use and prevent burns

Energy-saving tips for any season: Replace old-style incandescent bulbs with LEDs and turn off lights when you are not in the room or when you can use natural lighting. Cook with your microwave or crockpot. Wash your clothes with cold water and clean the lint trap in the dryer before every load. Unplug electronics when not in use or use a smart power strip to do it for you.



*Switching to LED bulbs, tubes, and fixtures is a simple and effective ways to save energy and money. Credit: Rasstock/Shutterstock.com (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)*

## **2. Get an energy assessment to learn about ways to save and potential health and safety concerns**

If you haven't already, arrange to [get an energy assessment](#) to find out where you can save the most energy, and consider making larger investments for long-term energy savings. Contact your utility to see what options they offer, or who they recommend. This assessment of how your house is functioning can help you decide what needs fixing, what needs upgrading, and what needs replacement. It will identify some simple low-cost measures you can take, such as weather-stripping doors, and it will determine more expensive but cost-effective measures, such as air sealing and adding insulation.







*Some Minnesotans spend up to 30% of their household income on energy expenses. Credit: MPIX/Shutterstock.com (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)*

#### **4. Get help with bills through energy assistance programs**

The nation's average [energy burden](#) is roughly 3.5%, but some Minnesotans spend 20-30% of their income on energy. If you are having trouble paying your energy bills, there are two income-qualified programs that might be able to help. The state [Energy Assistance Program](#) helps pay for energy expenses and the [Weatherization Assistance Program](#) reduces energy bills for the long term with insulation, heating systems, appliances, and more. If you'd like to learn more about your bill and find more resources and support during COVID-19, contact the [Citizens Utility Board of Minnesota](#).

#### **5. Learn about shut-off protections**

If your utilities get shut off or you are behind on payments, contact your utility to set up a payment plan and find out if they have affordability programs and your local Energy Assistance Program to request assistance paying your utility bills, if you qualify. During the winter, (Oct. 15-Apr. 15), if you receive Energy Assistance or if your household income is under 50% of MN median income, you and the utility should establish a reduced payment plan. During the winter, if you make timely payments based on that payment plan, the utility may not disconnect you, or must reconnect you if you have been disconnected.





*Solar powers this family's home and many others like them across Minnesota. Credit: Nokomis Energy (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)*

## **6. Consider if solar energy is right for your home**

If you have an unshaded roof or area of land that gets a lot of sun throughout the year, [solar energy might be a good fit for you](#) and your home. Other technologies like air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, and insulation might better reduce demand for fuels needed to heat your home. Any one of these technologies might be right for you depending on your energy use or the solar resource available at your site. You can also contact your electric utility to see about other options like community solar and green pricing.





*Minnesota residents charge their electric vehicle before continuing on their trip. Credit: Clean Energy Resource Teams (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)*

### **7. Make your next car an electric vehicle and drive less by biking, walking, and taking transit**

It's estimated that by 2040, 55 percent of all new vehicle sales in the US will be electric. There are currently more than [35 plug-in electric vehicle models on the market](#), most easily going over 100 miles a day, some twice that or more. EV charging infrastructure is in place and growing rapidly across Minnesota, too, especially on major corridors. Of course it's also good to consider when biking or walking would be a healthy way to reduce your driving, and to take transit when and where it's available.





*The Heers family in Steele County farms swine, corn, soybeans, peas, and solar. Credit: Blue Horizon Energy (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)*

### **8. Help businesses and farms in your community save with energy projects**

Businesses and farms need help more than ever right now, and many of the same energy-saving steps you can take at home will work for their buildings and operations, too. There are also other funding opportunities like the [Rural Energy for America Program](#) (REAP) from USDA Rural Development and financing options like [Property Assessed Clean Energy](#) (PACE) that can support their energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Their utilities may also offer specialized energy assessments and rebates, too.





*Solar powers campus and education at Pine River-Backus Schools. Credit: Clean Energy Resource Teams (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)*

### **9. Help your community's school go solar**

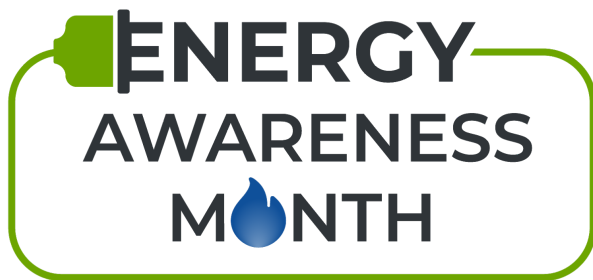
[60 school districts in Minnesota already benefit from solar](#), and there has never been a better time for even more schools to take advantage of clean energy opportunities. On top of the cost savings that solar energy provides for schools, access to solar allows students and teachers to connect STEM education with new technology on school grounds and with one of the fastest growing job markets in the state.



Solar technicians working on site at installation in Chisago County. Credit: The Power of Minnesota (download full resolution photo at <http://on.mncerts.org/eawpics>)

### 10. Explore careers in the quickly growing clean energy economy

If you've been considering a career in clean energy, you're not alone. In 2019, there were more than 61,000 people working in clean energy jobs across the state—1 in 3 of them in Greater Minnesota. Some of the most common opportunities posted to the state's [Clean Energy Job Board](#) over the last couple years have been solar installers, wind technicians, and weatherization specialists, all of which are good family-supporting jobs. There are also [training opportunities available in Minnesota](#) to prepare people for these exciting careers.



October is Energy Awareness Month, starting with Energy Efficiency Day Oct. 7 and ending with Weatherization Day Oct. 30. It's a great time to think about things you can do and share ideas with others. If you have a personal story about energy to share, post it to social media with the hashtag [#EnergyAwarenessMonth](#) to join the conversation.

**About the Clean Energy Resource Teams:** The Clean Energy Resource Teams, or CERTs, connects individuals and communities in Minnesota to the resources they need to identify and implement community-based clean energy projects. CERTs is a partnership of the University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, Minnesota Department of Commerce, Southwest Regional Development Commission, and Great Plains Institute. Learn more at [www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org](http://www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org).



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