

Energy Efficiency
By Tom Beam of the Ashland Conservation Commission
Conservation Corner – March 2015

As a community, Ashland has long understood and appreciated the value of conserving energy. From early efforts using solar water heating, to weatherization improvements like added insulation and double paned windows, to more simple, daily efforts like turning off lights when you leave the room and setting the heater at “sweatshirt” temperature (experts recommend between 68 and 72 degrees), we have all realized that not wasting electricity is a far better (and cheaper) way to live.

Lately, there has been a virtual explosion of technology, gadgets and “stuff” that require electricity. This is definitely a sign of progress and not many of us could bear the thought of not having our cell phone at our side with a full charge. However, this also raises the bar to some degree in our efforts to balance out the benefits of our use of electricity with its costs, both in our own wallets and to the environment we all treasure.

As with many areas of our increasingly complicated lives, being aware and actively involved in keeping track of how much energy you use in your daily life can often get pushed out to the bottom of the list of daily tasks and is only brought back to the forefront when the electric bill shows up in the (e)mail. (quick plug for paperless billing for your City utility bill, go to www.ashland.or.us and click on “Pay Your Utility Bill”)

While often used interchangeably, the terms energy conservation and energy efficiency are actually two different but related concepts, both useful for being smart with your personal energy use.

Energy Conservation involves finding ways within your daily life and activities to use less energy. This can be as easy as changing the thermostat setting down or up and getting used to layering up a bit while indoors. This can also include changes like getting rid of your TV’s and other electronics that plug into the wall and use energy whether you are using them or not (called phantom load. Using a power strip and turning that off when the devices are not in use is the easy fix), or drying clothes outside instead of with a dryer. Often, relatively simple behavioral changes in our routines can accomplish a great deal of energy conservation.

Energy Efficiency means evaluating what you are using energy for and then trying to make sure that every bit of the energy being used is needed to accomplish that goal. Lighting is a great example of energy efficiency that has transformed dramatically in the past decade or so. Energy efficient lighting produces the same amount of light but with less energy required to do so. Light Emitting Diodes (LED) light technology has drastically reduced the amount of electricity needed to light up our homes, businesses, streets, playing fields, etc. For indoor lighting, LED’s also have an added bonus of not emitting heat like the less efficient traditional incandescent light bulbs that were prevalent less than a decade ago. One easy way to ensure you are make energy efficient purchases is to look for items that have the Energy Star logo, which means they have been design, tested and approved to use less energy than other similar products. Rebates for Energy Star appliances are available through the City Conservation Division.

Just so it doesn’t get lost in the conversation, a close relative of energy conservation and energy efficiency is also worth noting. **Renewable energy** is another opportunity to have a more direct

connection and impact in the energy you use on a daily basis. Renewable energy is defined as energy that comes from resources that are naturally replenished like the sun and wind.

Because our City forefathers efforts and decisions over a century ago, the City of Ashland owns and operates its own Municipal Electric Utility, a true public power utility. Along with important electric utility decisions being made locally rather than with shareholders outside our region, comes the opportunity to have a small staff of local energy efficiency experts available and dedicated to helping residents and businesses find ways to use energy as efficiently as possible and also offer tips and ideas to conserve electricity. This saves money for the customer and also reduces the amount of electricity needed for the community now and into the future.

So, if you are interested in finding out what you can do to conserve and efficiently use energy, check out the information and programs available through our own local electric utility.

For tips and tricks to conserve energy – www.ashland.or.us/energytips.

For info on energy efficiency programs, rebates and zero interest loans – www.ashland.or.us/conserve.