

How to budget for electricity usage

Every family has its own lifestyle and its own energy needs. Trying to get the most from your energy dollar without causing discomfort or changes in your family's lifestyle is a challenge, but can be worth a small amount of extra effort.

One way of controlling energy costs is by budgeting kilowatt hour usage. One kilowatt hour is equal to the electricity needed to burn ten 100-watt light bulbs for one hour. Learning how to read your meter will let you keep track and record how much electricity you're using from day to day and month to month. Follow these four easy steps to budget your family's electricity use:

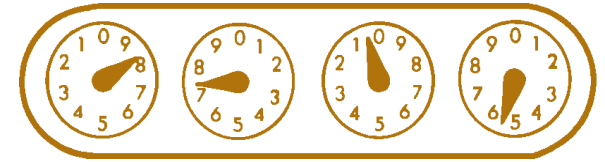
STEP 1 Estimate the amount of money you can afford to spend for electricity each month. Remember that electricity use varies from season to season depending on heating and cooling needs. Determine the number of kilowatt hours (kWh) you can afford to use. Your district office can tell you how much a certain amount of kWh will cost.

STEP 2 Divide the desired monthly amount of kWh by the number of days in the month and you get a daily average. For example, if you decided you could afford 1,200 kWh per month and there were 30 days in the month, your daily average use should be 40 kWh.

STEP 3 Read your electric meter daily at the same time each day. It's important that the meter is read at about the same time each day so you'll know exactly how much electricity has been used during the 24 hour period.

Here's how to read your electric meter

Read each dial from right to left and write them down in the same order. Some dials turn clockwise and some counterclockwise, but don't let this confuse you. Each dial hand rotates in the direction of the increasing numbers. If the hand is between two numbers, read the number the hand has just passed. For example, if the dial hand has passed 5 but is not yet to 6, read that dial as 5. Write down the number from each dial from right to left. Practice on the following examples:



Example 1 8705 kilowatts

On some four dial meters it is necessary to multiply the reading by 10. This is indicated by "X 10" on the face of the meter.



Example 2 43894 kilowatts

You may have difficulty determining the number to record if the dial hand is pointing directly to the number. For example, in the above illustration, is the dial hand in the dial second from the left pointing to 4 or 3? In this case, read it as a 3 rather than a 4 because the dial immediately to the right has not yet passed 0.



Example 3 05049 kilowatts