Saving on Your Utility Bill – You Can Do It! Are you looking for ways to reduce your monthly utility bills? Let this free energy-saving workshop show you how. The workshop will show homeowners where they can make changes in and around their homes to reduce their energy consumption. The low-cost or no-cost methods will be easy for any participant to do, save money, and be more comfortable during the upcoming cold weather. The workshop will be offered at 5:30 pm on Tuesday, January 15. The workshop is free but preregistration is required.

Parenting Matters: Parent Education Program. It's not easy being a parent. In fact, parenting is probably the most challenging job most of us will ever have. Come to this 8-week, hands-on creative learning program for parents who want to make a difference in their child’s life and improve their parent-child relationship. You will learn how to manage stress, improve your communication skills, avoid power struggles with your child, and build a support system to help you. The classes will meet on Tuesdays—January 15 through March 4—from 12 noon to 2 pm. A $10 registration fee covers materials; preregistration is required. Call to inquire about evening classes.

New Weight Management Program: Eat Smart/Move More/Weigh Less. This new weight management program gives you practical skills to lose or maintain your weight in a healthy way. Even if we are able to maintain and not gain over the holidays, we may still want to plan for eating healthier and moving more in 2008. The class will meet on Mondays, 12:00-1:00 pm, January 28 through May 12. Plan to attend all sessions or as many you can. A $20 registration covers supplies, personal journal and magazine; preregistration is required.

MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER FOR ANY OF THESE CLASSES, CALL 828-255-5522. ALL ARE HELD AT THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY CENTER OF NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, 94 COXE AVENUE, ASHEVILLE.

Holiday Indoor Air Quality

Although many individuals are not sensitive to various indoor pollutants, it is best to be aware of what is going on in your home for the benefit of those visiting and your own future health.

The burning of candles seems to become more common during the winter months and especially during the holidays. It is important to remember the burning of candles can be a trigger for an asthma episode as they can increase small particle pollution. The following won’t alleviate the problem but may help. Keep candle wicks trimmed to less than one quarter inch to minimize sooting. Keep candles away from drafty places. Use a good filtration system on your furnace and replace filters more often during periods of high candle use. Be aware of candles and holiday products that have been recalled by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.
You Don’t Have To Be an Energy Scrooge - If a houseful of company and the extra hot water, lights, and need for a warmer house make you shutter at the thought of January’s higher utility bill, there are some preparations that can be done prior to the visit.

- Study your family’s lighting needs and use patterns, paying special attention to high-use areas such as the living room, kitchen, and outside lighting. Look for ways to use lighting controls—like occupancy sensors, dimmers, or timers—to reduce lighting energy use, and replace standard (also called incandescent) light bulbs and fixtures with compact or standard fluorescent lamps.

- Clean warm-air registers, baseboard heaters, and radiators as needed; make sure they're not blocked by furniture, carpeting, or drapes.

- Turn off kitchen, bath, and other exhaust fans within 20 minutes after you are done cooking or bathing. When replacing exhaust fans, consider installing high-efficiency, low-noise models. Replace the fan switch with a timer.

- Installing a programmable thermostat, you can adjust the heat to be lower at night when everyone is in bed and raise it again before they get up.

- During the heating season, keep the draperies and shades on your south-facing windows open during the day to allow the sunlight to enter your home and closed at night to reduce the chill you may feel from cold windows.

- When you use the fireplace, reduce heat loss by opening dampers in the bottom of the firebox (if provided) or open the nearest window slightly—approximately 1 inch—and close doors leading into the room. Lower the thermostat setting to between 50° and 55°F.

- Keep your fireplace damper closed unless a fire is going. Keeping the damper open is like keeping a window wide open during the winter; it allows warm air to go right up the chimney.

- Install aerating, low-flow faucets and showerheads.

- Repair leaky faucets promptly; a leaky faucet wastes gallons of water in a short period of time.

- Lower the thermostat on your water heater; water heaters sometimes come from the factory with high temperature settings, but a setting of 120°F provides comfortable hot water for most uses.

- Take more showers than baths. Bathing uses the most hot water in the average household.

- Insulate your electric hot-water storage tank, but be careful not to cover the thermostat. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations.

- Insulate your natural gas or oil hot-water storage tank, but be careful not to cover the water heater's top, bottom, thermostat, or burner compartment. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations; when in doubt, get professional help.

- Insulate the first 6 feet of the hot and cold water pipes connected to the water heater.

- If you are in the market for a new dishwasher or clothes washer, consider buying an efficient, water-saving ENERGY STAR model to reduce hot water use.

- Drain a quart of hot water from your water tank every 3 months to remove sediment that impedes heat transfer and lowers the efficiency of your heater. The type of water tank you have determines the steps to take, so follow the manufacturer's advice.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

If You’re the One Traveling - If the price of gas is a concern when planning holiday visits, it may be time to review inefficient driving habits. Becoming aware of what is occurring when behind the wheel could help to reduce expenses.

- Idling gets you 0 miles per gallon. The best way to warm up a vehicle is to drive it. No more than 30 seconds of idling on winter days is needed. Anything more simply wastes fuel and increases emissions.

- Aggressive driving (speeding, rapid acceleration, and hard braking) wastes gas. It can lower your highway gas mileage 33% and city mileage 5%.

- Avoid high speeds. Above 60 mph, gas mileage drops rapidly. The www.fueleconomy.gov web site shows how driving speed affects gas mileage.

- When you use overdrive gearing, your car’s engine speed goes down; this saves gas and reduces wear.

- Using cruise control on the highway helps you maintain a constant speed and, in most cases, will save gas.

- Clear out your car; extra weight decreases gas mileage.

- Reduce drag by placing items inside the car or trunk rather than on roof racks. A roof rack or carrier provides additional cargo space and may allow you to buy a smaller car; however, a loaded roof rack can decrease your fuel economy by 5%.
To Grandma’s House We Go

During the holiday season many of us take off to visit family and friends. When we have children, this can become quite the endeavor. Here are some ideas to ease the strain of making those trips.

- Children handle schedule changes and other changes that occur when traveling better when they know what to expect. Share the itinerary with them. Let them know when you are leaving, how you will travel, how long it will take and how long you will stay there. Talk to them about who you are visiting and what you plan to do when you are there.

- Have older children pack their own bags. You can always double check it but this way they become more involved with the trip.

- Make up travel games to play in the car or plane like word games or “I Spy”. With older children, bring cards or small items like binoculars so they can see out cars further. If it is a new trip, let your children be travel reporters and use disposal cameras, notebooks and even recorders to chronicle the trip.

- Prepare travel bags with things for your child to do inside. Have this organized so that you can pull out one item at a time. These bags can double as activity bags if visiting where there are no children’s toys or books. If traveling by plane, check with the airline on any restrictions on carry-on items and make sure the activity bag is not too large or heavy to make it difficult if changing planes in busy airports.

- When traveling by car, be prepared to stop every two to three hours. Make these stops part of the trip and do a fun game, stop at a known park, run around or move in other ways.

- Be prepared for hungry tummies. Both theirs and yours. Pack healthy snacks in small bags that can easily be shared and closed up if not all eaten. Include water as the drinks because if spilled they are easier to clean up. If flying, check the airport’s regulation on fluids and food and plan to purchase healthy items like water, plain pretzels, nuts, fruit or other snack items at the airport. If your layover has enough time for a meal, check what restaurants are in the airport and choose a salad, plain sandwich or other healthy choice instead fried foods.

- Be prepared with travel sized wipes and other needs like diapers, change of clothes, if younger, in case you need a quick clean up.

- When flying with children explain to them ahead of time, that you expect them to sit and wait until the carry-on bags are stored and the flight attendant gives the okay before getting out toys or games. This is important when using electronic games.

- Check with the airline about using Child Restraint Systems on the plane. If your car seat is appropriate for planes and cars you can use it with children 40 pounds or less. This is the safest way for children, toddlers and infants to travel. Children over 40 pounds can use just the airplane seat belt. Remember to check what the laws are where you will be visiting so you are prepared. Some even have pet restraint laws.

- Be realistic about the trip and what behavior you expect from your children. Keep a positive attitude and laugh at the little things because it will be too hard for children to be well behaved the whole trip when dealing with changed schedules and the excitement of seeing family and other holiday celebrations.

While visiting, try to have some schedule with bedtimes and meals and don’t try and do everything. This will give some structure to the children’s day and help prevent some of those holiday breakdowns. For more tips on traveling with children, call the Buncombe County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension, 255-5522.
**Become a Safety Elf During the Holidays**

Although we all know the importance of safety in and around our home, it may be necessary to have those reminders when our lives get overly busy this time of year.

**When Getting That Special Tree:**

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.
- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches, and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin; and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and radiators. Because heated rooms rapidly dry out live trees, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic and do not block doorways.

**Lights:**

- Indoors or outside, use only lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, which indicates conformance with safety standards.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and throw out damaged sets.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be shocked.
- Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use.
  - Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks. Or, run strings of lights through hooks (available at hardware stores).
  - Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.
  - For added electric shock protection, plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable outdoor GFCI’s can be purchased where electrical supplies are sold. GFCI’s can be installed permanently to household circuits by a qualified electrician.

**Decorations:**

- Use only noncombustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonlead metals. Lead materials are hazardous if ingested by children.
- Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. Always use nonflammable holders, and place candles where they will not be knocked down.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to avoid the child swallowing or inhaling small pieces. Avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.
- Wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

**Storage:**

- If younger children are coming to visit, inspect your cabinets for hazards that may be stored within reach, i.e., pesticides, breakable objects, matches, etc.
Cooking with a Light Touch

When cooking your holiday meal this Thanksgiving, here are some tips on making the dishes healthier:

• Reduce the Fat – You can reduce the fat in most recipes without changing the quality of the end result, by 1/4 to 1/3. You can also replace some of the fat in baked goods by replacing 1/2 of the fat with applesauce or other fruit purees.
• You can also reduce the sugar by 1/4 to 1/3 and increase the sweet spices like cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, or vanilla.
• If the sugar or fat is in the recipe just for flavoring, you can decrease them to match your tastes.
• Use nonstick baking pans, nonstick cooking sprays or paper muffin liners when baking.
• Substitute whole grain flour for 1/4 to 1/3 of the flour.
• Decrease the salt by 1/2 as well, and you decrease the sodium in the dish.
• Use recipes that call for liquid oil instead of solid fat, and use the healthier oils like olive and canola oils.
• Another way to decrease the calories from these dishes is to decrease the portion. When you just don’t want to mess with a family recipe, decreasing the portion by 1/4 to 1/3 will also decrease the fat, sugar and other ingredients that increase our risk for weight gain and sodium during the holidays.
• Even though we need to eat more vegetables, the holidays can bring those dishes which are “Death to our Vegetables”, like creamy casseroles. Try to make sure you have some plain veggies at the meals for those who want to do without all the extra calories.


Holiday Food Safety Tips

• **Cook foods to proper temperatures.** Cooking foods to proper temperatures can destroy harmful bacteria. Follow these guidelines to be sure that your food has reached a safe internal temperature. Turkey and chicken, whole – 165°F; Stuffing – 165°F; Egg dishes – 160°F; Fresh Hams -160°F; Leftovers and casseroles - 165°F. Purchase a food thermometer so that you can be sure your food is safe!

• **Store leftovers promptly.** Leftovers should not be left at room temperature for more than two hours. Store them in the refrigerator within two hours after cooking. Be sure to wrap them well or store in covered containers. Use leftovers within 3 days or freeze them. Harmful bacteria can grow even in the refrigerator. If you are not sure if something is safe to eat, throw it out. If you are going to freeze leftover turkey, do so as soon after cooking as possible. The longer you leave it in the refrigerator before freezing, the poorer the quality will be when you eat it later.

• **Prepare a Healthy Buffet.** Prepare a number of smaller platters and dishes ahead of time. Avoid keeping perishable foods over two hours in the “danger zone” of 40°F to 140°F because this is a leading cause of foodborne illness. Hold hot foods at 140°F or higher and cold foods at 40°F or lower until serving time. At events where food is set out for guests, avoid adding fresh foods to foods that have been out longer. Serve smaller bowls of food and put out fresh food bowls as needed. For added safety, put foods on ice or over a heat source to keep them out of the temperature “danger zone”.

• **Refrigerate That Pumpkin Pie.** A pumpkin pie is a form of custard, and like custard, must be kept in the refrigerator. The same is true for other foods which contain eggs, milk or have a high moisture content. Bacteria love to grow in these types of foods.
**Holiday Turkey Tips**

Look for us on the Buncombe County TV station this season for tips on cooking a safe holiday turkey. If you can't catch us there, follow these tips, call our office at 255-5522 or use the hotline contacts below.

**Safe Thawing Times:** Give yourself enough time to safely thaw your frozen turkey in the refrigerator. You need about 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds of turkey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 to 12 pounds</td>
<td>1 to 2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 to 16 pounds</td>
<td>2 to 3 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20 pounds</td>
<td>3 to 4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 pounds</td>
<td>4 to 5 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HOTLINE NUMBERS:**

**Turkey Talk Line – 1-800-BUTTERBALL (288-8372) - Online Assistance:** [http://www.butterball.com](http://www.butterball.com)

- November 1-16: 9:00 am-9:00 pm
- November 17-18: 9:00 am-7:00 pm
- November 19-21: 9:00 am-9:00 pm
- Thanksgiving Day: 7:00 am-7:00 pm
- November 23-Dec 21: 9:00 am-7:00 pm (weekdays)
- December 22-23: 9:00 am-7:00 pm
- December 24-25: 8:00 am-5:00 pm
- December 26-28: 9:00 am-7:00 pm

**USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline – 1-888-674-6854** – You may speak with a food safety specialist from 10:00 am - 4:00 pm Eastern time on weekdays year round. On Thanksgiving - 8:00 am - 2:00 pm, Eastern Time. Online Assistance: [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) (general food safety, preparation and handling of meat and poultry products).

Individuals with disabilities who would like to participate in any program mentioned in this newsletter but who need special assistance to do so, should call the Extension Center at 828-255-5522 at least five days prior to the event.