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 free workshop will be offered at 6:30 pm on Tuesday, October 16 at the Buncombe County Extension Center, 94 Coxe Avenue. Space is limited so pre-registration is necessary by calling 255-5522.

Basic Home Maintenance Course – Have you wanted to make those basic home repairs but didn’t know where to start? The Buncombe County Cooperative Extension Center is offering a five-series Basic Home Maintenance Course beginning Tuesday, November 27 from 1:00-3:00 pm. Remaining dates for the course are: November 27 and 29, December 4, 11 and 13. Some of the topics to be covered are: saving on your heating and cooling bills, basic plumbing repairs, interior and exterior maintenance, landscaping and lawn care, indoor air quality, common household pest, etc. The course also offers "hands-on" activities that include repairing: leaking faucets, damaged drywall, and replacing window screens. The fee of $20 includes all materials. The course will be held at the Extension Center, 94 Coxe Avenue. Preregistration is required by calling 255-5522.

It’s That Time of Year Again

The signs of the season are not just the cooler days but the multicolored Asian Lady beetles congregating on the sides of the house, porch or garage in search of a location to overwinter. From the exterior of the house, the beetles move indoors by crawling under defective weather stripping or by crawling and flying in open windows/doors on warm days. They use chemical cues to locate specific crevice they want to inhabit within the structure. The source of these chemical cues may be the beetle feces from the previous winter, the odor of beetles that died at the site, or an attractant pheromone. The beetles hibernate as adults, usually in wall voids (they cannot survive long in heated rooms of a house). On warm days, they become active and move towards light or bright surfaces. The Asian lady beetle does not reproduce indoors and the beetles are not harmful to people or pets since they do not bite or sting. Neither do they eat wood or furniture. If squashed, they may stain fabric and painted surfaces.

Preventive pesticide treatments both indoors or outdoors provide little control. Outdoors, you simply can’t treat enough area safely and effectively to prevent the beetles from finding access points into the house. Spraying or using “bug bombs” are not recommended for controlling the Asian lady beetle. Spraying the entire interior of the house isn’t practical, economical, or most importantly safe for humans or pets. Preventing entry is by far the most preferred and effective method for reducing the problem. If you decide to vacuum up the beetles, empty the vacuum bag as soon as possible. Although the beetles will die in the vacuum within a day or so, the dead beetles will decay and may leave a permanent odor in the vacuum.
October is National Energy Awareness Month

Before the heating season begins, you may want to inspect your home and perform a “simple” home energy audit. The key is to be diligent while performing the “walk through” of your home and keep a running record of areas you have inspected and problems found. This will help you prioritize your upgrades. Follow the four simple steps of:

- **Checking For Air Leaks**
  Sealing up air leaks should be the first step in retrofitting your home to conserve energy and save money. Air leakage can be found in and out of your home with about one-third of the air leaks found through openings in your ceilings, walls and floors. Some common spots to look for air leakage is around your plumbing, chimney, attic access hatches, electrical outlets and switches, door frames and windows just to name a few. When you find possible areas of leakage, make a note so you can return to make changes. Fixing the air leakage problems will usually consist of sealing, caulking, and weather stripping.

- **Checking for Adequate Insulation**
  After you have sealed all possible air leaks you can move on to checking your home’s insulation. Heat loss in the ceiling and walls in your home could be very large if the insulation levels are less than the recommended minimum. You can check recommended insulation R-value levels at the following website: [http://www.ornl.gov/sci/roofs+walls/insulation/ins_01.html](http://www.ornl.gov/sci/roofs+walls/insulation/ins_01.html). Checking your home’s insulating system is one of the fastest and most cost-efficient ways to reduce energy waste and maximize your energy dollars. You can increase your homes comfort by 30% just by spending a few hundred dollars.

- **Inspecting Heating and Cooling System**
  Heating and cooling can account for about 44% of your electric bill. It is recommended that you have a service maintenance contract on your heating and cooling and that a professional check and clean your equipment before the heating and cooling season. Between visits you can help keep your heating and cooling system in good working order. Things you can do to help your system run smoothly are: vacuum grill and duct areas, keep supply and return vents clear, keep supply vents open, clean/replace air filters regularly, remove any obstructions around your HVAC unit, clean leaves and debris from condenser, make sure condensation drip pan is clear. If your HVAC is more than 15 years old, you should consider replacing it with a newer energy efficient unit.

- **Evaluating your Home’s Lighting**
  Energy for lighting is about 10% of your electric bill. You may have a 75-watt light bulb where a 60-watt light bulb belongs. Something also to consider is to change your regular incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light (CFL’s) bulbs. Use of a 15-watt compact fluorescent light bulb to replace a 60-watt incandescent bulb has its advantages. The life of a compact fluorescent light bulb is 10,000 hours as compared to an incandescent that last only 1,000 hours. By making the change from incandescent to compact fluorescent you can save approximately $5.40 a year based on kWh price of $0.08. In addition to these savings, you will also save on bulb purchases since CFL’s last longer.

Be Careful of Cut Tomatoes

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta recently announced some new recommendations for cut tomatoes. They advise that once tomatoes are cut, they need to be refrigerated within 2 hours. CDC makes the following recommendations for consumers:

- Don't buy bruised or damaged tomatoes.
- Wash all tomatoes thoroughly with water just before eating or preparing.
- Refrigerate all cut, peeled, or cooked tomatoes within 2 hours or discard them.
- Separate cut tomatoes from raw, unwashed produce, raw meats and raw seafood.
- Uncut tomatoes do not need to be refrigerated, but should be stored away from other produce that will be eaten without being cooked thoroughly.

Since 1990, at least 12 Salmonella outbreaks have been linked to tomatoes. These multi-state outbreaks have caused about 1,990 confirmed illness cases. Salmonella outbreaks may have included as many as 79,600 cases because more than 97% of infections are not confirmed. Even though there were no reported deaths from the infections, the increase in the number of outbreaks in the recent years had caused the concern. Exactly how tomatoes get contaminated is not known, but it seems that the tomato-growing environment is a possibility and that consumers can take precautions when preparing and storing tomatoes.
Praise Goes a Long Way

When raising children, we are often reminded to focus more on the good and less on the bad - rewards go further than punishments. The same is true for praise. Children grow more confident and feel better about themselves when they receive praise from people important to them. The same can be true at any age. When was the last time that someone praised you for a job well done or noticed the extra effort you put into a project at home or at work. How did it make you feel? Those little comments can really brighten a day and make some of tedious day to day responsibilities easier and more enjoyable. Here are tips for parents when giving praise but can also be helpful if you want to focus more on the positives than the negatives when dealing with those in your life.

- Increase your praise level – often when we give criticism we are lengthy about what we say. Our praises are sometimes quick and not as drawn-out.

- Be specific – let the person or child know exactly what they did well. For example: don’t just say “You did a great job on this project”; let them know the specific thing they did well, such as, “You really pulled all the numbers together in a clear way” or “You researched thoroughly how to plant a vegetable garden for your school report.”

- Stay honest – praising every act or event will cause those around you to question the sincerity of your praise. Even children can pick up on praise that is not true full.

- Identify progress – recognize that those around you are developing new skills or getting better at what they do.

- Don’t compare – even if the comparisons are statements such as “You are the best singer we have” or “You are better than your brother in math”. These types of praise are a way of putting others down and also can foster the feeling of failure if they can not always perform the best. Negative comparisons can also add up so that even if each individual comparison does not seem that important, hearing the negative comparisons over and over again can make someone feel that they will never get anything right.

- Avoid negative compliments – these are the ones where you say something positive but end it with a negative. An example is “it’s great you were good at daycare today, why can’t you be good at home” or “it’s great that you got the report in early, for a change”. These types of statements express that you may not believe that they really can do what you praised them for on a regular basis so why should they even try.

- Remember to commend efforts and not just results – this goes a long way in encouraging continued development especially with difficult tasks.

So, take some time to notice the positives both with your family and with friends or co-workers. When you give praise it can make you feel good as well as those receiving the praise.

Vegetables and Fruits - A Treat Not A Trick!

This Halloween add some colorful vegetables and fruits to your holiday celebrations for a tasty treat. You can keep with the orange theme by using carrots and winter squashes like pumpkin, acorn and butternut. A real sweet treat is pasteurized apple cider. Look for a local supplier and it’ll be fresher. Another sweet treat is a fruit tray of cut apples, oranges and other sweet tasting fruits. Take time to visit a local orchard and see how apples grow and are harvested. Don’t just add veggies and fruits to your celebrations but also hand them out as a healthy treat. Get little boxes of raisins or other dried fruit or even little bags of carrots. If you are looking for other non-candy treats try stickers with veggies or fruits on them or small toys. When children are exposed to more of a variety of foods in a fun way, they are more likely to acquire a taste for them.
Home Lead Testing
With all the recent recalls of various household items and children’s toys containing lead, concerned individuals have been inquiring on how to test the myriad of imported items in their homes. Although there are home lead testing kits available they have not shown to be accurate when used, and therefore, may give a false sense of security if the results show no lead content. Studies have shown the home test kits are unreliable about 60% of the time. With that great of an error of margin they are not recommended. If someone would like to be kept informed of recalls as they occur and have computer access, they can visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission at: www.cpsc.gov.

Cleaning Tips
- To make an all purpose cleaner mix together: 2 tablespoons ammonia, 2 tablespoons liquid detergent and 1 quart of water
- To clean mildew and other stains from grout: mix ½ cup bleach and 1 cup of water. Let stand 5 minutes and rinse with clear water.
- For windows and mirrors: mix 3 tablespoons ammonia, 1 tablespoon white vinegar and ¾ cup water in a clean spray bottle.

For additional articles and workshop announcements during the month, check out Nancy’s blog at: http://onhomefront.blogspot.com/

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.

On the Home Front is a newsletter produced by the Family and Consumer Sciences Agents in Buncombe County. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform and educate Buncombe County residents on workshops and issues that affect them, and to provide ideas for helping improve their quality of life.

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Check out Buncombe County Center’s website at...http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu