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THE PHANTOM STRIKES YOUR WALLET

Even when they're not in use, a lot of home electronics and gadgets are drawing energy—and bumping up the electric bill

THE SMARTPHONE, iPad, laptop, e-reader, modem, router, plasma television—all those household gadgets guzzle a lot of energy.

In fact, powering electronics, lights and appliances accounts for 30% of the average household's energy use, according to survey results from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That's up from 19% in 1993.

Trouble is, all those electronics consume electricity even when they're not in use, creating a "phantom load" on the power grid, says Paul Campbell, director of sustainability and green leadership for Sears Holdings.

A typical American home has 40 products continuously drawing power, amounting to roughly \$100 spent every year powering devices that are off or on standby, according to Energy Star, a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy.

Julia Vosler, owner of a design and faux-painting company, once left her home for seven months while it was being renovated. Nonetheless, her monthly electric bills totaled \$75 to

\$100. "I called Con Ed and said, 'I'm not there, I'm not using anything.' But even if they're off, they still guzzle up energy so long as they're

plugged in," says Ms. Vosler, who lives in Katonah, N.Y. Homeowners can take steps to stop power-hungry appliances: unplug de-

vices that aren't in use, set automatic timers and schedule energy-consuming activities, like running dishwashers or washing machines, during off-

peak times, typically before 1 p.m. or after 6 p.m., to avoid extra charges.

Adriana Faerman, broker associate with ONE Sotheby's International Realty in Miami, recently sold a penthouse for \$2.5 million in Sunny Isles Beach, Fla., that had "all the gadgets you could imagine." Ms. Faerman—who is certified by EcoBroker, an environmental- and energy-education program for real-estate professionals—advised the buyer to put in timers for many of the appliances, and the bill decreased by 50%, she says.

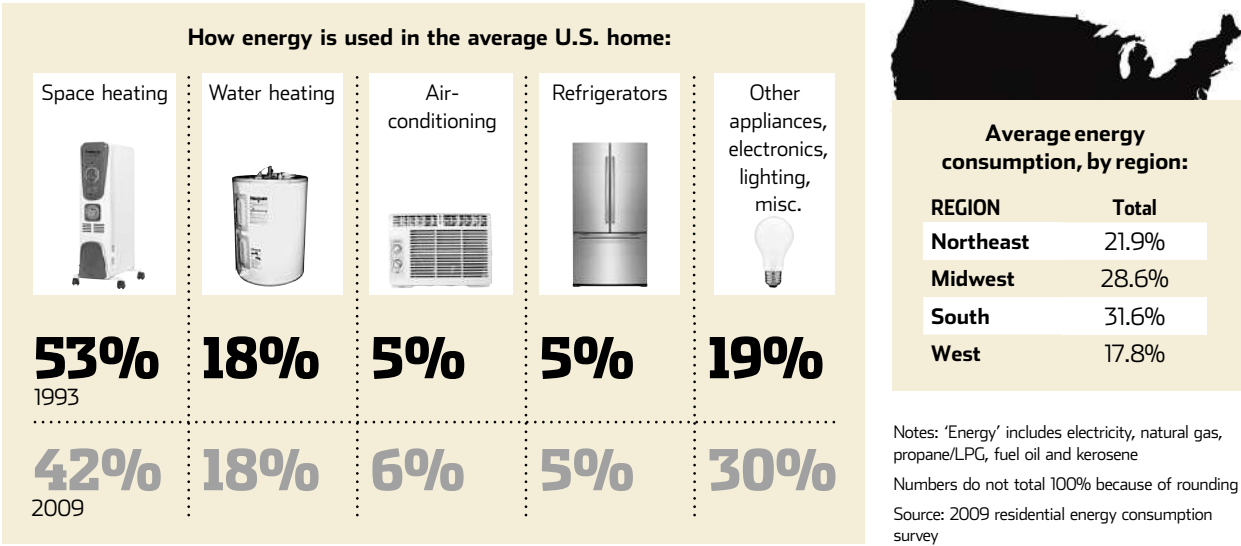
Still, gadgets aren't the No. 1 energy hog. That's the furnace and other space heaters, which accounted for 42% of household energy use, according to the 2009 survey, the latest data available. But better insulation, improvements in glass and more-efficient heating equipment have lowered consumption since 1993, when 53% of energy use went to space heating.

Ms. Vosler, the interior designer, says she recently left a space heater running in her basement for a month and got a bill for \$500. "I turned it off, and now I wear a sweater," she says.

—Sanette Tanaka

UTILITY PLAYERS

Much of our energy spending goes toward heating, but electronics and other gadgets are getting more power-hungry



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