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## Tune up your home with an energy audit

**LEARN IT:** Homeowners can get free in-depth look at their digs — and save

BY JENNIFER WILLIS

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...you're like me, you left Al Gore's movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," feeling a bit despondent. In the closing credits, the filmmakers listed suggestions for simple yet powerful steps that can be taken to have a positive impact on the looming energy crisis.



Kevin Cote, a field adviser for the Energy Trust of Oregon, gets up close and personal with a house's infrastructure in an evaluation of its energy efficiency.

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One suggestion stood out: "Get a home energy audit."

What's a home energy audit? This is a review of your house condominium or apartment to reveal areas where energy efficiency can be improved.

I live in a condo. There's only so much I can do: I doubt the condo association would be thrilled if I covered every surface with solar panels. But I still want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

I did two things: I conducted my own walk-through to find trouble spots, and I called Energy Trust of Oregon for a free home energy audit.



### Walk-through's a first step

My do-it-yourself review was fairly straightforward. I made a checklist of the usual suspects — lights, water, insulation, etc. — to gauge my condo's energy efficiency. When I moved in, I'd installed all compact fluorescent light bulbs, called CFLs.





I'd recently replaced my shower head with one that has better flow control for water conservation.



I keep an eye on utility bills by raising the thermostat a few degrees in summer, and turning it down in winter — visitors often complain about my cold house in the darker months. I also knew that my drafty old windows — which account for most of my exterior wall space — really suck the energy right out of the place.




My walk-through yielded no surprises, but I suspected I could do more. Next up was a visit from the Energy Trust of Oregon.



The Energy Trust of Oregon was formed in 2002 to help Oregonians save energy and move toward renewable sources of energy and self-reliance. With programs covering new and existing homes and businesses, solar and wind power, and production efficiency, the Energy Trust seeks to transform the energy market in Oregon.




Through the Home Energy Savings Program, Oregon customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural and Cascade Natural Gas can have a free home energy audit and find out if they qualify for any number of rebates and tax credits on energy-saving home improvements. The State Home Oil Weatherization Program covers homes heated by oil, kerosene, propane or wood.




### Help comes from a pro

Energy Trust Field Manager Shawn O'Neill — who runs the crew for all of Oregon — appeared promptly at my door and went straight to work.

"It just gives you a good overall assessment of what's going on in the house and maybe a look at other things you hadn't considered," O'Neill explained. "I give a rundown of what the rebates are, and help prioritize what would make the most sense dollarwise. For efficiency, I look at it both energywise and dollarwise. Your success rate is tied to ours. Ours is tied to yours."

He checked my furnace and cooling system, tested the temperature of my water, switched out flow restrictors in my sinks for more efficient ones, and came armed with a hefty supply of CFLs.

He even crawled underneath my condo to check insulation and tried to locate the elusive water heater — which later was discovered hiding inside a walled-off section of the linen closet.

I learned that I need not worry about the possibility of leaking ductwork, since it's inside the heated space of my home — the ductwork in most homes is located beneath the house and can be problematic if not insulated properly.

Even though I have an older furnace, O'Neill pronounced it in good working order, and advised that weather-stripping the furnace closet door could improve efficiency.

"Older places, like turn-of-the-century, are really tough," O'Neill said. "I'll go up in the attic and there's zero insulation. Nothing in the walls, nothing in the attic, and the old, original, single-paned wood windows. I just wonder how people didn't go bankrupt from just the cost of heating that place. But we can make serious adjustments to that."



O'Neill handed me his written report, and I'm pleased to say my 1970s condo is more energy-efficient than I'd thought. Although I'll want to take a serious look at having weatherized windows installed, it's good to know that the small choices — like opting for CFLs and water flow restrictors, and wrapping water pipes — really do make a difference.

If you want to schedule your own home energy audit, it's better to call sooner rather than later. As cooler weather sets in, the Energy Trust team gets lots of calls. "As soon as people hit their thermostat, that's when we start getting busy," O'Neill said.

Plus, the sooner you improve your home's energy efficiency, the sooner you can start reaping the benefits of available rebates, tax credits and lower energy bills.

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### Vital stats

- Average annual cost of lighting a home: \$130
- Percentage reduction in cost by switching from incandescent to fluorescent lighting: 70
- Percentage of occupied homes nationwide with central air conditioning: 57
- Percentage of occupied homes nationwide with air-conditioner window units: 25

*Sources: Chicago Tribune, The Washington Post*

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### Find out more

- Free online home energy analyzer at [www.energytrust.org/analyzerindex.html](http://www.energytrust.org/analyzerindex.html)

Spend 20 to 30 minutes using this online tool to analyze your home's energy efficiency and receive four free compact fluorescent light bulbs.

- U.S. Department of Energy, [www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your\\_home/](http://www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your_home/)

Information on do-it-yourself home energy audits and other energy-efficiency tips.

- Energy Trust of Oregon,  
1-866-368-7878,  
[www.energytrust.org](http://www.energytrust.org)

For Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural or Cascade Natural Gas customers.

Call to schedule a free energy audit and for information about available rebates and tax credits for improving the energy efficiency of your home.

- State Home Oil  
Weatherization Program,  
1-800-452-8660,  
[www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/CONS/RES/weather/weahome.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/CONS/RES/weather/weahome.shtml)

For homes heated by oil, kerosene, propane or wood.

Call to schedule a free home energy audit and for information on weatherization options and available incentives.

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