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HOMEFACTS

■ The eight hottest places to buy a house
(Based on price gain during 1987-88)

Anaheim-Santa Ana, Calif.	Up 20.1%
Los Angeles	Up 19%
San Francisco	Up 15.5%
Washington, D.C.	Up 14.4%
Buffalo-Niagara Falls	Up 14.1%
Baltimore	Up 13.7%
San Diego	Up 12.1%
Seattle-Tacoma	Up 11.2%

SOURCES: National Association of Realtors; Self magazine

Copley News Service

Tips for Cutting Air Conditioning Costs

Between rising energy costs and rising temperatures, your air conditioning bill is likely to come as quite a shock at summer's end. However, by developing good conservation habits and by maintaining the unit properly, you can trim your electric bill considerably. Bill Moore, vice president of marketing for Trane Dealer Products Group, one of the nation's leading manufacturers of air conditioners and heat pumps, offers the following tips to help keep skyrocketing cooling costs in check. Coupled with simple adjustments in your living habits, these do-it-yourself conservation measures will help your air conditioning system perform the task it's meant to do — keep you cool.

1. Raise Your Thermostat

This unglamorous and old-fashioned practice yields impressive savings. Set the thermostat as high as comfort will permit — the smaller the difference between indoor and outdoor temperatures, the less outdoor heat will tend to flow into your house, and the shorter the amount of time your air conditioner will need to run. Each degree you raise the thermostat will translate into dollar savings. Seventy-eight degrees is considered a reasonable temperature. Also, avoid the temptation to set the thermostat lower than usual to speed up the cooling process. The house will take just as long to cool, so you'll only be wasting energy.

2. Perform Simple Maintenance Tasks

A blocked airflow will impede your air conditioner's cooling capabilities. Clean the filter at least once a month during the cooling season and check it often, replacing it when necessary. The filter can be found behind a front panel on the indoor portion of the system and is usually easily accessible. You can leave it in the frame and vacuum it, or remove and wash it like a sponge and squeeze or shake the filter dry.

For central air conditioners, keep the outdoor condensing unit free of debris, leaves, flowers, shrubbery and anything that might block airflow. Indoors, check supply registers and dampers for blockage. Run your hands along the ducts while the system is operating to check for air leaks or loose insulation and seal them

with duct tape. Further adjustments or repairs should be left to a professional.

Room air conditioners can become clogged with dust and grime. Clean them each spring with the dusting brush of a canister vacuum, and use the vacuum as a blower for hard-to-reach spots.

3. Consider Replacing an Inefficient or Malfunctioning System

If your air conditioning system is showing its age, it might be time to start shopping for a new one, notes Trane's Bill Moore. Though the temptation is to patch up a failing system, consider this: it was probably manufactured before the energy crisis and therefore has a low SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) rating. Replacing it with a more efficient system will save you money in the long run. An increasingly popular alternative is to install a heat pump — not only is it an efficient air conditioner, but doubles as an economical heating system in winter by reversing its pumping process.

4. Shade Your Windows

The National Association of Home Builders estimates that windows account for up to 28% of heat gain. Preventing the sun's heat from striking your house is by far the simplest and most effective way to reduce your cooling load. Put awnings, louvers, sunscreens or overhangs over your windows, particularly those on the east and west sides of the house. Such devices can lower interior temperatures from 8° to 15°. Other heat repellent products on the market include fiberglass shading screens and sun control films which are placed on the window's exterior. Shades and shutters on the inside of the window will also help to keep the heat from seeping into your house. Keep blinds and curtains drawn when you're not home.

5. Insulate

Insulation and sealing for air leakage aren't just wise winter energy conservation techniques, according to Moore. He notes that infiltration of hot, humid outside air can account for 15-30% of air conditioning energy requirements. Insulation R-values of 30 are recommended for ceilings and attic floors and R-11 for exterior walls.

Caulk and weatherstrip around doors and windows, and insulate hot water tanks and bare pipes which give off heat. Be sure to insulate around central air conditioning ducts in uncooled spaces such as the attic.

6. Relieve Heat and Moisture

Avoid cooking, bathing, and doing laundry during the hottest part of the day. The heat and moisture these activities produce place an additional burden on your air conditioning. Electric appliances such as irons, hairdryers and toasters also generate heat. Switch off lights when not in use and capitalize on daylight whenever possible.

7. Ventilate Your Home

Good ventilation can cut air conditioning operating expenses by up to 30%. The attic is a major collector of heat, so you'll want to focus your attention there. It may be necessary to enlarge existing vents or add new ones. Be sure kitchens, bathrooms and utility rooms are equipped with vents and exhaust fans to reduce heat and humidity.

8. Use a Timer

Avoid unnecessary air conditioning by using a timer to shut off the system while you're out and switch it on shortly before you plan to return. New computerized air conditioning systems have thermostat controls that raise or lower temperature levels at intervals programmed by you, in accordance with your daily routine and sleep schedule.

9. Air Conditioner Location

You can avoid placing unnecessary strain on your air conditioning equipment by situating it in a shady area. The western exposure of your house is the worst spot, because it's exposed to direct sunlight during the hottest part of the day. Try to situate the condenser unit of a central air conditioner on the north side of the house. If this is impossible, shield it from the sun with a louvered wood cover; however, be sure not to obstruct the air flow to or from the unit. Room air conditioners should also be installed on the north side, in a location where the airflow is unimpeded.

"Mount the thermostat well away from the unit's airflow and away from appliances such as lamps and TVs," advises Moore. The heat they generate could trick your air conditioning system into overcooling your house. In particular, central air conditioning thermostats should be placed in the room where comfort is of the greatest importance, or in a hallway where they can sense air circulating from several rooms.

"Whatever cooling system you select, be sure it is properly sized to your home," Moore emphasizes. "Don't assume the existing one is." Before choosing, have the installer visit your home personally to inspect your present system and estimate your cooling load.



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