Get back energy savings –
Set back your thermostat

What is a thermostat?

A thermostat is an on/off switch that tells your furnace to heat your home when the temperature drops below a set point. The thermostat's job is to maintain the temperature indoors within a narrow range. It works the same way for central air-conditioning in the summer.

Why should I set back my thermostat?

In the winter, you can save energy by setting back the temperature when you're asleep or not at home. For every 1 degree you lower the thermostat for 8 hours, you can save 1% on your heating bill. (Setting up the temperature for air-conditioning saves a similar percentage on cooling.) An average MGE customer can save $40 to $100 per heating season by doing setbacks.

What temperatures are recommended?

Recommended thermostat settings when you are home are 68˚ in the winter or 78˚ in the summer. When you're sleeping or not at home, set it at 55˚ in the winter or 85˚ in the summer. Caution: Talk to your doctor about any health problems (or medications) that may require temperatures different from these recommendations. Older adults are more likely to lose body heat, leading to a serious problem called hypothermia. For more information, see: http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/staysafe/

If you've had problems with freezing pipes during cold weather, correct the problem before setting back the thermostat.

Check the owner's manual for your furnace if you're turning down the temperature for more than a day or two. Some manufacturers specify a minimum thermostat setting, typically 55 or 60 degrees.

Estimated energy savings

(Savings are the same whether temperature is adjusted by hand or by programmable thermostat.)

Set back	8 hours per day	16 hours per day	24 hours per day
5˚	5%	10%	15%
7˚	7%	14%	21%
11˚	11%	22%	33%
13˚	13%	26%	39%

Myths

"It costs as much or more to heat a home back up after a setback." (Or to cool the house after a summer setup.)

Fact: The longer your house remains at the lower temperature, the more heat you save. (If the average temperature difference between indoors and outdoors is smaller, less heat is needed.) If you were leaving for a week you'd set back the temperature, so why not for shorter time periods?

"The house will warm up faster the higher the thermostat is raised."

Fact: The thermostat isn't like the gas pedal on a car. It's either calling for heat or not, so setting the thermostat too high may cause you to overshoot the desired temperature.

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GS0998 12/15/2008

"The kids will kick off the covers and get cold."

Fact: Children older than about two weeks can regulate their body temperature just like adults, so they don't need any different temperature than adults. If they kick off the covers, try dressing them in two sets of pajamas with feet or using a sleeping bag.

Manual set back

You can get the same savings adjusting the thermostat by hand, but it can be inconvenient. You may forget to change the temperature at bedtime or when leaving the house. Some people don't like waiting for the house to warm up after turning up the heat.

Programmable (automatic setback) thermostats

A programmable (automatic setback) thermostat offers comfort and convenience. It can turn on the heat before you get out of bed in the morning or before you come home in the evening. A setback thermostat also never forgets to change the temperature. Many people install thermostats themselves using the instructions that come with the thermostat. Some prefer to hire a heating contractor to do the installation.

Where to buy

If you plan to install one yourself, thermostats are sold at hardware stores, home improvement stores and some discount stores. Typical prices are $30 to $100.

Features

Basic programmable thermostats have a different program for weekdays and weekends. Fancier ones can have a different program for every day of the week. For a more detailed discussion of features, call MGE's Home Energy Line at 252-7117. Consumer Reports reviews programmable thermostats every few years. Your local library can help you find the most recent article or visit consumerreports.org.

Special heating systems

Heat pumps, electric heaters and boilers may require special thermostats, so check for compatibility first.