

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

EcoConsumer

How to stay cool and comfy when Seattle heats up

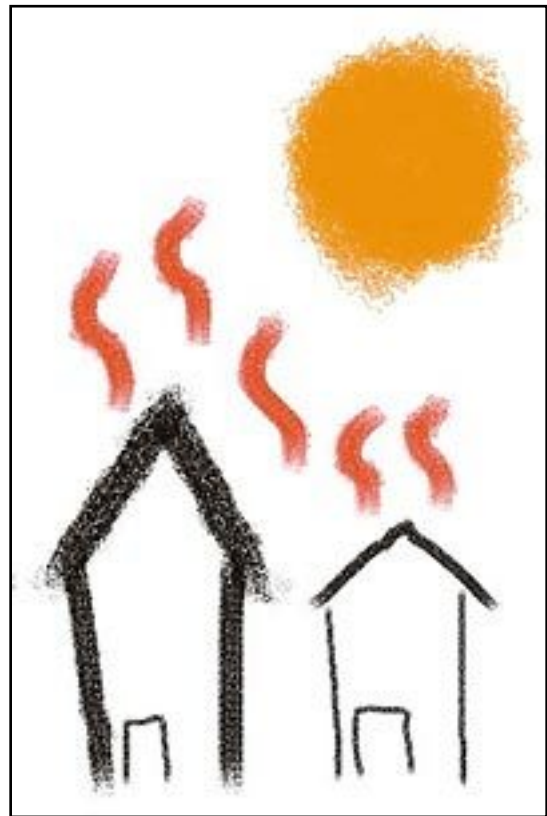
By Tom Watson / Special to The Seattle Times

The time-honored Seattle approach to hot weather — just ignore it because it won't last long — doesn't always work.

Our homes can get brutally hot in the summer. And with global warming, Seattle may become even hotter, for a longer period of time. Here are my top 10 EcoConsumer tips for keeping your home cool while conserving energy and saving money:

- **Keep the sun on the outside.** Close blinds and drapes on the sunny sides of your house. We've been doing this without fail at my house the past two years, and have really noticed the difference. Direct sun can increase the temperature of a room by more than 10 degrees. Also consider installing awnings for southside patio doors and windows.
- **Be fantastic.** A floor fan uses only 100 watts on the highest speed, according to Michael Bluejay's Saving Electricity guide. In contrast, a window air conditioner uses 500 to 1,400 watts, while a central air-conditioning system may use 3,500 watts.
- **Look to the ceiling.** A ceiling fan can make a room seem 7 to 10 degrees cooler. Make sure your fan blows down (turning counter-clockwise) in the summer. This sends air past your body, removing warmer air.

Most ceiling fans have a switch, usually located between the light and the fan blades, to change the fan direction. Energy-Star-rated ceiling fans, the most efficient, can cost \$75 to \$400. You may pay more for Energy Star, but with the energy savings, the pay-back time for the added cost is less than two



years.

- **Embrace AC efficiency.** In King County, 15.4 percent of occupied houses and apartments have central or room air conditioning, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This means we use a lot less energy in the summer than other parts of the nation.

If you feel you need an air conditioner, select a newer Energy Star model. Today's air conditioners commonly use 30 to 50 percent less electricity than models from 15 years ago.

Make sure you have the right size air conditioner for your room or home. Clean or replace your filter regularly.

- **Decentralize.** As an alternative to central air conditioning, consider installing a room air conditioner. Use a fan with your window-mounted room AC to distribute the cool air through your home.

- **Stop running.** Just because you have an air conditioner doesn't mean you need to run it all the time. Save energy and money by turning off the AC or fans when you leave the house. In fact, you should turn off the air conditioner 30 minutes before you leave.

- **Seal for summer and winter.** Especially if you have air conditioning, you can save money if you keep your windows and doors well-sealed. Your caulking and weather-stripping will also pay off handsomely in the winter.

- **Don't forget the attic.** A poorly insulated attic can result in the loss of up to 40 percent of a house's cool air. Add attic insulation with a rating of R-49, and you will once again benefit in the winter as well.

- **See the light.** Converting your light bulbs from incandescents to compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) not only reduces global warming and saves money, it also keeps your home cooler. CFLs produce 70 percent less heat than incandescents. Halogen light bulbs, which are becoming more common in homes, burn very hot — about 1,000 degrees — so avoid using those in the summer.

Try not to run appliances during the hottest parts of the day. Use the outdoor grill, microwave or toaster oven (which uses one-third to one-half as much energy as a full-sized oven) instead of the stove or oven.

- **Good things come in trees.** It's too late for this year, but planting shade trees will cool your house in the summer. Trees also reduce global warming by absorbing carbon dioxide.

Choose deciduous trees, which drop their leaves to let the sun through to warm your home in the winter. Just three trees properly placed around a house can save \$100 to \$250 a year in cooling and heating costs, says the U.S. Department of Energy.

Tom Watson, project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services, writes the EcoConsumer column for the digs section in Saturday's Times. Reach him at tom.watson@metrokc.gov, 206-296-4481 or www.KCecoconsumer.com.

Copyright © 2007 The Seattle Times Company