

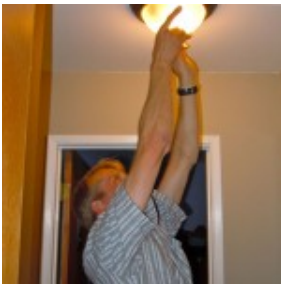
Free energy audit provides tips for saving money

By Kathryn Reed

I need to use less energy. Well, I don't, but our house should be using less.

That was the conclusion by Sten Seemann after he performed an energy audit last week.

"You do pretty good in the summer, but in the winter you almost use twice as much energy. We are going to see why," he said.



Sten Seemann checks to see the type of bulbs in this fixture.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Seemann through his company Sierra Energy and Water Conservation is a subcontractor for Liberty Energy. The utility, which took over Nevada Energy's California customers this year, does the energy audits for free.

Armed with our past bills supplied by Liberty Energy he was able to see how our electricity usage changed from month to

month over a few years.

February was higher this year than last. I'm thinking we had company and the outside temps dropped. I don't really know.

Part of the summer-winter difference is lifestyle – more lights on for longer in the winter, the furnace hums, increase in TV watching, more people visiting, more cooking (oven especially).

But the big energy culprit, according to Seemann, is the hot tub being set at 102 degrees all the time – or hotter in winter. He suggested putting in a timer to reduce the temp overnight when no one is in it. I have a call into Hot Springs Spas who we got it from to see if this is possible and what the cost would be.

When it comes to hot tubs in the winter it takes more energy to heat them because the outside air is so dang cold in South Lake Tahoe.

Another biggie is to get more insulation. Looking in the attic – Seemann did this, I've never done it – was not good. We have about R-12 insulation. Code is R-38. Such are the hazards of a house built in 1965 and knowing we've added zero insulation in the eight years we've lived in it.

Seemann recommended getting quotes from Gale Insulation and Meeks for insulation. In an email he sent the night of the audit he said to do so before November.

That's one of the nice things about the audit, Seemann follows it up with an email with the suggestions he said verbally and then some additional comments.

Even though the audit is painless and takes an hour or so, the problem is remembering all the information that is dispensed. That is why the follow-up email is nice to receive.



Window and door insulation inspections are part of the energy audit by Sten Seemann.

Education is a big component of what Seemann does. Nothing he suggests has to be done. No “energy police” are going to come see if you took him up on his recommendations.

“Liberty Energy is obligated by the regulator, California Public Utility Commission, to offer energy efficiency programs so that customers can choose to exercise options to lower the commodity costs on their electric utility bills,” Bob Dodds, president of Liberty Energy, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This does result in less money in the company’s pocket but that is offset by the lower amounts of electricity the company needs to purchase for distribution. In the long term, lower electricity use by customers reduces the need for continuing investment in facilities for the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity which ultimately lowers impacts on rates and the environment.”

Most of our light bulbs were CFLs, so we were ahead of the curve on that. I hesitated when Seemann wanted to put a CFL in the fixture over the kitchen table. We had done so a couple times with each one burning out rapidly. The older CFLs burned out faster if turned off and on a lot. I relented, but I kept the energy-hog old one just in case.

Seemann's philosophy is that it's better to throw out an old working bulb than to throw away money. In other words, don't wait until the energy-inefficient bulbs die before replacing them.

Seemann also put in a low-flow showerhead. I had the most consternation about this change. I have a thing for hot showers with good pressure. I'll write in the dark on my laptop battery without using electricity before I give up my daily hot, hot, hot shower.

So far, so good with the showerhead.

And on top of that, the bulbs and showerhead were free.

While Liberty Energy doesn't supply our water, the energy audit touches on water and gas usage, too.

To schedule a free energy audit through Liberty Energy, call 800.782.2506. They are running a bit behind on appointments. It was in June at the North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce Business Expo that I learned about the audits. It took two months to get a call – so be patient.