

Efficiency Issues in Leases

Leases should say who will pay for utilities and water. Leases can also include efficiency-related clauses – these could impose obligations on you and the landlord. You can ask for provisions like the following to be added to your lease.

When Landlords Pay Utilities

- Tenants must “act reasonably” to avoid wasting water, heat or other utilities.
- Tenants may not remove low-flow devices installed by the landlord.
- Tenant must reasonably make unit available for an energy audit.

When Tenants Pay Utilities

- Landlords shall have heating systems and HVAC equipment professionally maintained at least biennially.
- Landlord shall provide programmable thermostats and low-flow devices upon request of tenant.
- Landlord shall weatherize outer doors to minimize drafts.

Appliances in Rental Units

Many apartments come with stoves, refrigerators, dishwashers, washing machines, dryers or other appliances bought by the landlord. Some use energy and water more efficiently than others, so cost less to operate. Whether a landlord is motivated to buy an efficient-appliance may depend on who pays the utility bills.

When tenants pay utility bills, they receive savings from lower energy and water bills, but landlords have no direct economic gain. Splitting these savings may incentive landlords to buy more efficient appliances. For example:

1. Calculate difference in cost between standard appliance & efficient version
2. Determine estimated annual cost savings (the Energy Star program provides data)
3. Increase rent by 70% of the estimated annual savings (over 12 months)

Tenants will still get a 30% savings on the cost of energy for the appliance, and landlords will have money to help offset the higher cost of the efficient purchase.

Renting an Apartment?

Tips for:

Evaluating a unit’s energy efficiency

Asking landlords for efficiency upgrades

Reducing your utility bills

“Green” leases

Energy and water efficiency can save money on utility bills without changing how you live. Even if the landlord pays your utility bills, efficiency measures can increase your comfort and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

Help Yourself

Help the Planet

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Pre-Lease

Is an Apartment Efficient?

No two apartments are the same, but the following information can help you evaluate whether an apartment supports energy efficient and comfortable living.

- Do appliances like refrigerators have an energy star rating? (Check for labels on devices or in manuals.)
- Is the building/apartment insulated?
- Are there gaps between outer doors and the floor?
- Are windows well sealed or drafty?
- Have the heating and cooling systems been maintained? (Ask for results of the most recent professional efficiency test.)
- Do showers have low flow showerheads?
- Do sinks have low flow aerators at tips of faucets to control water flow?
- Is there space for line-drying laundry?
- How high are historic utility bills?

Live More Comfortably

Pre-Lease & During Tenancy

How Can Landlords Help?

Landlords can take steps to help improve a unit's energy efficiency and support your efficiency efforts. Examples of lower-cost steps include:

- Maintain heating and HVAC units, including changing filters.
- Install door sweeps on drafty doors.
- Caulk windows, fix broken sashes and replace missing latches. Provide all windows with screens.
- Insulate pipes and block drafts in basements and attics.
- Purchase appliances with good water and energy efficiency ratings.
- Install a programmable thermostat.
- Adjust the temperature on the water heater to 120°F or lower.
- Install low-flow showerheads and aerators; fix any water leaks.
- Use motion-activated lights in common areas and outdoors.

Save Money

During Tenancy

How Can You Reduce Utility Bills?

You can take some of the same steps as landlords. If the landlord pays utility bills, consider requesting reimbursement for supplies you buy. You can also:

- Use efficient light bulbs (CFLs or LEDs) and turn off lights and devices in empty rooms.
- Turn down the heat (to 55°F) at night and when the house is empty for more than a few hours.
- Use fans instead of AC for cooling; if you use AC, supplement with a ceiling fan and set the thermostat 4°F higher for the same comfort level.
- Use lower temperature settings on appliances like washing machines, dryers, dishwashers and fridges (*e.g.*, set refrigerators at 38-40°F).
- Run washing machines, dryers and dishwashers only when full; air dry clothes and dishes when practical.
- Unplug electronics that are not being used as they still consume energy (consider power strips for multiple devices).

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