

## *Sustainability Tip #10:*

# Phantom Energy

When you walk through your room at night with the lights off, chances are your path will still be lit by the eerie glow of “standby” lights and digital displays on various appliances and electronic devices. Because these devices are ready to operate or receive signals at all times, they act like vampires silently sucking away energy even when they are turned “off.”

This wasted energy, known as standby or phantom energy loss, represents a relatively small but growing percentage of an individual home’s electricity use (about five percent), but taken across all U.S. households, adds up to an estimated 65 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity each year. **This extra electricity costs consumers more than \$5.8 billion annually and sends more than 87 billion pounds of heat-trapping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year.**

Some of the biggest energy wasters in most homes are the adapters that come with rechargeable battery-powered cordless phones, cell phones, digital cameras and music players, power tools, and other electronic devices. Most draw power whenever they’re plugged into an outlet, regardless of whether the device battery is fully charged—or even connected. Other culprits include appliances or electronic equipment with standby capability (such as televisions and computer monitors), a remote control, and/or a digital clock display (such as microwaves, DVD players, and stereo systems).

Here are a few easy ways to help you enjoy your electronics without wasting energy:

- **Unplug it**—Unplugging devices when they are not being used eliminates any potential energy loss. To save the time and hassle of unplugging all the components of a computer or home entertainment system, you could plug them into a power strip or surge suppressor that can be turned off with a single switch (surge suppressors still protect against power spikes when plugged in, even if switched off). Unfortunately, some devices such as battery backup systems and computer network servers must be left on at all times to ensure proper functioning.
- **Check the label**—When buying an appliance or electronic device, choose the model that uses the least standby power. Energy Star-labeled models are a good choice because they use less energy for both regular and standby operation. If standby power is not included on a given product label, check the U.S. Department of Energy’s online database of manufacturer-supplied information (see Related Links).
- **Keep it simple**—Avoid buying products that include “bells and whistles” you don’t need. Some of these extra features might waste energy.