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SUMMER HEAT SOLSTICE

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When the mercury begins to soar this summer, use some great heat prevention tips or an energy-efficient air conditioner to cool off.

"Solar heat in your home can be reduced with awnings, drawing blinds, closing drapes, and by planting trees on the west and south sides of your home," says Mark Antonuk, of ATCO EnergySense.

Other tips include:

- Use oscillating or ceiling fans to provide cooling breezes within rooms.
- Turn off unnecessary lights and appliances and limit those activities that add extra moisture to the air, such as showering and cleaning, to the morning and evening.
- Minimize kitchen heat and humidity by using your range hood fan. Better yet, enjoy the fresh outdoors and fire up the barbecue.

If you've done all you can and the heat is still unbearable, find relief in an air conditioner.

If you already have an air conditioner, seal air gaps around the unit with an appropriate caulking compound or weather-stripping to improve its efficiency. Maximize the long-term efficiency and lifetime of your air conditioner with periodical cleaning or filter replacements. If you don't already have an air conditioner, you may find it worthwhile to first research the two types available-room units or central units.

Room air conditioners supply cool air to a limited area. They're available as either window or wall units and are usually equipped with various fan speeds. Room air conditioners work best in high traffic areas, such as a bedroom or living room. For maximum efficiency and to reduce operating costs, look for the EnergyStar logo on the EnerGuide label.

Central air conditioners are more expensive to purchase and operate, larger in size and usually located outside the home. The benefit of such a unit is that through existing ductwork systems, central air conditioners can deliver cool air evenly to all parts of the home. Purchasing a unit with a higher numbered Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER) will lower your operating costs. EnergyStar logos on the EnerGuide label indicate that these air conditioners are the most energy efficient units which offer the lowest operating costs.

After choosing the type of air conditioner most suited to your hot summer needs, you may want to consider

the size of the unit. Determining the right size can be done through a heating and cooling contractor. They will measure the cooling load, or the amount of cooling the air conditioner must provide to maintain comfort conditions. Units that are too large will result in short operating cycles and will not remove enough humidity.

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