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How Do I Shop For An Energy Efficient Apartment?

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A weekly question/answer column

How Do I Shop For An Energy Efficient Apartment?

Leona K. Hawks answers:*

If you are shopping for an apartment, remember that utility bills add up quickly. If you are willing to take some time researching and asking questions as you shop, it will pay off when your utility bills arrive.

- Check utility records. Ask the former resident or someone who lives in the apartment complex what the approximate utility costs are. If you want exact figures, get written consent from the previous occupant, owner or apartment manager and go to the utility company for past records. Realize, however, that your lifestyle and energy use may differ from previous tenants, so your bills may too.
- Check heating and cooling systems. These are the biggest energy users. Ask if there is a central heating system for the apartment, if it is gas, electric or oil, and if you would have your own thermostat and could control the temperature. In many areas of Utah, gas is one of the least expensive methods of heating a house.
- Look at windows and doors. These are the areas of the most heat and cooling loss. South-facing windows can be an asset in the winter since they let in warming sunlight, but can create overheating problems in the summer. North facing windows can contribute to heat loss. Look for double-pane windows and storm windows for maximum insulation. Feel around windows and closed doors for drafts and ask if they can be fixed if they are not air tight.
- Assess the appliances. In general, the older the appliances, the less energy efficient they are. Studies by the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers found about a 30 percent increase in efficiency between 1972 and 1984 model appliances.
- Consider the location. Carefully reconsider the true value of a \$20 reduction in monthly rent if it requires you to drive twice as far to work. Also take into consideration neighborhood stores and access to public transportation when figuring your housing costs.

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