

The quest for energy independence continues

By Lalita Malik

The incremental steps I have taken over the last two years have brought me closer to my quest for energy independence. I have accomplished this with a two-pronged approach: eliminating energy waste and installing solar panels. I have not sacrificed my comfort or quality-of-life. As a matter of fact, both have been enhanced by the changes I made. I do not have to wait to sell my home to see my return on investment; I have already seen it with reduced energy bills. The home energy audit helped me pinpoint where I should spend money to maximize my savings. Sealing leaks gave me the biggest bang for the buck. I am no longer spending money heating the outside in the winter and cooling the outside in the summer. I no longer have to worry about hot and cold spots throughout the house.

I exchanged my 30-year-old programmable thermostat for one with a vacation mode. I keep my house at 62 degrees F during the day when I am home and drop the thermostat to 55 F at night. When I am on vacation, I keep my house at 55 F. My cats have fur coats, and my birds have fluffy feathers that keep them warm. Sunshine and fleece keep me warm. My oil consumption went down from 750 to 400 gallons per heating season. With oil prices flirting with \$4 a gallon, that is a saving of \$1,400 per year.

Replacing my oil-fired hot water heater with a heat pump hot water heater also helped to reduce my oil consumption. Replacing light bulbs with CFLs and LEDs contributed to lower electricity consumption.

I hate throwing out anything that is not broken, but based on research, I decided to replace my 28-year-old appliances with new ones. I took advantage of new technology and replaced my oven with a double oven. In addition to better performance, I now have the option of using the smaller oven for cookies, cakes and pizzas and the bigger oven for turkey and bigger items. I replaced my cook top with an induction cook top and can now boil water faster than on a gas cook top. Induction technology does not heat up the surface, so spilled food is easier to clean up.

I read that the cable TV receiver is an energy hog. I placed my hand over it and could feel the heat radiating from it. To eliminate this wasted energy, I use green audio/visual power strips to turn my home theater system off when not in use. I purchased remote outlet switches from Amazon and now control my printers, external disk drives and lamps remotely from the comfort of my sofa.

See MALIK, Page [2G](#)



Lalita Malik

Article Continued Below

[See MALIK on Page G02](#)

Malik

Continued from Page 1G

My major sacrifice was the trees I removed to provide sun for the solar panels. There is a silver lining, though. I now had a sunny area for my rain garden, which is a haven for butterflies and bees. With the sun hitting my driveway, snow and ice melt faster. The sun on the deck prevents mold and algae from growing on my furniture. Gutters are cleaner. Best thing is, I have not had carpenter bees invade since the trees were cut. I benefit from more sun and warmth on the house in the winter. On the flipside, the south-facing rooms are warmer in summer.

I have achieved energy independence for electricity, but I am still dependent on oil for heat. Now that I have solar panels, I decided to check out heat pumps as replacements for my oil furnace and air conditioner. I discovered that technology has come a long way and there are now heat pumps that will work at temperatures as low as 15 degrees F. They have variable- speed fans that use less energy than my current system. But since my furnace and air conditioner are only 6 years old, replacing them is not a good fiscal move at this time.

So for now, I plan to increase the number of solar panels I have and continue to research new heating systems. As technology evolves, better and more energy efficient systems are bound to be available in the future.

Lalita Malik is a member of the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council.

Powered by
TECNAVIA

Copyright © 2013 Poughkeepsie Journal 10/20/2013
Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#), updated
March 2009.