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Phantom power is an expensive 'ghost'

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Picture this: You're preparing to leave your home to go to work or run an errand. You turn out all the

lights, the TV, maybe even your computer. But after you have walked out the front door, your home or apartment will still be buzzing with "phantom energy."

The Department of Energy estimates that 40 percent of the energy consumed by home electronics is owed to stand-by power, that's the same as wasted power. This "phantom load" equals the annual output of 17 power plants or about six percent of the U.S. total residential electricity consumption.

According to <www.gooddirtradioradio.org>, Gary Reysa (with 35 years as an aerospace engineer) is on a mission to educate consumers about phantom loads. Reysa says: "Phantom loads are

a little bit like the dripping water pipe. It's not a whole lot of flow at any given time, but when you add it up over the year, it can be thousands of gallons of water. The kinds of things that show phantom loads are TVs, VCRs, microwave ovens, battery chargers, just about anything that plugs into the wall."

Added up over a year, these phantom loads use about 500 kilowatt hours of electricity. The cost is not only what shows up on your monthly electric bill, but in pounds of CO2 reduction.

To find out whether a device is drawing power or not, purchase a watt meter and plug it into the wall. Then plug the device into the kilowatt meter and read exactly how much power the device is using.

The simplest way to get rid of a phantom load is to unplug the device when you're not using it. Try using a power strip for the devices in your entertainment center, so that simply turning off the power strip will also turn off the devices.

A computer that is left on

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(although the monitor may be turned off) uses electricity even if you are nowhere near the keyboard. Reysa recommends using the computer's hibernate or stand-by setting and plugging in the computer peripherals to a power strip so that turning off the power strip at night will save electricity all night long.

When buying new electric items, Reysa urges consumers to check the Energy Star rated devices and then to check stand-by loads with an inexpensive meter. Although the phantom load for one device may be small, the average household may have 20 or 30 such devices, adding up to a large quantity of wasted energy over a year.

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