

Vampires Stealing Your Energy?

Vampires are not just the stuff of Halloween. Though you may not see or hear them, they're there in your appliances and electronic devices. And though they're not after blood, they can drain your power – electric power that is.

Energy vampires are also known as phantom energy users or energy parasites. A lot of these vampires use energy when we think they are turned off. For example, televisions and many other electronic products use a small amount of power all of the time. This power makes it possible for them to work instantaneously when we do turn them on. In addition, everything you have that plugs in and that includes a digital clock or timer is constantly using power to operate that feature. Other energy vampires include all of our electric-powered things that have remote controls, memories, and wall cubes (those plug-in power supplies).



by Stjepan Vlahovich

In addition to the vampires we think we turn off, our homes have more and more things that are continuous drains on our power supply. Examples of these include garage door openers, answering machines, security systems, door bells, and hard-wired smoke detectors. And then there are all of those battery chargers – for your cordless phone, digital camera, cell phone, laptop computer, even your beard trimmer – all adding to the electricity drain.

Individually these energy vampires don't usually pull a lot of power. But their cumulative drain can be as high as ten percent of your electric use. Even now, over the course of a year, most microwaves use more power just sitting on your kitchen counter than they do heating your food. More and more products are adding electronic features. Some room air conditioners and ceiling fans now have remote controls and timers. As you upgrade to products with those features, and if you add new things that use a large amount of phantom power, such as digital televisions and digital converter boxes, the drain on your power could become a flood.

Are there ways to protect your budget from these energy vampires? The answer is somewhat. Manufacturers of electronic products are working, with the encouragement of governments around the world, to make the low power modes in those products as efficient as possible.

There are also some things you can do yourself to reduce the power wasted by your energy vampires. The simplest is to unplug them when you don't need them working for you. For example, many battery chargers draw power even after the battery is fully juiced. Don't leave those chargers plugged in after they've done their work.

Since it can be cumbersome to crawl around unplugging individual items, consider plugging energy vampires into switched power strips and using the strips to interrupt the drain on your power. You can also use timers and sensors to limit the time your energy vampires are draining power.

As ruthless as you can be with those energy vampires, you will probably have to adjust to living with some of them.



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It wouldn't make much sense to turn off your security system to save a bit of energy, either.

Since you're going to have to live with some of those vampires, another strategy to control them is to keep the big, burly ones out and only let the small, weak ones into your home. You can do that by buying products that are ENERGY STAR® qualified. Since one of the ways many products qualify for ENERGY STAR is by limiting energy use in low power modes, these products are usually the weakest energy vampires.

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