

Clean Laundry, Clean Air

Everyone needs to do laundry, but we don't want dirty air along with our clean clothes. As we've discussed, the biggest contribution Ontarians make to smog and global warming is through our electricity usage. There are some simple ways to reduce the energy used and air pollution created by doing laundry.

1) Try to do laundry less often- a relaxing way to help the environment. Wait until you have a full load before you wash, and consider whether there are any items that you are laundering more often than necessary.

2) Try washing and rinsing your clothes in cold water. Imagine how long it would take to heat a washing machine-full of water on top of your stove, and how much energy this would consume! According to the Sunlight web site www.goaheadgetdirty.com/cold/, there is absolutely no benefit from rinsing with warm water. The water is not hot enough to kill germs, and cold water can remove the soap residue. Simply changing to a cold rinse saves as much hot water as 220 showers a year for an average family.

Washing with cold water has benefits too, and many new detergents don't need heat to work. Colours are less likely to fade or run, your clothes won't shrink, and they'll last longer. Several detergents claim to clean perfectly well in cold water. They recommend adding the soap first, then allowing the machine to fill halfway with water before adding the clothing, to avoid residue. Liquid detergents usually rinse off better in cold water than powders.

3) Most laundry can be air-dried. Electric clothes dryers are real energy hogs. The average dryer uses 900 Kilowatt-hours per year (2.1 kWh per load), about one month's worth of your annual electrical use. In summer, clothes will dry nicely on a line, indoors or out. In winter, you can set up a rack or line system, and dry clothes directly on their hangers so they're ready to put away. If you haven't got much space, you can get retractable lines or umbrella-type drying racks. You can see some indoor racks at <http://www.naturedry.com>. Similar systems are available in Caledon hardware stores.

Air-drying clothes makes them last longer and saves the elastics in socks and underwear. Tumble dryers break down the fibres in the fabric -check your lint trap. Air-dried clothes fade and shrink less, and have no static cling. You can hang sheets and towels until almost dry, then put them in the dryer for a few minutes to soften them. A web site with good air-drying tips is <http://users.telerama.com/~efran/Handbook/Laundry.html>. Dish towels and other items that need to be disinfected should either be hot-dried or washed with bleach.

4) Buy efficient appliances when it's time to replace them. The average washing machine uses 600-1000 kWh per year- another month's worth of your annual electricity use. Energy Star rated units use 300-500 kWh/yr, and front-loading Energy Star rated units use only 200-350 kWh. Currently there is no PST on Energy Star rated appliances, so its a double bonus. Gas or propane dryers are better environmental choices than electric ones.

The Cost:

There's no cost for cold washing or air-drying, other than some time and a habit to change.

The Payback:

You can save \$50 per year if you air-dry 2/3 of your laundry. You can save another \$50 a year by changing an old inefficient washer or dryer for a new efficient one, or by doing half your wash in cold water.

The Environmental Bonus:

If every household in Caledon air-dried half their laundry and did their wash in cold water, we would save enough power to run 1900 households for 1 year. We'd also prevent 18,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, as well as significant sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury pollution. You can meet your share of Canada's Kyoto target by taking this single step.

For more information about this or other topics in the Caledon Clean Air Clean Energy Program, you can reach us at greenenergy@woodrising.com or 519-927-0548, or visit <http://www.woodrising.com/cca/stepup.htm>



Step Up To Kyoto. Future generations will thank-you a tonne.