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New ways to use electricity

If you listen carefully, you can hear a quiet transformation happening. Electric appliances and equipment are becoming more popular than ever among consumers.

Advancements in technology and battery power, coupled with decreasing costs, are winning over consumers looking for comparable utility and versatility. A bonus is that use of electric equipment is quieter and better for the environment.

Inside a home, consumers and homebuilders alike are turning to electric appliances to increase energy efficiency and savings. Whether a traditional electric stove or an induction stove top, both are significantly more efficient than a gas oven. That's because conventional residential cooking tops typically use gas or resistance heating elements to transfer energy with efficiencies of approximately 32% and 75%, respectively (according to Energy Star). Electric induction stoves, which cook food without any flame, will reduce indoor air pollution and can bring water to a boil about twice as fast as a gas stove.

Robotic vacuums are also gaining



in popularity. Fortune Business Insights attributes growth and popularity of robotic vacuums like Roomba to a larger market trend of smart home technology and automation (think Alexa directing a Roomba to vacuum).

More tools and equipment with small gas-powered motors are being replaced with electric ones that include plug-in batteries. In the past few years, technology in battery storage has advanced significantly. Hand-held tools with plug-in batteries can hold a charge longer and offer the user the same versatility and similar functionality as gas-powered tools. For do-it-yourselfers and those in building trades, national brands like Makita, Ryobi and Milwaukee offer electric versions of their most popular products, such as drills, saws, sanders and other tools. In addition to standard offerings, consumers can now purchase a wider array of specialty tools that plug-in, such as power inverters, air inflators and battery chargers.

Keith Dennis, an energy industry expert and president of the Beneficial Electrification League, says, "A few years back, the list of new electric product categories that were making their way to the



Wendy Sellers
President/CEO

market was limited—electric scooters, lawn mowers, leaf blowers and vehicles."

Today, the number of electric products available is exploding.

"There are electric bikes, school buses, pressure washers, utility terrain vehicles, backhoes—even airplanes and boats," Dennis adds. "With the expansion of batteries and advancements in technology, we are seeing almost anything that burns gasoline or diesel as having an electric replacement available on the market."

A case in point is the increased use of electric-powered tools and equipment, with more national brands offering a wider selection, including lawn mowers, leaf blowers, string trimmers and snow blowers. The quality of zero- or low-emissions lawn equipment is also improving.

Electric equipment also requires

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less maintenance and often the biggest task is keeping them charged. In addition, electric equipment is quieter, so if you want to listen to music or your favorite podcast while performing outdoor work, you can; something that wouldn't be possible with gas-powered equipment. On the horizon, autonomous lawn mowers (similar to the robotic vacuum cleaners) will be seen dotting outdoor spaces.

Another benefit of using electric appliances or equipment is that by virtue of being plugged into the grid, the environmental performance of electric devices improves over time. In essence, electricity is becoming cleaner through



increases in renewable energy generation, so equipment that uses electricity will have a diminishing environmental impact over time. Quite a hat trick—improving efficiency, quality of life and helping the environment.

Don't make your A/C work so hard

Summertime seems to be getting hotter every year. This season, prepare your home in advance so relying more and more on your air conditioning system won't show up so much on your electric bill.

Here are five ways to give your A/C a break this summer:

1. Call an HVAC tech. A professional can examine your system and let you know what needs repairing or replacing, which can prevent a mid-summer breakdown.

2. Change or clean air filters. When filters do their job properly, they trap dirt, pet hair and anything else that's floating in the air from recirculating into your home when the air conditioning system is blowing. But dirty filters can prevent air from flowing, too, which makes your A/C work extra hard to cool your house. The solution: Change or clean filters once a month during the summer.



3. Run ceiling fans. When the A/C is running at the same time as a ceiling fan, the room where the fan is located will feel cool enough that you can raise the thermostat by about 4°. A fan doesn't cool the air, but it creates a breeze that will make anyone in a room feel cooler.

4. Install a dehumidifier. Another great partner for your A/C is an energy-efficient dehumidifier. Lowering the humidity in your home helps the air conditioning system work more efficiently, because it doesn't have to waste energy removing moisture from the air and can concentrate on simply cooling it.

5. Don't create heat. On days when it's warm enough to turn on the A/C, turn off your oven, clothes dryer, lamps and other appliances that create heat. Wait until after dark, when the day cools off a bit before running heat-producing machines.

Safety tips for before, during and after a storm

Storm season is in full swing. Many summer storms have the potential to produce tornadoes—they can happen anytime, anywhere, and can bring winds over 200 miles per hour.

In April, a video of NBC Washington Chief Meteorologist Doug Kammerer went viral. During a live broadcast, Kammerer called his teenage son to warn him of a tornado that was headed straight for their home. Knowing the kids were likely playing video games and not paying attention to the weather, he told them to head straight to the basement. Kammerer debated if he should call his family on air, but he knew it was the right thing to do. Luckily, the kids made it safely through the storm.

As adults, we understand the importance of storm safety, but younger children and teens may not realize the dangers storms pose. That's why it's so important to talk to your family and have a storm plan in place. Here are a several tips you can share with your loved ones.

Before the storm

- Talk to your family about what to do in the event of a severe storm or tornado. Point out the safest location to shelter like a small, interior, windowless room on the lowest level of your home. Discuss the dangers of severe thunderstorms, as lightning can strike 10 miles outside of a storm. Remember: When you hear thunder roar, head indoors.
- Make a storm kit. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but having a few items on hand is better than nothing at all. Try to include items like water, nonperishable foods, manual can opener, first-aid kit, flashlights and extra batteries, prescriptions, baby supplies and pet supplies. Keep all the items in one place for easy access if the power goes out.

During the storm

- Pay attention to local weather alerts—either on the TV, your smartphone or weather radio—and understand the types of alerts. A thunderstorm or tornado watch means these events are possible and you should be prepared. A



warning means a thunderstorm or tornado has been spotted in your area and its time to take action.

- If you find yourself in the path of a tornado, head to your safe place to shelter, and protect yourself by covering your head with your arms or materials like blankets and pillows.
- If you're driving during a severe storm or tornado, do not try to outrun it. Pull over and cover your body with a coat or blanket if possible.

After the storm

- If the power is out, conserve your phone battery as much as possible, limiting calls and texts to let others know you are safe or for emergencies only.
 - Stay off the roads if trees, power lines or utility poles are down. Lines and equipment could still be energized, posing life-threatening risks to anyone who gets too close.
 - Wear appropriate gear if you're cleaning up storm debris on your property. Thick-soled shoes, long pants and work gloves will help protect you from sharp or dangerous debris left behind.
- Summer is a time for many fun-filled activities, but the season can also bring severe, dangerous weather. Talk to your loved ones about storm safety so that everyone is prepared and knows exactly what to do when a storm strikes.



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