

Community Solar & Autumn Energy Awareness

Summary:

October brings cooler mornings, vibrant foliage, and the beginning of shorter days across the Okanagan Valley. As heaters turn on and daylight hours shrink, energy demand starts to rise again, reminding us that our seasonal habits influence both our comfort and our environmental impact. This month, we highlight the growing momentum of **community solar** and fall energy smart habits that help reduce costs and support a greener Okanagan.

Whether we are studying in the commons with a warm drink, teaching in well-lit classrooms, or working from home as temperatures dip, simple actions can help us stay comfortable while lowering emissions and supporting clean-energy transitions happening in our region.

Practical actions:

1. Maximize natural daylight to reduce daytime lighting needs.
2. Use task lighting instead of overhead lights whenever possible.
3. Layer clothing before turning up heating systems.
4. Support community solar initiatives and local renewable projects.
5. Clean or replace furnace filters early in the season for efficiency.

1. Support Community Solar Initiatives in the Okanagan

Why it matters:

- Solar energy potential in the Okanagan is among the highest in Canada. Community solar shared systems, where households, campuses, or organizations co-own or subscribe to a solar installation, can lower energy costs, reduce emissions, and make renewable energy accessible even to those who cannot install panels on their own homes.
- A recent regional study identified Penticton and other Okanagan communities as strong candidates for future community solar projects, thanks to favorable sunlight patterns and local utility structures (Source: Economic Trust of the Southern Interior study).

What we can do:

- Learn about community solar models, support emerging initiatives, and explore the possibility of student or campus-supported solar co-ops. Even sharing renewable energy info helps build demand.

Local Tip:

- Kelowna, Penticton, and Vernon have active discussions about expanding renewable energy options. Keep an eye on municipal newsletters for opportunities to participate in feasibility studies or pilot programs.
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2. Reduce Lighting Demand With Seasonal Daylight Strategies

Why it matters:

- Lighting becomes a significant energy load during the fall. Efficient lighting habits can meaningfully reduce electricity use, especially between 4–9 PM, when BC’s energy demand peaks.

What we can do:

- Open blinds during daylight hours, sit close to windows while studying, and use LED task lamps rather than overhead lighting. Keep bulbs dust-free to maintain brightness.

Local Tip:

- The Okanagan enjoys substantial autumn sunshine; using natural light during daytime hours can reduce lighting demand by up to 40% in well-designed spaces.
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3. Prepare Your Home Heating for Efficiency

Why it matters:

- Heating costs rise sharply in October. A poorly maintained heating system consumes more energy and increases household expenses.

What we can do:

- Replace or clean furnace/heat-pump filters. Seal window drafts. Use heavy curtains at night to retain heat and open them during the day to capture sunlight.

Local Tip:

- Older rental units around the Okanagan College neighborhood often have drafty windows. Affordable draft strips from local hardware stores can reduce heat loss substantially.

4. Choose Clean & Efficient Fall Commuting Options

Why it matters:

- Car use typically increases once temperatures drop. Choosing sustainable commuting options helps reduce emissions and traffic while improving personal well-being.

What we can do:

- Bike or walk on mild days, use BC Transit for cold mornings, and carpool when possible. Utilize Okanagan College's new Ride Shark Platform for carpooling. Kelowna's fall weather often remains mild enough for cycling until early November.