

save \$ by making your home energy efficient

The DIY energy audit





Looking for a way to reduce your energy use, lower costs and improve your comfort this winter – and beyond? Then, consider doing an energy audit of your home. Audits by professionals typically cost \$300 and take three hours. Meanwhile, here are five common steps to take to reduce your home energy drains, recommended by the U.S. Department of Energy.

Action	Cost	Payback
Install a programmable thermostat	Easy to install, these units cost \$40 to \$100	Can cut your total heating bill by 10%
Insulate your electrical outlets	Foam inserts that fit behind electrical outlets on outside walls cost less than \$1	A few dollars per insert per winter, but worth the investment
Install storm windows	About 25% of the cost for new primary windows	Save up to 36% of your heating bill when you install storm windows with a "low-e" coating over single-pane standard, uncoated windows
Insulate your walls and attic	Prices vary widely – depends on type of insulation and the amount required for the job	Save up to 30% by adding insulation where it's most needed – in attics, ceilings, basement and exterior walls, floors and crawlspaces
Caulk and weatherstrip drafty spaces	Caulk costs about \$5 a tube and you can buy a 17-foot-long ribbon of self-adhesive rubber weatherstripping for less than \$6	Save up to 10% by sealing spaces around windows, skylights and doors

Source: *The Washington Post*

office closings
Thanksgiving Day–
 Thursday, November 26
Christmas Day–
 Friday, December 25
 Alliant's 24/7 Member Contact Center,
 Web site and ATMs are available.
 Visit our web site, www.alliantcreditunion.org,
 for product and other information

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the Alliant Advisor

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Mortgage Loan Rates

As of November 3, 2009

Type	Interest Rate	APR*	Points
FIRST MORTGAGES			
1/1 ARM	3.875%	3.807%	0
3/1 ARM	3.875%	3.825%	0
5/1 ARM	4.000%	3.886%	0
5/1 ARM (Interest Only)	4.250%	3.951%	0
7/1 ARM	4.500%	4.156%	0
7/1 ARM (Interest Only)	4.750%	4.232%	0
10/1 ARM	4.875%	4.509%	0
15-YR. FIXED	4.625%	4.711%	0
30-YR. FIXED	5.250%	5.301%	0
30-YR. FIXED IO	5.500%	5.546%	0

SECOND/VACATION HOMES

1/1 ARM	4.125%	4.058%	0
3/1 ARM	4.125%	4.076%	0
5/1 ARM	4.250%	4.138%	0
7/1 ARM	4.750%	4.410%	0
10/1 ARM	5.125%	4.764%	0
15-YR. FIXED	5.000%	5.087%	0
30-YR. FIXED	5.625%	5.677%	0

Rates, terms and conditions subject to change. Loan approval, APR and downpayment required based on creditworthiness, collateral, payment method and ability to repay. APR=Annual Percentage Rate. First Mortgages available in all 50 states. Rate is higher on fixed rate mortgages of \$417,001 and above and on ARMs and Interest-only fixed rate mortgages of \$500,001 and above. Refer to the Alliant web site for additional details and requirements. ARM=Adjustable Rate Mortgage. *The Annual Percentage Rate (APR) assumes a 20% downpayment on a loan amount of \$250,000 with a 30-year term. The results above assume an origination fee of \$950 plus \$180 in additional prepaid finance charges plus 15 days of prepaid interest.

Example Repayment Terms (per interest rate):

15-Yr. Fixed	4.625%	monthly pmt per \$1000	-\$7.11
30-Yr. Fixed	5.250%	monthly pmt per \$1000	-\$5.52
30-Yr. Fixed IO	5.500%	monthly pmt per \$1000	-\$4.58

cover story

Home appraisals more important than ever in today's market

If you're looking to refinance, buy or sell a home, welcome to the new make-it-or-break-it world of home appraisals. A couple of years ago, during the housing boom, appraisals seemed little more than a necessary cost of doing business and a formality. But, in today's market, when it's tough to determine the legitimate value of a home and lenders have tightened credit, the home appraisal has emerged as a key determiner of whether a deal will go through.

How much has the value of a particular home changed in the last six to 12 months? It's tough for you or the lender to know. That's where the unbiased, independent, expert opinion of the appraiser comes in – to ascertain whether an asking price is lower, higher or about right for the actual value of the property.

If you're in the market to refinance, getting a realistic sense of your home's current value can save you considerable time, money and frustration in shopping and comparing your mortgage options. House hunting and have found one that suits you? The appraisal will protect you from paying too much for it. And if you're selling your house, you might consider ordering an appraisal on your own prior to putting it on the market, especially if you already have a buyer or are selling it yourself. The appraisal will help you decide your asking price – and whether any renovations will prove profitable.

During the housing boom, lenders eager to green light loans would consider an appraisal to be an afterthought. Indeed, some of the nation's largest lenders have been accused of helping to precipitate the



housing crisis by pressuring appraisers to inflate home values to make loans easier to obtain by more people. But, today lenders are more likely to see mortgage opportunities as a yellow light situation that requires the caution of an impartial appraisal. More than ever, they now rely on independent appraisal management companies to orchestrate unbiased appraisals. Moreover, new rules that went into effect in May 2009 by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac bar mortgage brokers and real estate agents from selecting appraisers.

Appraisals cost, on average, between \$300 and \$400, and are valid for 90 days. Each mortgage lender will order its own appraisal – and if you or your buyer need to go through more than one lender to close a deal, you'll need an appraisal from each one. In today's market, appraisal fees are typically nonrefundable – borrowers are responsible for paying for the appraisal whether or not they close on the home.

Sources: *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, howstuffworks.com, appraisalstoday.com, businesswire.com and thompsonappraisals.com.

Why rake your yard?

The well-raked lawn didn't become a tradition until the 1600s. And that was only for English nobility, eager to flaunt their wealth and appreciation for the finer things in life.

In the U.S., leaf raking to protect and nurture one's lawn didn't become routine until the suburban boom following World War II. Today, it's taken for granted as a must-do chore.

When should you start raking? Not until your grass has stopped growing, say the experts. Until then, it's OK to continue mowing your lawn, mulching leaves if you have a mulching mower or bagging them if you don't. One reason: the prime growing time for many "cool-season" grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, is early fall, when the weather is cool – not yet wintery. During that time, as long as your grass is not buried by a thick level of leaves, then the leaves help your lawn by providing nutrients.

It's OK to leave leaves under trees and shrubs since they will turn into compost and provide your plants with mulch. But there's no getting around the obvious: grass craves sunlight even during winter, so you must remove the majority of leaves that cover your yard if you want healthy grass when spring arrives again.

One key to raking: rake deep to remove thatch – the layer of dead turf grass tissue that develops between vegetation and the soil surface. If you simply skim fallen leaves off the lawn surface and leave the thatch behind, you're not being kind to your grass.

Sources: american-lawns.com, allaboutlawns.com and organiclawncare101.com

raking leaves: it can be a great workout

How to rake without getting an ache – and other raking tips

Raking leaves is a moderate aerobic exercise that develops upper-body strength, as well as back and stomach muscles. Plus, it's a good calorie burner (a 135-lb person, for example, uses up 240 calories an hour raking). But raker beware! Raking involves some muscles people don't typically use and, if done improperly, you may wind up with an aching back, sore shoulders and hurt wrists. Here are steps to make your leaf raking into a workout that works for you.

Dress for success. Wear sturdy footwear and loose-fitting clothes. And dress in layers. Although you might feel comfortably cool when you start raking, you're likely to work up a sweat before long. You can then peel off your jacket and not get overheated if you're wearing a sweater or sweatshirt under it.

Stretch before you start. Warm up your muscles before you work them by doing some gentle stretches, such as trunk rotations for your back, knee-to-chest pulls for your legs, and reaching above your head with your hands locked to stretch your arms and shoulders. Also limber up by taking a brisk walk around the yard before you begin.

Do the dance and assume the stance.

Think of raking as dancing, suggests physical therapist Earlynda Heuszel, because you'll be shifting your weight like most do while dancing. Keep both sides of your body involved. Assume a wide-based "scissor stance" with the right foot forward and the left foot back, then reverse that order every 10 minutes or so. Hold the rake close to your body and vary the direction in which you pull the rake, from left to right and then right to left. Avoid twisting from the waist and take it easy on your arms and back by shifting your weight from the front leg to the back when pulling the rake toward you.

Go light on the bags.

Consider using a wheelbarrow to carry off your piles of leaves. If you're filling bags, don't make them too heavy. Bend your knees to lift the bags and use your leg muscles. Dragging a tarp of leaves to the curb? Avoid twisting your body when you pull it.

Pace yourself. Give your muscles a well-deserved rest every 10 to 20 minutes. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. And when you're done, cool down with the same exercises you did to warm up – and consider rewarding yourself with a relaxing bath and/or an ice cold beer.

Sources: homeownernet.com, timesunion.com, wisconsinrapidtribune.com and medicalnewstoday.com

Do you know someone in the market for a new home? Pass along this great \$100 OFFER!



Help yourself or someone you know save big money with an Alliant mortgage

If you or someone you know is in the market for a new home or looking to refinance a current residence, consider Alliant's great fixed, adjustable and interest-only mortgages.

With our online application, it's fast and easy to apply for a mortgage. Once your Alliant mortgage is approved and closed, we'll reward the borrower with a \$100 savings deposit.¹

Here's how it works...

1. Check out our below-market rates at www.alliantcreditunion.org. (If the person you are referring is not an Alliant member, he/she can easily join online, too.)
2. Apply online or call our Mortgage Hotline at 800-365-7003 (Mon-Fri, 6am-7pm CT; Sat, 8am-12pm CT).
3. Mail in the Certificate below. Then, we'll reward you with a \$100 deposit¹ to your Alliant savings account.

¹This offer can only be used by Alliant members. You must apply for your mortgage loan by December 31, 2009, to be eligible to receive the \$100 reward which will be deposited directly into your Alliant savings account. No substitutions will be made for the \$100 reward. Recipients are responsible for any tax liability. Only one \$100 reward per qualifying mortgage will be awarded. Original Certificate must be returned to Alliant Credit Union ATTN: Marketing Dept., P.O. Box 66945, Chicago, IL 60666-0945, in order to receive the \$100 reward.



\$100 Mortgage Program Reward Certificate

Member Information

Individual applying for a mortgage, please complete this section and mail to Alliant.

Member Account Number _____

First name _____ Middle Name _____ Last Name _____

Street Address (include unit #) _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____ E-mail _____

Not in the market for a mortgage?
Pass along Certificate to another member.

Once your Alliant mortgage loan is approved and closed, a \$100 reward¹ will be deposited into your Alliant savings account.

Offer expires December 31, 2009

COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS CERTIFICATE TO:

Alliant Credit Union
Attn: Marketing Department
P.O. Box 66945
Chicago, IL 60666-0945

¹This offer can only be used by Alliant members. You must apply for your mortgage loan by December 31, 2009, to be eligible to receive the \$100 reward which will be deposited directly into your Alliant savings account. No substitutions will be made for the \$100 reward. Recipients are responsible for any tax liability. Only one \$100 reward per qualifying mortgage will be awarded. Original Certificate must be returned to Alliant Credit Union ATTN: Marketing Dept., P.O. Box 66945, Chicago, IL 60666-0945, in order to receive the \$100 reward. Once we receive the Certificate and verify the loan amount and close date, we will deposit the \$100 reward in your Alliant savings account.

The price of heating your home is expected to cool

How much can you expect to pay for heating fuel costs this winter? On average, 8% less than last year, according to the Energy Information Administration (EIA). The average heating bill for U.S. households will be \$960 from October 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010 – about \$84 less than last year, the EIA reports.

The main cause of cheaper heating costs: lower energy prices. Other reasons: a warmer winter (expected to be 1% warmer than last year) and lower fuel use for some consumers.

You'll enjoy the steepest drop in price if you use natural gas (about 12% less – a \$105 savings) or propane (about 14% less – a \$280 savings). About 52% of U.S. homes are heated by natural gas and 6% by propane.

If you heat by heating oil, you can expect to pay about 2% less and save \$40. If you use electricity, you can also expect to pay about 2% less and save \$20 this year.

What a difference from last year – when heating costs rose to record levels and consumers paid 10.5% more than they did the previous winter.

Sources: The Wall Street Journal and USA Today

