

# Go green: save some money by unplugging the appliances you aren't using

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NEW YORK (AP) — For Ben Veligdan, a music teacher in Brooklyn's Coney Island neighborhood, opening the electric bill became a monthly surprise. There's no way more than \$100 a month for him, his wife and a cat could be normal, right?

So Veligdan, 26, looked around his modest one-bedroom apartment for the culprit and decided unplugging his computer when sleeping or working would be a start. His electric bill fell almost immediately. Many electronic items still draw power when they're turned off. It's a phenomenon called "phantom" load, and it sucks about 5 percent to 10 percent of the energy used in America's homes each year.

That's the same amount of power generated by 17 coal-fired plants annually, according to Brian Keane, president of the energy-efficiency think tank SmartPower. Many people talk about going green, but most do want to be bothered with unplugging devices. That could cost you. Your cable box and flat-screen TV are among the worst offenders. Microwaves and cell phone chargers are power suckers, too. "The biggest underrepresented area of energy efficiency is the efficiency of turning things fully off," said Stephen Connors, who researches energy consumption at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But let's face it, no one's going to plug and unplug that army cords attached to the stereo, cable box and TV to watch "American Idol" every week. Two words: power strip. One flip of a switch gives you instant savings, as much as \$110 a year, Keane said. Look around your house and you can put a price tag on all the plugged-in electronics you own. Cell phone charger: about \$10 each year. Computer speakers: \$4 per year. Dumping that desktop for a laptop could put \$36 in your pocket annually. We like to think we've become more efficient over the years, but the home of 2009 uses five times more power than the home of the 1950s. Beaver Cleaver never Twittered on an iPhone to his BFF. With power plants pushed to the limit by our love of toys, going unplugged can go a long way. "It's not changing your lifestyle," said Keane. "All you have to do is unplug."