Trends of electricity management are changing quickly

Eskom's latest application to increase electricity prices by as much as 16% in July this year will affect many households negatively, says Anne Porter, head of Knight Frank Residential SA.

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While most households have adjusted the way they use electricity, by conserving as much as possible and not wasting, many have now started looking for alternative ways to power their homes independently of the grid, some going as far as taking them almost completely away from the public electricity supply.

Depending on the budget in each household, one could consider converting all power supply to the home to a solar system, which could cost in the region of R150,000 for an average three bedroom house, but could also be done in increments, tackling each section of the home that consumes power at a time.

To save energy many would first think of installing a solar water heating system as the geyser is one of the largest consumers of power in any household. This can cost approximately R16,000. One can, however, install a black evacuator tubing system which is laid out on the roof of the house and warms water from the heat of the sun. Many people use this system and find it effective enough for them because South Africa does have a relatively high sun exposure rate each day.

Heat pumps

Some people prefer heat pumps to heat water, but the problem with these is that the heat pump does not work during power outages as opposed to the solar geyser which is independent. Another simple way of saving electricity is to install a timer on the geyser, which will allow it to switch on at stipulated times of the day.

Stoves and kettles use a lot of electricity and one can cut back by installing a gas stove and only filling the kettle with the amount of water to be used at that time instead of to the top.

Another system used which does help during power outages as well as cutting down on electricity consumption is a system with photovoltaic panels which will charge batteries, and these batteries then power lights and smaller appliances in the home. These systems can range from R7,000 to R50,000, depending on the size needed and number of batteries.

What could also save many households (7% of an average power bill goes to keeping appliances in the home in standby mode) is plugging appliances that don't have to be on all the time into a 'smart strip'. This device is inexpensive and it shuts off the supply of electricity to the appliance if it is not used for an hour and then immediately re-instates supply when the appliance is switched on again. LED light bulbs will also help in cutting back on electricity consumption.

Wood burning stove

Heating and cooling can be costly and the most effective way of heating is to install a slow wood burning stove in a central position in the home with the flue exposed, never on an outside wall. The heat from this will radiate throughout the home and heat a large area. Blinds and awnings on sun facing room windows will help keep the house cool inside, thereby reducing the need for air-conditioning.

"Many people will never again look at electricity management in the same way that they used to ten years ago. The trends are changing quickly to many not being willing to pay the exorbitant costs as well as not tolerating having the supply shut off from time to time.

"If a home has its own power supply (even only in part), the demand for this home will often be higher than one without, and this is something that then positively affects the market value and marketability of the property," says Porter.