

GREENER HOMES

MICHAEL GREEN



All savings great and small

It can be tricky to equate day-to-day energy use with quarterly bills. Christopher Zinn, from Choice, says people often get confused by terms such as kilojoules or kilowatt-hours. It's far easier to understand the dollars and cents.

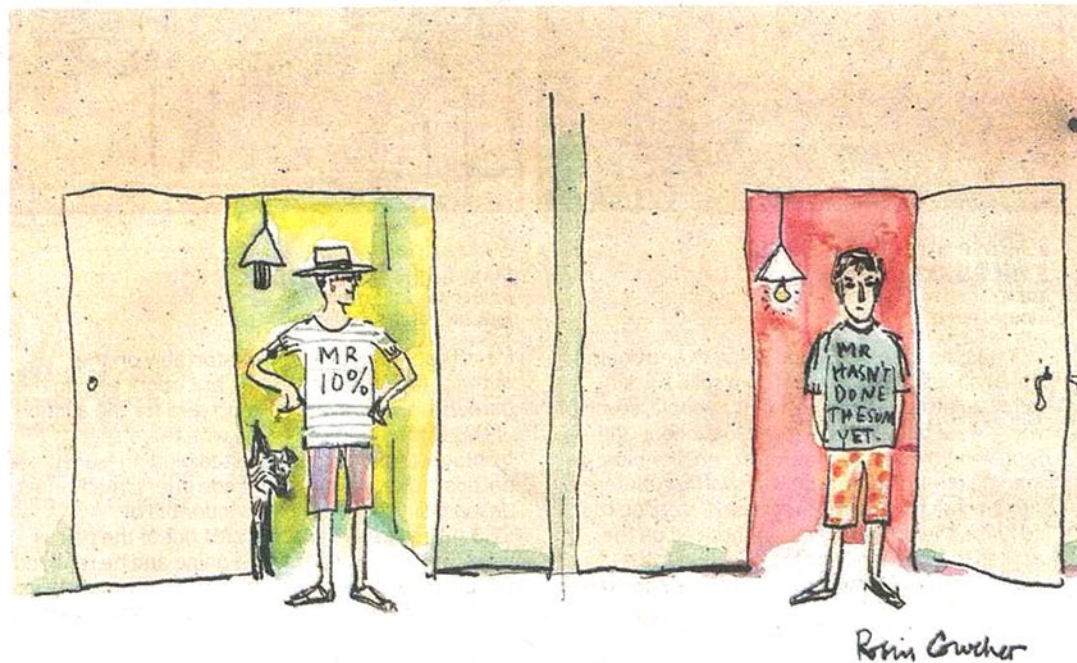
For that reason, the consumer advocate has teamed with the environmental group Do Something to launch "The 10% Challenge", a campaign urging householders and businesses to cut their energy and fuel bills by one-tenth.

"It's very straightforward to think of your energy use in terms of the amount it costs — and then aim to save 10 per cent," Mr Zinn says. "But before you can save anything, you need to measure it first."

The challenge's website includes a household savings calculator, where you can type in your electricity and gas consumption, as well as your car's make, model and yearly mileage. The calculator will tally your annual costs and display the money you'd save if you cut back by 10, 20 or 30 per cent. If you're not sure where to start, you can find dozens of basic tips on the site, such as switching off your wireless internet connection at night. "Historically, we've had fairly low electricity and petrol prices in comparison to other countries, so we haven't been focused on efficiency," Mr Zinn says.

Now, however, with "electricity prices going north very quickly", there's all the more reason to look at the simplest ways to economise. "It's very easy to achieve," he says. "And it's something you can build on. Once you've met the challenge, you

GET READY TO ROLL: THE ECO-COUNTDOWN HAS BEGUN.



can go after other savings." For clues about how to make bigger cuts in your greenhouse gas emissions, tour the eco-friendly homes open on Sustainable House Day, next Sunday, September 11.

This year, more than 200 householders around the country (including about

70 in Victoria) will open their homes to the public, most of them for the first time.

One of those is Ken Self's renovated brick-veneer home in Rosanna, in Melbourne's north. The design for its eco-makeover, by NOWarchitecture, included sensible measures such as extra insula-

tion and natural lighting, as well as a few striking innovations.

The family's in-ground pool has become a huge water tank and reservoir for a passive cooling system that keeps the home comfortable in summer. "We discovered that running the pool filter and chlorinator accounted for half our electricity bill," Mr Self says. "That made our decision easy."

They also added a large solar photovoltaic array, including panels set into a new glass wall on the home's northern side. The glass acts as both a sunroom and a thermal chimney: in winter, it warms the rest of the house; in summer, its vents help draw cooler air from beneath the home to the south.

Another key decision was to build a self-contained granny flat. "We designed for multiple occupancy — having more people live together reduces our energy requirements overall," he says.

While the retrofit has been expensive, Mr Self considers the project a 30-year investment. "We lived in the UK for several years and noted how much more comfortable the houses were there.

"And we've become aware of rising energy prices and issues like global warming and peak oil. We think things have to change in the world and the best way is to show other people what can be done."

michaelbgreen.com.au

LINKS 10percentchallenge.com.au
sustainablehouseday.com