



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FAQ

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

65 East State Street
7th Floor, Columbus, OH
43215

E-MAIL:
occ@occ.ohio.gov

WEBSITE:
www.occ.ohio.gov

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VAMPIRE POWER



Even after you turn off household appliances and electronics, devices left plugged in continue to use power and add to your electric bill. The power used by electronic devices while not in use is known as standby power, or “vampire power,” and according to ENERGY STAR the average household spends \$100 every year on vampire power. Devices using vampire power cost Americans \$19 billion annually, according to the National Resources Defense Council. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, the residential utility advocate, has answered these common questions about vampire power.

Q. Which devices use vampire power?

A. Many everyday appliances and electronic devices like cable boxes, DVD and VCR players, cellphones, MP3 players, video game consoles, standby machines like microwaves and coffee makers, TVs, and even alarm clocks, usually use vampire power.

Q. What can you do to control or eliminate vampire power?

- A. You should be aware of the devices that are not in use but may be using vampire power. Consult owners' manuals and product specifications for details about how much vampire power, sometimes called “minimum power,” is used and if it is appropriate to unplug the devices. (Be aware that unplugging a device could erase personal settings or programmed data.) You can also take these steps to use less power:
- ▶ Only connect devices to chargers while they are charging. Many devices have a light or indicator that indicates when batteries are fully charged. For example, a red light may change to green;
 - ▶ Do not leave chargers plugged into an outlet when not charging;
 - ▶ Shut down computers instead of logging off. Turn off monitors instead of leaving them in sleep mode; and
 - ▶ Unplug devices that are rarely used or when away from home for several days.

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at www.occ.ohio.gov.



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Q. Which devices use the most vampire power?

- A. Devices vary in their vampire power usage. However, the average home has 20-40 electronic devices, and the combined vampire power usage can be surprising. Some of these devices are coffee makers, cellular phone chargers, and televisions.

Experts indicate that in the future you may use more vampire power as more devices are created with microchips and are connected to the Internet.

Q. Is vampire power necessary?

- A. Some vampire power is necessary for functionality and convenience. Vampire power enables monitoring of refrigerator temperatures, allows use of remote controls, keeps digital clocks running, and charges cellular phones. But experts indicate most vampire power is wasteful because of inefficient AC adapters.

Q. What should you know when purchasing a new appliance?

- A. You should consider energy efficiency when shopping. Devices with the ENERGY STAR logo use less electricity and are energy efficient. ENERGY STAR's website, www.energystar.gov, has a complete list of qualified devices. Ratings for ENERGY STAR devices change so energy efficiency is typically greater in new ENERGY STAR items.

Q. Can a power strip reduce vampire power?

- A. Power strips are used to plug multiple devices into one wall outlet. Surge protectors serve the same purpose and protect devices from electrical power surges. Regular power strips and surge protectors do not reduce vampire power.

But there are also "smart" power strips, or advanced power strips, that shut down devices in standby mode and eliminate vampire power.

According to ENERGY STAR there are three types of advanced power strips: timer-equipped, where power to the power strip is turned on or off at a designated time; occupancy sensing, where the power strip is controlled by a motion detector; or current sensing, where power to the entire power strip is activated when the device plugged into the master outlet is on. Advanced power strips are typically more expensive than other power strips or surge protectors.

Q. Can you measure the electricity lost to vampire power?

- A. Kilowatt meters can be purchased to measure the power used by a device in use and in standby mode. To calculate electricity usage, plug the meter into a wall outlet and plug the device into the meter. A meter is a great tool for teaching you and your family about your electricity consumption, and it could encourage you to follow power-saving tips.

