8 Energy Efficiency Questions to Ask Your Landlord and Yourself about Your New Apartment or Home

When looking to rent a home or apartment, an avalanche of questions seems to follow. Rent prices, pet policies, lease terms and agreements, and dozens more. Each new inquiry helps potential tenants know exactly what they are getting in a unit, and for what price. A topic that many tenants and landlords miss, though, has the potential to save or cost a significant amount each month. Energy efficiency is an issue that must be discussed before move-in, and here are some questions to get the conversation started with your new landlord.

How old is the heating and cooling system, and what is its efficiency rating? Efficiency ratings are a best-case scenario in factory conditions. This rating will help you know how much of the heating or cooling produced reaches building occupants. Something else to keep in mind is that original efficiency ratings on old systems are probably lower today than when they were made.

Who pays for repairs and maintenance? Landlords are willing to let an old system sit stagnant if they're not the ones paying for repairs. If that responsibility becomes theirs, it's a good chance they'll upgrade to a more efficient, lower maintenance model in order to save themselves more money in the long run.

What is the R-value (insulation level) of the home? That awesome exposed brick wall in your office may be the most popular design choice of any home you know. And the coldest. Brick has little-to-no insulation value, and neither does glass or some stone. Do you know what levels of insulation the exterior material of your unit has? Insist on an R-value of at least 20, which is code in many places. If your building doesn't have at least that, you're probably paying higher energy bills for no reason.

Are the windows single-pane? Single-pane windows let out drastically more heat than double pane. Historic homes can have windows replaced for more efficient models, and it will probably raise the value of the home anyway. If you end up in a home with old single-pane windows, use specially designed window shrink wrap to create a layer of air between your home and the cold pane of glass.

Does the house get natural daylight? Windows and skylights can reduce the need for artificial lighting and heating. A home that gets a lot of sunlight can be more quickly and efficiently heated and lit during daylight hours.

Are the appliances energy efficient? Energy Star appliances support a sustainable living environment, and can help landlords save money in the long run. Older appliances will probably be more inefficient, so be sure to ask about the age and efficiency of them.

Do any of the faucets have leaks? A drippy faucet will reflect extra expense in your water and heating bills. This should be an easy leak for the landlord and is definitely their responsibility to maintain.

Are recycle and compost bins included, provided by the local government, or available for paid service? Landlords should provide these bins, but it is important to know how to recycle and compost from your home. Almost half of the average garbage bag from residential homes can be either recycled or composted.

Share information! Rarely do tenants and landlords both know all of the information about a unit, which leads to inconsistencies. Ask your landlord about ratings and data from past tenants or other units; they should be perfectly willing to share this information and it will help you know the efficiency of the unit.

On your end, be sure to tell your landlord if you have concerns or maintenance questions. Working as a team will increase energy efficiencies and reduce unnecessary expenses for both parties involved.

Sources

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