

Unit 5: Eco-Detectives

Narrator: This house is a typical three-bedroom home in a nice suburban neighborhood. But lurking beneath this innocent facade is an energy-eating monster.

Houses and buildings account for more than half of all energy consumption in the United States. And many homes waste more energy than they actually use.

Environmental visionary Amory Lovins has brought a team of eco-detectives to investigate the Cohen house.

Amory Lovins: So this innocent-looking thing here, when it is on, eats a whole lot of money. When I feel this much cold on the outside of the freezer, the insulation is really not as thick as we would like.

Oh, what have we here?

Climate change is a problem we don't need to have, and it's cheaper not to.

Narrator: Lovins demonstrates that we needn't give up the conveniences we want—a warm room or a cold drink—in order to save energy. It's all about how efficiently we use it.

Amory Lovins: I think once people understand that climate protection puts money back in your pocket because you don't have to buy all that fuel. Political resistance is going to melt faster than glaciers.

You see that little red light? Down in the corner?

Cohen: Yes.

Narrator: And you'd be surprised by just how much energy your home is wasting, even while you sleep.

Amory Lovins: If you have all kinds of appliances, you know, your TV, your VCR, your DVD, etc. that have that little light on—they're using electricity. It's called vampire loads.

A hundred and nine watts. Almost 60 bucks a year, just sitting there, turned off.

Narrator: If every household in the U.S. did away with their vampire loads, we could eliminate a minimum of 18 coal-burning power plants.

Lovins leads by example. He designed his own home in Aspen, Colorado. He employs a mix of high technology and good old common sense.

Amory Lovins: We're at 70, 100 feet here. It can go to -47 F, get frost any day of the year. We could get 39 days of continuous winter cloud.

Narrator: Winters are extremely cold here, but Lovins's house doesn't need a furnace. The house gets all the electricity it needs from the solar panels on the roof. And there's energy to spare. The entire house runs on 120 watts. That's just slightly more electricity than a single light bulb uses.

Amory Lovins: Energy-efficiency is the biggest, fastest, cheapest way to solve the climate problem, to save money, and to make a safer, richer, fairer, cooler world.