

Excerpt from Motley Fool.com, April 23, 2007

<http://www.fool.com/investing/high-growth/2007/04/23/save-money-the-green-way.aspx>

Save Money the Green Way

By Jack Uldrich

Last fall, I wrote about **Wal-Mart's** (NYSE: [WMT](#)) [bright idea](#) to launch a massive in-store campaign to educate customers about the benefits of replacing older incandescent light bulbs with their newer, more energy-efficient counterparts commonly known as compact fluorescent lights (CFLs). At the time, I noted that while the CFLs cost six times as much as regular incandescent bulbs, they were estimated to pay for themselves in as little as five months because they use just 25% of the energy that an ordinary bulb gobbles up.

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Easy money, little sacrifice Perhaps not surprisingly, there are a number of other simple actions that you and I can do to help protect both the environment and our pocketbooks. For instance, turning down the home thermostat by a measly 1 degree will save the average person about \$45 a year. Lowering the thermostat on the water heater to 120 degrees will save an additional \$24. Easy money for little sacrifice.

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.... Here, then, is my Foolish idea.

The Environmental Reinvestment Plan Why not reinvest these savings to do some further good for the environment and your own economic well-being? For example, the savings could be used to replace an older air conditioner or refrigerator with a newer, more energy-efficient model.

If none of these options interests you, there is always the possibility of investing in a solar-power company, such as *Motley Fool Rule Breakers* recommendation **Suntech Power** (NYSE: [STP](#)), or in a company like **Zoltek** (Nasdaq: [ZOLT](#)), which will benefit from the expansion of [wind power](#). Alternatively, the money could be directed toward a mutual fund or ETF that focuses on investing in clean-tech companies, such as **PowerShares WilderHill Clean Energy Fund** (AMEX: [PBW](#)).

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