



## Geek Out With The Power Cost Monitor + WiFi

February 7, 2011 by [Alicia Kraig](#)

Monitoring your home electricity usage is wise from both an economical and environmental standpoint. Blue Line Innovations' [Power Cost Monitor](#), an attractive and small home energy monitor that resembles a digital clock, promises real time energy usage that can help homeowners reduce their electricity consumption by 10 to 20 percent. We like that the only installation required is the attachment of a sensor unit via a ring clamp to the outside of your home's electric utility meter.

The monitor works with standard digital and electromechanical meters, and the clamp can be attached to glass that typically surrounds meters. The sensor unit then transmits the energy usage – in both kilowatts and dollars and cents – to the monitor (energy rates must be entered for cost to be calculated). It also displays the time and outside temperature, and having a thermometer is certainly a useful feature for San Francisco living.

The monitor also displays the highest amount of energy used in a 24-hour period, which can help pinpoint the times when you and yours may be wasting energy. The monitor requires a wireless signal of 433 MHz and has a range of 100 feet from the sensor.

We found the set up to be fairly easy. We called Blue Line Innovations' customer support to answer a few questions and found them to be helpful and polite. We observed a lag time of about 30 seconds between a change in energy consumption and the monitor reading. Unfortunately, communication to the unit is heavily affected by the use of other wireless devices in the home and can result in a dropped connection and unrecorded data. Moving the monitor closer to the sensor unit and moving the other wireless devices further away helped with this issue. We're a little concerned about the accumulation of water in the seal around the sensor. So far so good, but only time will tell.

Blue Line Innovations [sells the Power Cost Monitor for \\$109](#) and provides a 1 year warranty, while Amazon.com [offers the unit for \\$100](#).

Ready to take your energy monitoring to the next level? Then the optional [Power Cost Monitor WiFi](#) is for you. This bundle works with the Power Cost Monitor or the Black and Decker Power Monitor and allows you to monitor your energy usage online with free access to monitoring and reporting software Microsoft Hohm. The Hohm software offers tracking usage and historical tracking, as well as tips and tricks on how to conserve energy and money. Not surprisingly, a Microsoft Live account is required to use the Hohm software, but we found it pretty straightforward to use and actually kind of fun.

Tracking of up to a year's worth of data can really let you geek out. It's up to you to determine how much you want to annoy your cohabitants by unplugging the energy vampires in your house, [but controlling and identifying them is easy with some of the gadgets we recently reviewed](#). The WiFi setup was a bit difficult as it uses the antiquated 802.11b wireless standard, which may require the user to alter their access point configuration. If nothing else, adding a 802.11b device to your network could constrain newer devices running on the network. We feel the WiFi Gateway has some kinks to be worked out and because of connectivity issues, we recommend holding off on purchasing this until an updated module that runs on a G or N protocol is released. However, if you simply cannot wait, Amazon.com [sells the Wi-Fi add-on for \\$129](#).