

# Home energy monitors come to big box stores — for less than \$100

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Fry's Electronics [announced today that average consumers can now buy a PowerCost Monitor](#), made by [Blue Line Innovations](#), in any one of its retail stores or on its web site. The device [tells you how much energy you are using and how much it is costing you in real time](#). It's priced at \$99.99. That's one of the lowest price points we've seen for such a system, yet another indicator that home energy management is becoming a mainstream priority.

With so much talk of home energy monitoring companies like [Tendril](#), [Control4](#), [OpenPeak](#), [Google Powermeter](#) and others, Blue Line and its PowerCost device have gone largely overlooked. Well, no longer. Now available through both Fry's and online electronics retailer [Newegg.com](#) (for \$109.99), the PowerCost system looks like one of the most practical, no-fuss options on the market.

Two similar options already exist: the home energy monitoring kit from Britain-based [AlertMe](#) (\$112 with a \$50 subscription fee) and [The Energy Detective](#) made by Energy, Inc., [which just got a big infusion from 3M](#), (\$200 for the newest version). Both of these

companies have a slight edge, having teamed up with Google [to feed energy consumption and cost data to its PowerMeter interface](#) (accessible through any web browser). PowerCost may not need this kind of partnership if it remains more cost effective and user-friendly.

Requiring no special wiring or expertise to install, the PowerCost system includes a radio device that plugs into any electricity meter — even really old ones — and a small display screen (pictured above). The radio wirelessly beams the information it collects to the display, which reflects how much money you are spending on electricity per hour at that very minute, as well as how much your monthly bill would be so far.

When people are privy to exactly how much they are spending on electricity and why, evidence shows they alter their behavior to save money. Blue Line Innovations reports that current PowerCost users have shaved 6 to 18 percent off of their regular energy use as a result of using the device.

The question now is whether average people really will be willing to shell out \$100 to keep tabs on their energy use. Blue Line says the device could save people upwards of \$250 a year on bills, so it has a fairly quick return — but people don't often spring for things unless they'll see immediate savings. In addition to expanding its product to other big retailers, the company will also need to focus on bringing the cost of its offerings down if it wants to stay ahead of the game.

Based in Canada, Blue Line Innovations has not disclosed any investments from venture firms or angels but has taken some financial support from the Canadian government.