November 2011

West Central Electric News

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Frigid temperatures will be here before we know it. You can help your electric coopertive system avoid a peak by limiting your use of appliances during high-use periods.

Winter brings increased demand, peak alert periods

On the hottest days of summer and coldest days of winter, air conditioners and heaters are running at full capacity. As a result, the demand for electricity often increases beyond normal levels, which is called a **PEAK ALERT**.

"Hitting a peak increases our demand, which increases our wholesale power costs for the next year," General Manager Mike Gray said. "We urge our members to conserve during these times because this is something they can do to directly affect their electric bills."

As we approach winter, the increased use of space heaters, engine heaters, heat tapes and electric heat will add to the electrical demand. Cooperatives try hard to avoid peak situations because of that increased demand they put on the system. As the temperature decreases to near zero, the demand raises and increases the likelihood of a peak alert.

You Can Help...

You can help by limiting your use of dishwashers, lights, washers and dryers, and other appliances during a peak alert. Peak alert situations happen most frequently between the hours of 5 p.m. and 8 p.m., although they can happen at any time.

Listen to your area radio stations for peak alert announcements, and try to reduce your use of electricity during those periods. The voluntary reduction of electric usage by members can make a big difference.

Don't bust your energy budget over the holidays

Electric cooperatives often see a spike in energy use during the holiday period from Thanksgiving through New Year's that includes buying, entertaining and celebrating. Here's what you can do to avoid busting your energy budget:

Switch to LED holiday lights — Get rid of your strings of old C-7 or C-9 bulbs, which use about 7 watts of electricity per bulb, according to the Edison Electric Institute. Switching to strings of minilights will drop your usage to about .4 watts per bulb. But your best option is LED (lightemitting diode) lights, which produce very little heat and are 90 percent more efficient than incandescent lights; they use only .04 watts per bulb. Indoor LED lights can last up to 100,000 hours or more and outdoor LED lights up to 50,000 — virtually a lifetime of holiday lights.

Switch to fiber optics — The ultimate in energy efficiency is fiber optics. An artificial tree with fiber optic lighting built into it uses a single low-wattage LED bulb or incandescent bulb to light the entire tree.

Cook smart — Instead of the oven, use the microwave, crockpot, toaster oven or outdoor grill or oven. Avoid preheating, use the oven to cook multiple items at a time and match the pot to burner size.

Forget the fireplace — It may be tempting to stoke up the fireplace on Christmas Eve, but remember that most of that heat goes right up the chimney. In addition, without an intake air vent,

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Disberger is named engineering manager

West Central Electric General Manager Mike Gray has announced the promotion of Dan Disberger to the position of engineering manager at the cooperative. Disberger will be responsible for overseeing the brush crews, service inspectors, the staking department and building maintenance department.

Disberger

"I am really looking forward to all of the challenges ahead and moving into this new role within the cooperative world," he said. "It's exciting to be able to see things from a different side. There is a lot of new technology, and new things coming around. It's an exciting time in the cooperative world."

Disberger joined WCE in 1988 as an apprentice lineman. He earned journeyman status in September 1990, and was promoted to serviceman in 2006. In June 2009, he was named line foreman, a title he held until his current appointment.

Disberger lives in Higginsville with wife, Shelley and their son, Trevor.

WCE offices will be closed Friday, Nov. 11 for Veterans Day and Thursday & Friday, Nov. 24-25 for the Thanksgiving holiday.

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STATE FAIR WINNER... West Central Electric members Mark (pictured) and Robin Luber were the winners of a 6.75 Pro DR trimmer/mower from Rural Missouri Magazine. The Lubers were visitors to the Missouri Electric Cooperatives Building on the Missouri State Fairgrounds in August where they registered for one of several giveaways.

Seal cracks to save energy and money

Finding and sealing air leaks can save you energy and money. Here's a tip fromWest Central Electric Cooperative that can help keep your home cooler in summer and warmer in winter while lowering your utility bills.

Caulking cracks and openings can save you as much as $212 a year. Find cracks by waiting for a windy day and then carefully holding a lit incense stick or a smoke pen next to your windows, doors, electrical outlets, and other spots where outside air may infiltrate. If the smoke stream moves horizontally, you've found a leak that needs to be sealed.

Experts recommend using waterproof, flexible, and long-lasting silicone caulk to seal cracks and gaps that are less than one-quarter-inch wide. Remove any old caulk and clean the surface before applying new caulk.

Fresh caulk takes several hours, or longer, to dry, so it's best to do the job on a dry day when humidity is relatively low and the temperature is above 45 degrees F. In addition to caulk, you can use low-expansion spray foam to seal leaks.

For other tips on how to save energy—and money—visit www.energysavers.gov OR Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives energy-saving website, www.TogetherWeSave.com, or call the efficiency experts at West Central Electric at 800-491-3803.

Give efficiency this Christmas...

Green gifts are practical, thoughtful

With the holiday rush starting earlier and earlier every year, get a jump-start on your shopping wish list with some great green gifts. Using the tips below, you can have everything wrapped up before the ho, ho, ho turns into go, go, go!

Why Give Efficiency?

Green giving is thoughtful on many levels. The person receiving the gift has a new gadget to use that keep long-term electric costs low year-round.

"Choosing a green gift can be easy," says Brian Sloboda, senior program manager for the Cooperative Research Network (CRN). "Be aware of energy use. Look for any mention of energy ratings on large appliances and televisions, or select unplugged gifts. Think solar, reusable, and recyclable. Even something as small as the packaging and wrapping can make a difference."

Look for items with lightweight packaging. And think about wrapping your gift in something like fabric bag that can be reused or even an accessory like a scarf to tie things up.

Green Gift Ideas:

• **For Decorators:** LED Christmas lights ($15-$35)–These energy-efficient lights are becoming easier to find. They save on high holiday electric bills and stay cool to the touch. For a festive complete package, wrap in a decorative stocking.

• **For Gardeners:** Solar garden lights ($15-$50)-Available in endless colors, styles, and sizes, solar garden lights can be a lovely addition to your favorite green thumb's garden. To up the green quotient, wrap in a burlap bag.

• **For Cooks:**: Toaster oven ($60 – $140)–Especially great for the empty nester or those only cooking for one or two, toaster ovens are a good choice to save energy as an alternative to heating a large standard oven.

• **For Movie Buffs or Sports Fans:** ENERGY STAR-rated TV (price based on size)–Televisions are getting bigger and better. But before you give something that uses as much electricity as a refrigerator, look for the ENERGY STAR label. It will offer the smallest impact on your electric bills possible.

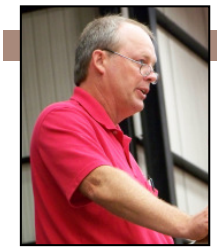
• **For Techies:**

--Smart strip ($20 - $40)–This new cutting-edge technology is great for plugging in electronic gadgets. Not your average power strip, smart strips sport designated outlets that make it easy to power down certain devices to save energy while not affecting others plugged into the same strip.

--Solar cell phone charger ($55 - $100+)–Help unplug energy-sucking chargers from the wall; solar chargers can be placed in a window to charge a cell phone or other devices like a GPS unit or even MP3 players anywhere the sun shines, even in a car on-the-go!

There are many options when you start looking for green gifts. Get creative, and remember that what you give impacts future electric bills. So give the green light for energy-smart gifts this year!

Kelly Trapnell writes on writes on safety and energy efficiency issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.



From the Manager...

Protecting our silent sentinels, it's up to you to help

It's easy to take something for granted when you see it every day. We drive by row after row of them, but how often do we think about utility poles? Yet these silent sentinels—often under attack in our community—are critical to West Central Electric's mission of delivering safe, reliable, and affordable power.

Electric cooperatives like WCE own and maintain more than 2.5 million miles of distribution lines stretching across two-thirds of America. Some of these lines can be found underground, but for the most part they stretch above ground, chasing after us on roadsides and doggedly climbing through harsh terrain to deliver power to homes.

Co-ops rely on more than 41 million utility poles to deliver these lines, and these staunch supporters of electricity are under constant attack from the elements—storms, woodpeckers, insects, moisture, and harsh soils. But people play a part in pole erosion, too.

I can't tell you how many times I've driven by a pole and noticed yard sale signs or ads tacked to the base. It's illegal to attach unauthorized items to poles. When a lineworker is responding to an outage and climbs a pole, abandoned nails or tacks can rip through protective gloves, leaving the lineworker potentially exposed to thousands of volts of energy. And even when nails are removed, the leftover holes provide easy entry for bugs and water, causing a pole that should have lasted four decades or more to weaken much faster.

We need your help. If you notice anyone trying to attach something to a utility pole, let them know it's dangerous and against the law. Whenever we see an illegal attachment—whether it's a satellite dish, a birdhouse, a basketball hoop, deer stand, or anything else—our employees will remove it and are not responsible for any damage caused to the unauthorized item.

Thanks for your help as we work together to prolong the lifespan of these silent sentinels that provide us with safe, reliable, and affordable electric service.

Extension Cord Safety: Make Smart Connections

During the holiday season, families often string together extension cords without a second thought. Unfortunately, not all cords are not created equal.

Just because an extension cord can reach an outlet across a room doesn't mean it's the right one for the task at hand. If a tool, appliance, or holiday display draws more current than an extension cord can carry, it may cause the cord (and whatever is connected to it) to overheat and start a fire.

Cords come in many lengths and are marked with a size or gauge. The gauge is based on the American Wire Gauge (AWG) System, in which the larger the wire, the smaller the AWG number.

For example, a 12-gauge wire would be larger and power larger wattage appliances than a 14-gauge wire. A cord, based on its gauge, can power appliances of a certain wattage only at specific distances. As the cord gets longer, the current-carrying capacity of the cord drops.

Using the right cord for the job is only the first step in using extension cords safely. Follow these tips to ensure safe use and make smart connection decisions:

•Look for the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) symbol. The UL mark means that samples of the cord have been tested for safety hazards.

•Never use an indoor extension cord outdoors, as it could result in electric shock or trigger a fire. Extension cords that can be used outdoors will be clearly marked "Suitable for Use with Outdoor Appliances."

•Extension cords should not be placed underneath rugs or other heavy furniture; tacked in place to a wall or taped down; or used while coiled or bent. Match the length of the cord to your needs.

•Store all cords indoors when not in use. Outdoor conditions can deteriorate a cord over time.

•Unplug extension cords when not in use. The cord will continue conducting electricity until unplugged.

•On cords with more than one outlet, use the covers provided for unused openings. Children and pets face serious injury if they chew on unused outlets or stick sharp metal objects into the openings.

•Do not use extension cords that are cut or damaged. Touching even a single exposed strand of wire can result in an electric shock or burn.

•Never file or cut the plug blades or grounding pin of an extension cord or appliance to plug it into an old outlet.

•As a safety feature, extension cords and most appliances boast polarized plugs (one blade wider than the other). These special plugs are designed to prevent electric shock by properly aligning circuit conductors. If a plug does not fit, have a qualified electrician install a new outlet.

Source: Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.

Mercury in compact fluorescent bulbs is miniscule

Ads and packaging materials for compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) proclaim that they use much less energy and last much longer than standard incandescent bulbs. However, if you read the fine print on the packaging or find the notice on the base of each bulb, you'll see that it contains mercury.

While that may raise an alarm in your mind, there's no need to worry. The amount of mercury inside the glass tubes of an average CFL is miniscule—about the equivalent of the tip of a ballpoint pen—and it's especially small when compared to other items you may have around your home. The amount of mercury in a CFL runs about 4-5 milligrams (mg), while a glass fever thermometer contains 500 mg, and an old-style thermostat could contain up to 3,000 mg.

CFLs are safe to handle and use in your home, and they release no mercury when in operation. Even if you break a CFL, the amount of mercury that may become airborne poses a very low risk of exposure, says ENERGY STAR. (To prevent breakage, carefully unpack a CFL, and always screw and unscrew the bulb by its base.) When CFLs burn out or break, the best course of action is to recycle them.

CFLs fall into the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) category of Household Hazardous Waste (HHW), but there's no federal (or [state]) requirement that the bulbs be recycled. There are several HHW recycling centers in our state—in [list local counties], for example—that accept CFLs. Some hardware stores and other retailers may have CFL recycling buckets on hand. And you may be able to dispose of CFLs during your community's annual hazardous waste collection event.

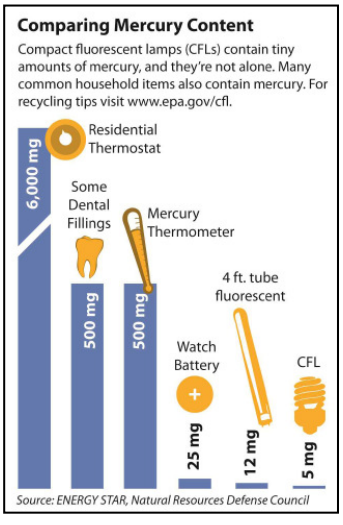
To find out if there's a facility or store near you that accepts CFLs, go to the Earth 911 website at www.earth911.org, or call 800-CLEANUP. Be sure to call the facility or store that's listed before you make the trip, to ensure that it allows homeowners or apartment dwellers to drop off CFLs.

If one of these recycling options is not available to you, you may put burned out or broken CFLs with your regular trash—but in no case should you burn or incinerate them. Here's what EPA says about properly disposing of CFLs.

•Burned-out CFLs: Put the CFL in a sealed plastic bag, and place it with your regular trash.

•Broken CFLs: If you break a CFL in your home, open nearby windows to disperse any vapor that may escape, and carefully sweep up the glass shards. (Don't use your hands!) Wipe the area with a damp paper towel to remove glass fragments; don't use a vacuum cleaner. Put the fragments, the base of the bulb, and the paper towel in a sealed plastic bag, and place it with your regular trash.

CFLs are a great idea. They'll help you cut your utility bills, and they'll help reduce the need for electricity production. However, to create the maximum benefit for the environment, recycling burned-out and broken CFLs makes sense.



Missouri One Call provides you an essential service

Do you want to stay safe? Avoid expensive damages? If so, it is essential to use the Missouri One Call System to notify the utilities of your work before every type of digging project: landscaping your yard, installing a culvert, building a fence or even something as simple as installing a mailbox.

Notifying Missouri One Call before beginning any type of excavation will allow the utilities to mark their underground facilities, permitting the excavation to safely proceed. Damaging an underground line can result in injuries, expensive repair costs, legal fees and outages.

Nationwide, an underground utility line is damaged by digging once every three minutes, and one out of every three facilities are damaged as a result of not notifying the One Call center to have the facilities marked prior to digging. Using the Missouri One Call System is free, and you can process your request 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It only takes a few minutes to complete the process of notifying the utilities of your intent to dig. The utilities are then allowed three working days to respond and mark their facilities.

Notifying the utilities is easy. Here's how the Missouri One Call System works:

1. Three working days before you begin your work, call 1-800-DIG-RITE or 811 or go online to www.mo1call.com to place your locate request.
2. Our operators will map the dig site from excavator information and notify the utilities that have facilities in the area.
3. The utilities will respond by marking their facilities or notifying you that they have no facilities at the dig site.
4. The utilities will mark the facilities that they own, usually up to the meter.
5. Once all the utilities have responded, work can then safely proceed, avoiding damages. There are more than 20 million miles of underground facilities buried in the United States. Never dig without knowing where the underground facilities are located.

To place your free notification, call 1-800-DIG-RITE or 811 or go online at www.mo1call.com

And remember, always call or click before you dig!

Don't bust your energy budget over the holidays

From page 1

which many houses don't have, the roaring fire in your fireplace will draw oxygen from cool outdoor air through leaks around doors and windows. That cool air can actually cause your thermostat to kick on the heat.

Go with gas — If you must have a fireplace, switch from wood to gas. According to National Grid, gas can be up to 80 percent efficient without the hassle of wood, ashes and smoke. By contrast, traditional masonry fireplaces are only 10 to 25 percent efficient.

Time your outdoor lights — Use timers to limit outdoor displays to six hours a night. According to the Alliance to Save Energy, leaving them on 24 hours a day could quadruple your energy costs.

Use a humidifier — It will make you feel warmer, and you can lower the thermostat setting to save energy and still be comfortable.

Lower the thermostat — When you've got company in the house, lower the thermostat a few degrees — you won't notice the difference with those extra warm bodies. According to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, you'll save about 1 percent energy use per degree of permanent set back. Now you have an excuse to wear that new wool sweater.

Go green for gifts — For the energy-conscious homeowner, there's no finer gift than a new Energy Star appliance that can cut related energy bills by 30 percent. Also consider giving energy-free gifts. A third option is to invest in rechargeable batteries.

Turn off the electronics — The U.S. Department of Energy says that 75 percent of electricity is consumed while a product is turned off. It makes sense to turn appliances and electronics off when not in use or put them on a surge protector and turn that off.

Doug Rye Says...

Tint and save...

Well, the summer of 2011 has gone on record as one of the hottest ever. Just like many of you, we received the highest electric bill that we have ever received. Every month, I try to teach you ways to keep your utility bills as low as possible. Remember that most energy-efficiency tips are attempts to lower the heating and cooling costs of the house.

As I am always looking for ways to help you do just that, I had the opportunity this summer to find another affordable tool for your energy-efficiency arsenal. It is window tinting.

I actually looked at window tinting years ago but I didn't like the fact that it seemed to have to be silver, gold or really dark to work very well. Both of our automobiles have tinted glass, and I knew that they were more comfortable and better on the eyes than most of the rental cars that I had used where the glass was not tinted.

This past spring, I was conducting a seminar for an electric cooperative in Arkansas. After the meeting, a fellow asked me why I didn't tell folks about the benefits of window tinting. I told him that I really didn't know that much about that subject and that I had doubts about window tinting meeting all the claims that I had heard. He gave me a nice package of material from 3M, a well-known company. I told him that I would read the material. I did so and was impressed with the claims.

But I remained cautious, as experience has taught me that many claims are just sales pitches. But I thought, 3M is a large and well respected company, the warranty looks great, and if it performs anywhere near as good as it claims, I want to give it a try. So I called a dear friend who performs energy audits on a daily basis and asked him to find a house that might benefit by installing window tinting.

He called me after just a few days to tell me that he had found the perfect house. It was a 2,000-square-foot brick veneer house with 8-foot ceilings and about an equal number of windows on all sides of the house. The windows were single-hung aluminum with double-glazing and in good condition. The lady of the house said she couldn't use the dining room on the really hot days because of the extreme heat coming through the west windows, and that she couldn't enjoy her morning view of the mountains because of the heat through the east windows.

Let's make the rest of the story short. I called the company and asked if they would do one house to prove that their product works as claimed. They said "yes." I called the family and asked permission to tint their windows. They said "yes." We met the crew at the house to measure the windows.

It was 100 degrees at noon. The house thermostat was set on 75 degrees but the house stayed at 80 degrees. We met the next day to install tinting. It was 102 degrees at noon. Tinting was installed on all windows. The temperature where the sun was hitting the carpet went down about 10 degrees. The house temperature went down about 5 degrees, which is huge on a hot summer day.

The claim was that the tinting would reject 56 percent of the total solar energy, 97 percent of the infrared rays and 99 percent of the UV rays, which practically eliminates fading. You could not tell by looking that there was tinting and there was much less glare. I believe that it passed the test. The house was more comfortable and, as the lady of the house said, "I got my room and view back." If your windows are still in good condition, this may be an affordable energy solution for you.

Another success story with 3M tinting took place during the 2010 Energy Efficiency Makeover sponsored by the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas. The home of Bill and Mary Quilhot of Gassville won the grand prize and as part of the energy efficiency makeover, the couple's prized picture window, which provides a view of their beautifully landscaped yard and nearby woods, was tinted. An infrared thermal imaging camera showed that the tinting reduced the heat gain inside the house by 15 percent.

I hope this gives you yet another energy efficiency option for your home. And, as always, you may call me for more information at 501-653-7931.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Doug Rye, a licensed architect living in Saline County, Ark., and the popular host of the "Home Remedies" radio show, works as a consultant for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas to promote energy efficiency to cooperative members statewide. To order Doug's video or ask energy efficiency-related questions, call Doug at 1-501-653-7931. More energy-efficiency tips, as well as Doug's columns, can also be found at www.ecark.org

Listen to Doug Rye's "Home Remedies" show Saturday mornings 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on KXKX Radio, 105.7 FM.