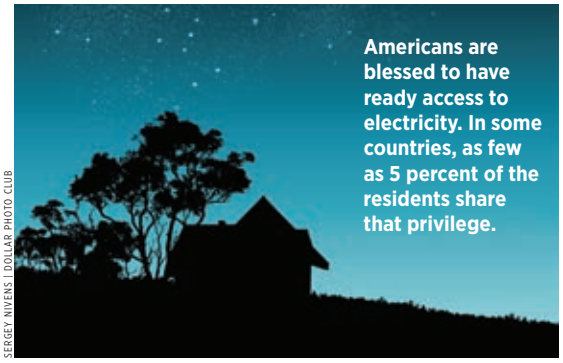
What Would Life Be Like Without Electric Co-ops?

MESSAGE FROM
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER DARRYL SCHRIVER

FOLKS OFTEN TAKE STOCK OF BLESSINGS AND CHALLENGES AT the beginning of each year, thinking about the impact their lives have made on the world and envisioning the effect they'd like to have on the future. At Tri-County Electric Cooperative, we approach the new year with this spirit of contemplation.

In the classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life,* lead character George Bailey wishes he had never been born because he is in financial trouble. With the help of an angel, he sees how many lives would have been negatively affected if he didn't exist. Bailey comes to realize that, even with his problems, he has a wonderful life with great friends and family.



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Americans are blessed to have ready access to electricity. In some countries, as few as 5 percent of the residents share that privilege.

So what do you think life would be like if community leaders had not founded Tri-County EC all those years ago?

Living in the United States in 2018, it is nearly impossible to imagine life without electricity. So many of our modern conveniences that improve the quality of our lives depend on electricity as the "fuel" to make them work. From the alarm clock that wakes us up, to the refrigerator that keeps our morning milk cold and fresh. From the air-conditioning and heating units that keep us cool in summer and warm in winter to the vacuum that lets us clean more efficiently and all those kitchen appliances that save us time and effort. So much of our entertainment, whether from the TV, game system or computer, depends on the kilowatt-hours that your electric co-op provides. Just think: There would be no smartphones or cellphones if there were no electricity.

As you consider the new year, remind yourself to be thankful for all that you have. It also is important to remember the 1.2 billion people in the world who still live without reliable electric service—a number equal to about four times the U.S. population.

Many of the things we take for granted living in the U.S. are much harder and more time-consuming for people in developing countries around the world. We are proud members of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, which works through its affiliates, NRECA International and the NRECA International Foundation, to help empower people in developing countries such as Haiti and Liberia.

We are thankful that our community ancestors had the vision and foresight to do for themselves what needed to be done, gathering friends and neighbors to form our electric co-op. As the electric business of the 21st century continues to evolve, you can count on Tri-County EC to meet all of your electric energy needs. More important, we are here to help improve the quality of your wonderful life.

WHAT TO DO IF …

Your Car Crashes Into a Utility Pole

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN. WOULD YOU KNOW what to do if your car crashed into an electric utility pole? Knowing what to do—and what NOT to do—could be the difference between life and death.

Always consider power lines and other electrical equipment to be live and dangerous.

If a power line falls on your vehicle and there is no fire, your safest option is to stay inside your vehicle until help arrives. The vehicle acts as a path for the electrical current to reach the ground. You are safe inside the vehicle, but if you get out, you could be electrocuted.

If a power line falls on your vehicle and there is a fire, to exit safely:

- Jump out of the vehicle, making sure NO part of your body or clothing touches the ground and vehicle at the same time.
- Land with both feet together and take small, shuffling steps for at least 40 feet away from the vehicle.
- The ground could be energized. Shuffling away with both feet together decreases the risk of electrical shock.

In either situation, call 911 and your electric cooperative for help.

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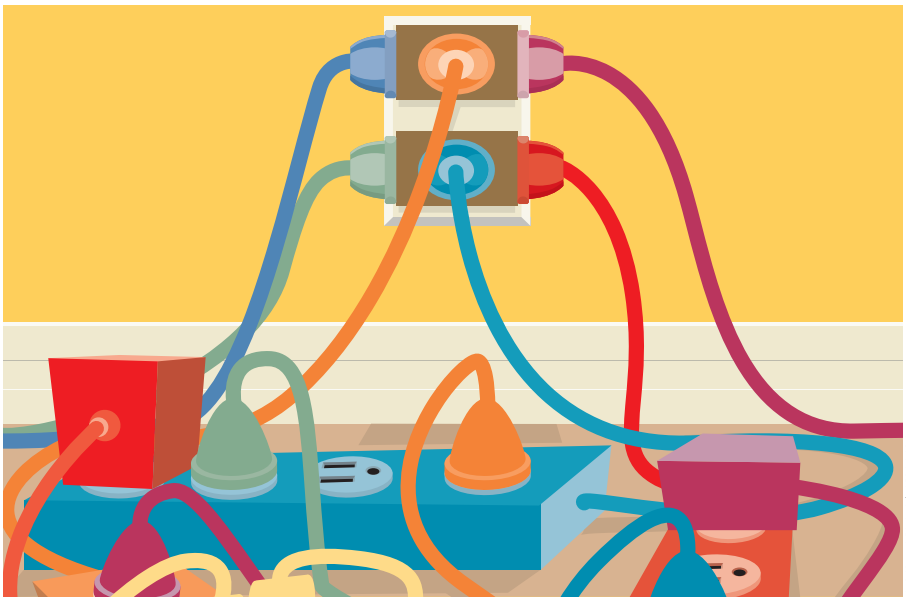

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Resolve To Save Energy in 2018

SAVING ENERGY—AND MONEY—SHOULD BE ON EVERYONE'S RESOLUTION LIST. HERE are 10 quick tips to help you get started in 2018.

1. Replace your lightbulbs. Most people have switched from traditional incandescent bulbs by now, but in case you're still on the fence: An $8 LED lasts up to 25 times longer and costs only $30 to operate over that period.

2. Beef up the insulation in your attic. Attics can be sources of heat loss in the winter and heat gain in the summer. Payback varies by region, but it's usually within two years, and your home's comfort will show a difference.

3. Install programmable thermostats. Up to 20 percent of the average home's yearly energy bill goes toward heating and cooling. Programmable thermostats save money by adjusting the temperature during unoccupied hours.

4. Maintain your HVAC system. Heating and cooling system equipment runs best when maintained. Change your filters on a regular basis and have equipment serviced annually to make sure it's running efficiently.

5. Unplug. Check around the house to see if devices are unnecessarily plugged in. Cellphones, chargers, TVs, entertainment systems, computers and appliances still draw power when not in use.

6. Weatherize. Weatherizing your home means sealing against airflow around doors, windows and places where pipes enter the home.

7. Conduct your own energy audit. Do you really need two refrigerators? Is there a fish tank with no fish? Is your house so hot in the winter that you need to wear a Hawaiian shirt? Walk around your house to check for—and eliminate—wasteful energy loads.

8. Replace your single-pane windows. Upgrading to more energy-efficient windows can help control temperature and air infiltration in your home. It can be costly, but payback can take just a few years.

9. Upgrade your appliances. Energy Star-rated appliances mean more energy efficiency and can save you hundreds of dollars over their life span.

10. Contact your electric cooperative for information about energy audits, efficiency rebates or other programs offered.

Tri-County Electric Cooperative

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IT PAYS TO STAY INFORMED!

Find your account number in pages 18–25 of *Texas Co-op Power*, and you will receive a $20 credit on your TCEC electric bill. Simply contact one of the offices listed above and make them aware of your discovery!

Sources of the Dreaded 'Vampire Loads'

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PERHAPS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH AN UNDESIRABLE ASPECT OF the electronic and internet-of-things revolution: vampire loads. Vampire loads come from devices that use electricity even when they appear to be off. The primary culprits are chargers, cable and satellite TV boxes, instant-on TVs and gaming systems. There are others, but these four represent the major offenders.

Let's look at how vampire loads occur and why they are approaching 10 percent of average household electricity use, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Chargers take 120 volts of power at the outlet and reduce it to the voltage required by a connected device, usually 5–12 volts. Obviously, when your device is charging, the charger is using electricity—but you might be surprised to learn that chargers still use small amounts of energy even when they're not connected to anything.

Cable and satellite TV boxes also consume energy when they appear to be inactive. Anytime the box's lights are on, it is using power. Like chargers, they use more when the television is on, but they are always working—even when the TV is off. This is especially true for those devices with a DVR function that records your favorite TV shows.

The instant-on television is another culprit. The intention of the instant-on feature is instant gratification for the viewer, meaning there's no waiting for the TV to turn on and warm up. Unfortunately, for that convenience, the TV must remain on standby at nearly full power, which can be a real energy drain.

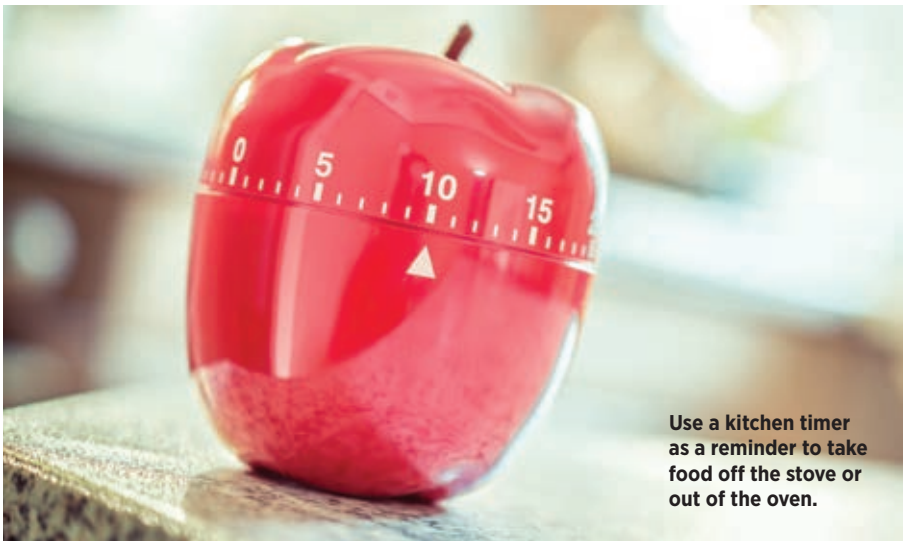
A typical gaming console can use as much energy as a refrigerator, even when it's not being used. Make sure to check the console settings and disable automatic updates, which are where the main energy drain comes from. Games on the console are frequently updated, and each update requires a lot of electricity.

So how does the average family combat these dreaded vampire loads? Garlands of garlic? Silver bullets?

Fortunately, none of the remedies of fable are necessary. You just need to change how you handle energy-sucking electronics. **Here are a few suggestions:**

- Unplug chargers when not in use.
- Invest in smart power strips. These look like normal power strips but have a twist: One of the outlets is the "master" that receives power all the time. The others are off. When the device connected to the master outlet turns on, the rest of the outlets receive power, too. Ingenious and perfect for entertainment setups. Plug the television into the master outlet, and when you turn it on, the cable or satellite box, speakers, streaming devices, etc., will turn on, too. These are also ideal for PCs and their peripherals.
- Disable the instant-on function on your TV. Turn off cable and satellite boxes that do not contain DVR functionality, or use a smart power strip.
- Disable automatic updates in gaming consoles and turn the consoles completely off when you finish using them.
- When replacing any device or appliance, look for an Energy Star-rated product. These energy-efficient items save you money in operating costs.

Vampire loads are a real problem that will only continue to grow as the digital age advances. But you can fight the vampires with vigilance and application of the recommendations above. Check with your co-op for additional suggestions and energy-saving advice.



Use a kitchen timer as a reminder to take food off the stove or out of the oven.

Cold Weather Safety

IN COLDER WEATHER, A RISE IN ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE USE INCREASES THE OCCUR-rence of electrical fires, electrocutions, carbon monoxide poisoning and other winter weather-related injuries. Keep in mind the following tips to stay safe.

Heating the House

Space heaters are a common way to keep warm, but they require caution and close attention for safe use. Read manufacturer's instructions and warning labels carefully. Inspect the cord for cracked plugs or loose connections. Don't let pets or children play by the unit, and turn it off when you're leaving the room or going to sleep.

Keep heaters on level, flat surfaces at least 3 feet away from anything flammable, including papers, clothing, bedding and rugs. Place heaters out of high-traffic areas and doorways where they could trip passersby. Plug a heater directly into a wall outlet with no other electrical devices, and always unplug and safely store it after use.

In the Bedroom

Electric blankets and heating pads often are used for supplemental heat. Look for charred or frayed spots on their surfaces, or cracks or frays in the electric cords. Never fold or tuck in an electric blanket and do not allow anything to rest on top of it—including other blankets or pets—when in use.

In the Kitchen

Cooking fires and electric shock also are common during winter months. Never cook if you're sleepy or have been drinking alcohol. Use a timer to remind you to check on food on the stove or in the oven. Double-check that oven burners and appliances are off once you are done cooking. Use outlets protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters for countertop appliances, especially near water.

In Case of Outage

Portable generators are used often after winter storm-related power outages. Be sure to locate your generator outside, away from windows and doors. Install carbon monoxide alarms on every level of your home and outside each sleeping area; test the alarms monthly; and replace batteries at least annually.

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Did You Know?

Persistent dirt lines on floors likely can be blamed on air leaks. Dirt travels in moisture, which travels in heat, which seeks cold. Where lines exist around the joints between walls and floors, check for drafts, then seal the leaks.

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Power Tip

Turn off outdoor lighting during daylight hours when it's not needed. If you can, replace existing outdoor lights with solar-powered options for even greater savings.

Do-It-Yourself Energy Checkup

The first step toward greater comfort and lower costs

THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR IS A PERFECT TIME TO TAKE STOCK of your home's energy efficiency and take the steps needed to improve it. Americans can save 5–30 percent of annual energy costs simply by conducting energy checkups in their homes, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The goal of an energy checkup is to save money without sacrificing comfort. Conducting a basic energy checkup is a simple process that can lead to savings on monthly energy bills and increase in-home comfort levels.

What You Need

Make sure you have:

☐ Time to conduct a room-by-room walk-through of your home
☐ Pen and paper to note problem areas

Begin Inside

Close:

☐ All doors
☐ All windows
☐ All fireplace flues

Turn off:

☐ Furnace
☐ Water heater
☐ Space heaters

Dampen your hand and place it near areas where drafts might occur. Air passing through even small openings will feel cool against your skin.

Find Hidden Leaks

Check for drafts along:

☐ Baseboards
☐ Floor covering edges
☐ Bay windows jutting out from the house
☐ Partition walls between garage and basement
☐ Exterior wall penetrations for fans, electric lines, cables, condensate lines, etc.
☐ Areas where walls or ceilings meet
☐ Electrical outlets
☐ Switch plates
☐ Window frames
☐ Doors
☐ Bath and kitchen exhaust fans
☐ Shower/tub drain lines
☐ Attic hatches
☐ Wall- or window-mounted air conditioners
☐ Fireplace dampers and inserts
☐ Pipes
☐ Concrete or block foundations in basements and crawl spaces

In the attic, around:

☐ Pipes
☐ Ductwork
☐ Hatches
☐ Chimneys

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If possible, look behind insulation for vapor-barrier material such as:

☐ Tar paper
☐ Plastic
☐ Kraft paper attached to fiberglass batts

Make sure:

☐ Insulation is not blocking attic vents
☐ Attic floors are covered with adequate insulation

In the basement, check HVAC equipment for signs of air leaks, including:

☐ Dirt accumulation in ducts and at duct seams
☐ Drafts around pipes and vents

In the crawl space, you should have:

☐ A minimum 6-millimeter plastic vapor barrier
☐ Foundation insulation

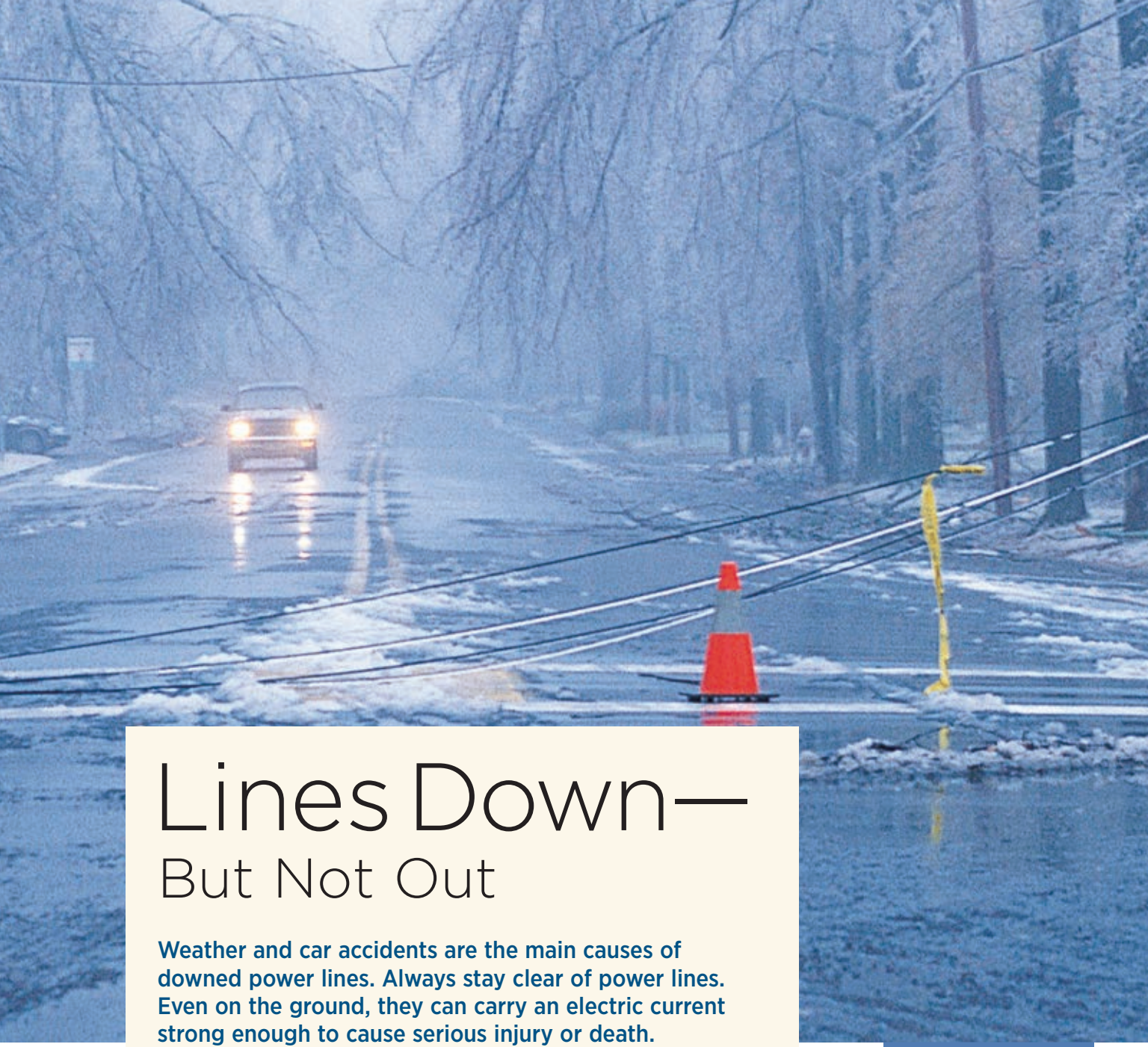
Locate Outdoor Draft Sources

Inspect all areas where building materials meet, such as:

☐ Where siding, brick or block meet foundations
☐ All exterior corners
☐ Where siding and chimneys meet

Note any cracks or gaps in these areas, so you can come back later to seal them.

Now that you've determined the problem areas in your home, take a trip to the hardware store to gather the supplies you need to address them or contact a professional to make the improvements.



Lines Down—
But Not Out

Weather and car accidents are the main causes of downed power lines. Always stay clear of power lines. Even on the ground, they can carry an electric current strong enough to cause serious injury or death.

Here are some rules to follow:

- **If you see a downed power line, move away from the line and anything touching it.**
- **The proper way to move away from the line is to shuffle away with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times to minimize the chance of presenting a human path for electric current.**
- **If someone is in direct or indirect contact with the downed line, do not touch the person. Call 911 instead.**
- **Don't try to move a downed power line or anything in contact with the line by using another object such as a broom or stick.**
- **Don't drive over downed power lines.**
- **If you are in your car and it is in contact with a downed line, stay in your car unless it is on fire. Honk your horn for help but tell others to stay away from your vehicle. Call 911 if you have a cellphone or ask passersby to do it.**

Tri-County Electric Cooperative encourages you to always practice safety.