

History Helps Co-ops Stand Strong



MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER DARRYL SCHRIVER

THIS MONTH, I FOUND SOME INSIGHT TO SHARE FROM CO-OP HISTORIAN Ted Case, who is the executive director of the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association. His books, *Power Plays* and *Poles, Wires and War*, describe the effect electric co-ops have had on national policy since the 1930s. Case recently talked with Paul Wesslund from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association about what the history of electric co-ops means for members.

Q: Has researching these books changed your view of electric co-ops?

Case: I have a greater appreciation. The core values of what co-ops do are the same as in 1936 when the Rural Electrification Act became law.

Q: What are those values?

Case: I think of one particular co-op: It has several thousand people who come to the office to pay their bills. They don't need to do that—it's a lot easier to just toss the bill in the mail or pay online. But they go in because the co-op has this value beyond just electric service. It really is the center of everything in the town and the economic driver. The co-op is not just a power company; it's the center of their world.

Q: Does that kind of relationship really apply in this increasingly high-tech world in a high-tech industry?

Case: As I travel the country, I'm blown away by the technical acumen and the vision and the strategic abilities of co-op leaders to see into the future. Some electric co-ops are considering providing broadband internet connections at a time when nobody else will do it.

Q: Can a co-op be successful providing technologies as different as electricity and broadband?

Case: Co-ops will embrace new technologies when that's what their members want. Co-ops have never strayed from that business model that listens and responds to their members, their customers, their owners. 800820684

Q: How does that business model relate to the basic mission of keeping electricity reliable and affordable?

Case: Co-ops are very competitive, in rates, service and reliability. It comes back to that local connection. Members know the folks who work at the co-op and the directors. There's terrific customer service getting the lights back on after an outage.

Q: One characteristic of electric co-ops is their nonprofit nature. How does that affect the members?

Case: A lot. Increasingly, institutions have fallen from grace because everybody believes there's this profit motive that's just out to milk you, and there's such a lack of trust in a lot of the large institutions. Being a nonprofit is an attractive feature that means decisions are based on the best interests of the co-op and the consumer.

Q: So what should members know about their electric co-op?

Case: That they have the ability to influence their co-op more than they ever imagined. Directors are really interested in hearing from folks. When somebody at a co-op annual meeting has a point to make, the board takes it seriously. The co-op's management takes it seriously. That's the value.



Protect Your Electronics

CHANCES ARE GOOD THAT YOU HAVE AN electronic item or two in your house that you didn't have last year. Are you doing all you can to protect your expensive equipment from power surge damage?

A power surge in a home full of large home appliances and electronics isn't unusual. Any device with an on-off switch can cause a surge, according to the National Electrical Manufacturers Association. 800769126

That impressive new entertainment system or the TV that takes up a whole wall in your family room won't be easy to replace if something goes wrong. Your best bet is to protect that equipment by connecting it to surge protection.

You can buy individual surge protectors for each piece of equipment, or you can invest in a whole-house surge protector. The latter device typically comes with a warranty that covers up to \$50,000 worth of damage if your appliances or electronic devices fail because of a surge.

Whole-house surge protectors typically are wired to the electric service box and located nearby to protect all the appliances and electrical systems in a home. They typically cost \$200-\$500 to add to your home's electrical system—often less than the cost of replacing a huge TV or your computer equipment.

Energy Efficiency Is Good for Everyone

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR CREATIVE WAYS TO MAKE ENDS MEET IN YOUR MONTHLY

budget? Many budget-savvy consumers explore ways to stretch every dollar, from clipping coupons and passing down clothes to planning meals around what's on sale at the grocery store.

One potential savings hot spot is your electric bill. A few home improvements and simple changes in behavior can add up to big savings over the long run.

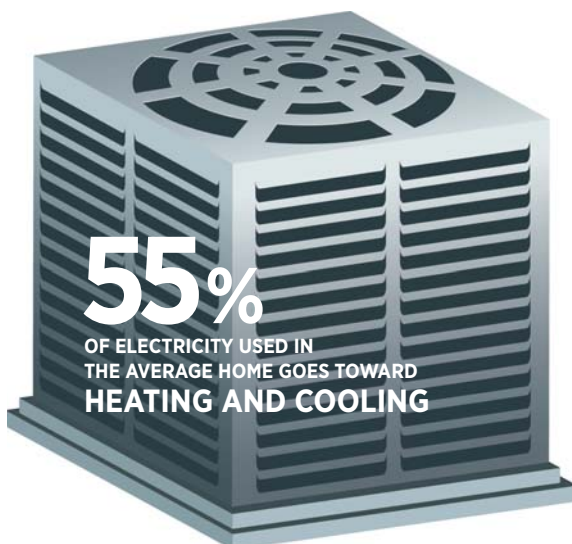
Your local home improvement store offers inexpensive products that can make your residence more efficient. A few tubes of latex or silicone caulk for your windows help keep conditioned air in and outside air out. Installing a blanket on your water heater will help it operate more efficiently. And insulating hot water pipes can cut water heating costs by 4 percent.

Changes in your daily routine also can translate into electric bill savings. Approximately 55 percent of the electricity used in the average home goes toward heating and cooling. The ideal winter setting for your thermostat is 68 degrees. Rather than turning up the heat on a cold day, adding a layer of clothing will keep you comfy while shaving power costs. In summer, set the thermostat at 78 degrees and dress in light clothing.

Seeking even bigger savings? Check your home's insulation. According to energystar.gov, the insulation in your home's attic should cover joists and be evenly distributed. It is also important to use insulation with the appropriate R-value for your region. In Texas, an R-value of 30–60 is recommended. The colder the climate, the higher the R-value you will need to maximize savings.

At energystar.gov, you'll find a variety of tools and tips to help maximize your home's energy efficiency. 46533001

Tri-County Electric Cooperative is a not-for-profit electric power provider. That means our mission is to provide you with the electricity you need to improve your quality of life—not turn a profit for a shareholder. An important part of that mission entails empowering you to manage your electricity use. We want you to have more affordable power bills. It's good for everyone.



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

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Warning Signs of an Electrical Malfunction

WHEN ELECTRIC SERVICE WORKS PROPERLY, WE NEVER NOTICE IT. MOST OF THE TIME, we flip a switch, the lights go on and all is right with the world. It's only when things go wrong that we start paying attention. Here are five warning signs that can indicate an electrical malfunction. 8003175201

1. Flickering lights. If an electrical circuit in your house is overloaded, it could cause the lights to dim or flicker. This usually happens when you have too many energy-intensive appliances or fixtures wired to the same circuit. For example, your lights may flicker when your washing machine is running if the two are on the same circuit. The solution: Ask a licensed electrician to move the lights to a different circuit or install a dedicated line for the washing machine.

2. Suspicious odors. It's not unusual for a new appliance to smell a little bit bad the first time or two you use it. But if outlets, the breaker box or other appliances emit a foul odor, that could signal a problem with the wiring. Switch off and unplug anything that doesn't smell right, and call an electrician.

3. Sparks. An appliance that sends off a spark could be damaged. Sparks from a breaker panel or fuse box could signal something more serious and should be inspected by a qualified electrician as soon as possible.

4. Tripped breakers. A breaker tripping more often than occasionally isn't normal, and it's probably not safe. Circuit breakers that trip signal an overloaded circuit.

If the same appliance, such as a hair dryer or vacuum cleaner, trips the circuit every time, chances are that the appliance is the culprit. But if the same outlet trips the circuit no matter what you plug into it, it's likely an overload on the system. This is a job for a professional.

5. A buzz. Electric appliances should not buzz. They shouldn't make any sounds. If they do, you might have a problem with an outlet or some wiring. An electrician can fix this.

Laundry Day Savings

TO SAVE MONEY IN THE LAUNDRY ROOM, use cold water and less water overall.

Unless the stains on your clothes are oil-based, warm or cool water in your washing machine will do just as good a job of removing them as hot water, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Here are some ways to clean your clothes without cleaning out your bank account:

- ▶ Wash clothes in cold water and use cold-water detergents.

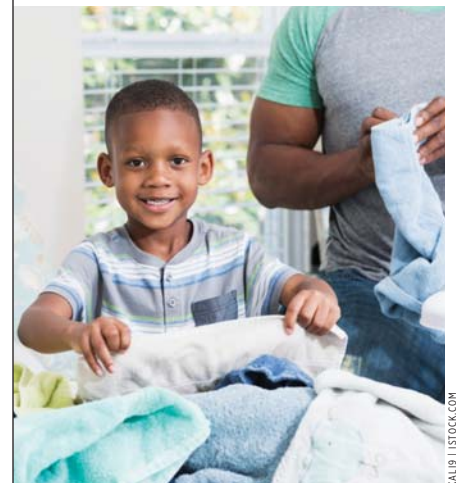
- ▶ Wash and dry full loads only. If you must run the washer before it's full, adjust the water level so the whole machine doesn't fill up unnecessarily.

- ▶ Towels and heavy cotton items like jeans tend to take longer to dry than lightweight clothing. Don't dry the two types together. 800824488

- ▶ Let the dryer decide how long your clothes need to tumble. Newer models have moisture sensors and automatically stop the cycle when clothes are dry.

- ▶ Clean the dryer's lint screen after each load. Letting the lint build up creates a fire hazard.

- ▶ If you have a high-efficiency washer, use detergents labeled "HE." The American Cleaning Institute says these low-sudsing detergents clean clothes well in machines that use less water.



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Celebrate National Ag Day

Tip your hat to farmers and ranchers

ALTHOUGH IT SEEMS AS IF SPRING HAS BEEN IN WEST Texas for several weeks already, the season officially begins Tuesday, March 20, on the vernal equinox. According to the Farmer's Almanac, the equinox falls on March 19 or 20 every year, marking spring's beginning in the northern hemisphere.

Since the 1960s, National Ag Day has been celebrated on the first day of spring. Ag Day, celebrated during Ag Week, March 18–24 this year, was established to honor farmers and ranchers for their hard work and dedication to providing safe, abundant and affordable products, a strong economy, sources of renewable energy and a broad selection of job opportunities.

Agriculture Puts Dinner on the Table

In much the same way that we know electricity doesn't "just show up" ready to use at our homes, we also know that food and fabrics don't just arrive at the store—or magically appear on our dinner tables or in our closets. There's an entire industry dedicated to providing plentiful, safe food for consumption, as well as a range of clothing, textiles and garments.

Agriculture is responsible for providing the necessities of life—food, clothing and shelter—to every human on the planet. Yet this vitally important system is little understood among those outside the industry, much like electricity distribution.

Just a few generations ago, most people were connected to the agricultural way of life, or at least had friends or relatives involved with farming. Today, that's no longer the case. Few people now understand what it really takes to put dinner on their tables each night. 37701001

This is particularly the case in our schools, where students might be exposed to agriculture only if they enroll in related vocational training. And just like the number of electric cooperative linemen, the number of farmers is dropping in the United States. By building awareness through National Ag Day and other initiatives, the Agriculture Council of America is encouraging young people to consider career opportunities in agriculture.

An Important American Export

Most people are similarly unaware of the contribution that U.S. ag and farmers make to the national and global economies. Each American farmer feeds more than 144 people annually, on average, according to the ACA—a dramatic increase from 25 people in the 1960s.



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Across the nation in 2015, more than 167,000 farms produced locally edible food and sold it through direct marketing practices, resulting in \$8.7 billion in revenue, according to a survey conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Most of those sales, which include fresh and value-added foods, such as meat and cheese, were through farmers markets and on-farm stores.

About 304,000 people were involved in making decisions for the U.S. farms that marketed food for human consumption directly in 2015. Thirty-eight percent of those decision-makers were women.

Texas ranked sixth among all states, with \$357 million in direct farm sales of edible commodities. This revenue was generated by 11,078 Texas agricultural operations in 2015. Value-added food products accounted for about one-third of the \$357 million.

Farms and ranches are big business in Texas and across the country—and it's obvious why. An industry so vital to human lives and livelihoods deserves a day of recognition. On National Ag Day, March 20, thank a farmer! 800796167



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The Dangers of DIY

EACH YEAR, THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES ARE CRITICALLY INJURED and electrocuted as a result of electrical fires and incidents in their own homes.

More homeowners than ever before are tackling do-it-yourself projects. However, most do not have the training or experience needed to safely perform home electrical work, increasing the risk of injuries. Working with electricity requires thorough planning and extreme care, and cutting corners can prove a costly mistake.

Tri-County Electric Cooperative strongly recommends hiring a qualified, licensed electrician to perform any electrical work in your home. **However, if you do decide to do it yourself, consider the following important safety tips before undertaking any home electrical project:**

- ▶ Always turn off the power to the circuit that you plan to work on by switching off the circuit breaker in the main service panel.
 - ▶ Take time to learn about your home electrical system so that you can safely navigate and maintain it.
 - ▶ Never attempt a project that is beyond your skill level. Knowing when to call a professional may help prevent electrical fires, injuries and fatalities.
 - ▶ Be sure to unplug any lamp or appliance before working on it.
 - ▶ Test wires before you touch them to make sure that the power has been turned off.
 - ▶ Never touch metal pipes when performing a do-it-yourself electrical project.
- Many do-it-yourself projects involve the use of power tools. Using power tools safely requires skilled instruction and training. The most common scenario for power tool-related electrocutions occurs when the equipment comes in contact with live electrical wires while it is being used. **Stay safe by following these tips:**
- ▶ Use ground-fault circuit interrupters with every power tool to protect against electric shocks.
 - ▶ Do not use power tools with an extension cord that exceeds 100 feet in length.
 - ▶ Never use power tools near live electrical wires or water pipes.
 - ▶ Use extreme caution when cutting or drilling into walls where electrical wires or water pipes could be accidentally touched or penetrated.
 - ▶ When working with electricity, use tools with insulated grips.



HAPPY EASTER!
APRIL 1

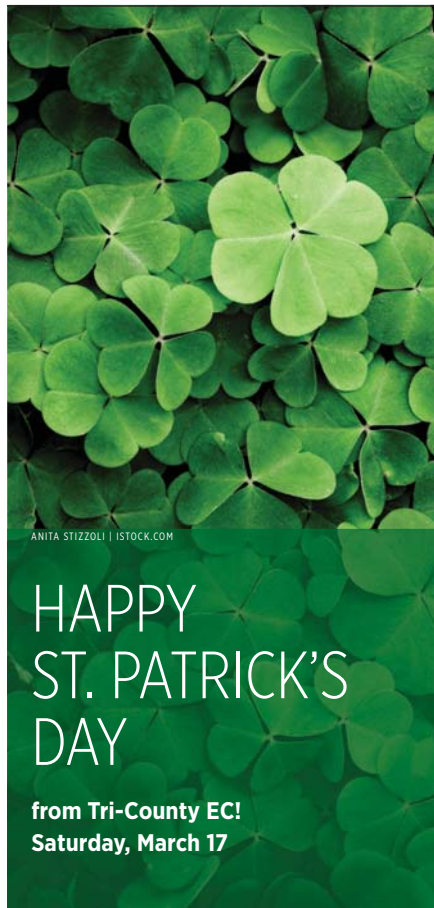
The offices of Tri-County EC will be closed March 30 in observance of Good Friday.



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DAYLIGHT
SAVING TIME

begins at 2 a.m., Sunday, March 11. Remember to “spring forward” by setting all clocks an hour ahead.



Don't Go Out on a Limb

Your safety is a top priority at your electric co-op. And it's even more important when it comes to our kids. They don't always know—or remember—what can be dangerous, so it's up to all of us to watch out for their safety.

Safety rules for power lines:

- ▶ Don't plant trees or install tall playground equipment under or near power lines.
- ▶ Don't build treehouses in trees near electric lines.
- ▶ Don't allow children to climb trees growing near electric lines.
- ▶ Teach your children to always look up to check for power lines before climbing trees or any tall objects.
- ▶ Keep children away from ladders, poles or work equipment that may be near power lines.

And the No. 1 safety rule for everyone to remember is this: Don't touch a power line or anything that's touching a power line. No one can tell simply by looking at a line whether it is energized or not, and contact with a power line can be deadly. Remember, electricity always seeks the easiest path to reach the ground, and, unfortunately, human beings are good conductors of electricity. Look up and live!