



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

# West Central *Electric News*

March 2011



West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc. ~ Serving our members' needs since 1939

## BLIZZARD!

### Outages minimal, crew stuck

Only one outage affecting 22 members in the Concordia area was reported as a result of the blizzard that hit the Midwest Feb. 1, however West Central Electric crews faced a mound of obstacles in their attempt to get power restored.

"We tried to get to them, but the drifts were just too much," Operations Manager Mark Zeikle said. "We got two trucks stuck trying to get to them, and had to turn around."

Zeikle said contact was made with

all members affected to notify them of the situation, and to let them know that crews would be there to restore the power as soon as they could reach the area. By 7:30 a.m., crews were back on the road trying to make their way to those members.

"We made contact with the county to get equipment to clear a path in front of us so we could get to them," Zeikle said.

Despite the unusual conditions, outages across the state were few.



**(Left photo)** The back entrance of the cooperative's headquarters in Higginsville was inaccessible when employees arrived early Feb. 2. **(Top photo)** Snow drifts in front made entering the building through the front doors impossible.

**Headquarters:**  
7867 S. Highway 13, P.O. Box 452  
Higginsville, MO 64037  
1-660-584-2131 or 1-800-491-3803

**District office:**  
506 N. Broadway  
Oak Grove, MO 64075  
1-816-625-8211

**Website:**  
www.WestCentralElectric.coop

**24-Hour Number:**  
1-800-491-3803

**General Manager:**  
Mike Gray

**Board of Directors:**  
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**Capital Credits checks must be cashed within six months of issue**

Capital Credits checks issued to members must be cashed within six months of the issue date to remain valid, according to WCE Office Manager Sandy Starke.

“Banks will return the checks after six months because they are void,” Starke said. Members who have old capital credit checks that have not been cashed may

return them to the cooperative to have a new check issued. Mail checks to: West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc., c/o Sandy Starke, P.O. Box 452, Higginsville, MO 64037.

**5 ways to spring into energy efficiency...**

Spring marks a perfect time of year to make your home more energy efficient. Here are five quick tips that will save both energy and money:

**1. Seal cracks and gaps around your home**

As you put away your storm windows consider adding weather stripping around leaky doors and caulking around window frames. TogetherWeSave.com, a web site sponsored by Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives, the branding program of the nation’s not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric co-ops, shows how easy it is to use a caulking gun to seal up leaks around vents, duct work, and windows. A typical West Central Electric Cooperative member can save more than \$200 annually by taking this simple step.

**2. Change filters regularly**

Change furnace and air conditioner filters monthly. Dirty filters restrict air flow and reduce the overall efficiency of your heating and cooling system by making it work harder on hot summer days.

**3. Clean the refrigerator inside and out**

Now’s a good time to not only throw out that leftover fruitcake from the holidays but check the temperature settings on your refrigerator. Ideally, a refrigerator’s temperature should be between 37 and 40 degrees for maximum operating efficiency. When it’s time to replace that old refrigerator, be sure to buy one that’s ENERGY STAR rated. These energy-efficient appliances can

save WCE members as much as \$100 a year based on calculations from the TogetherWeSave.com

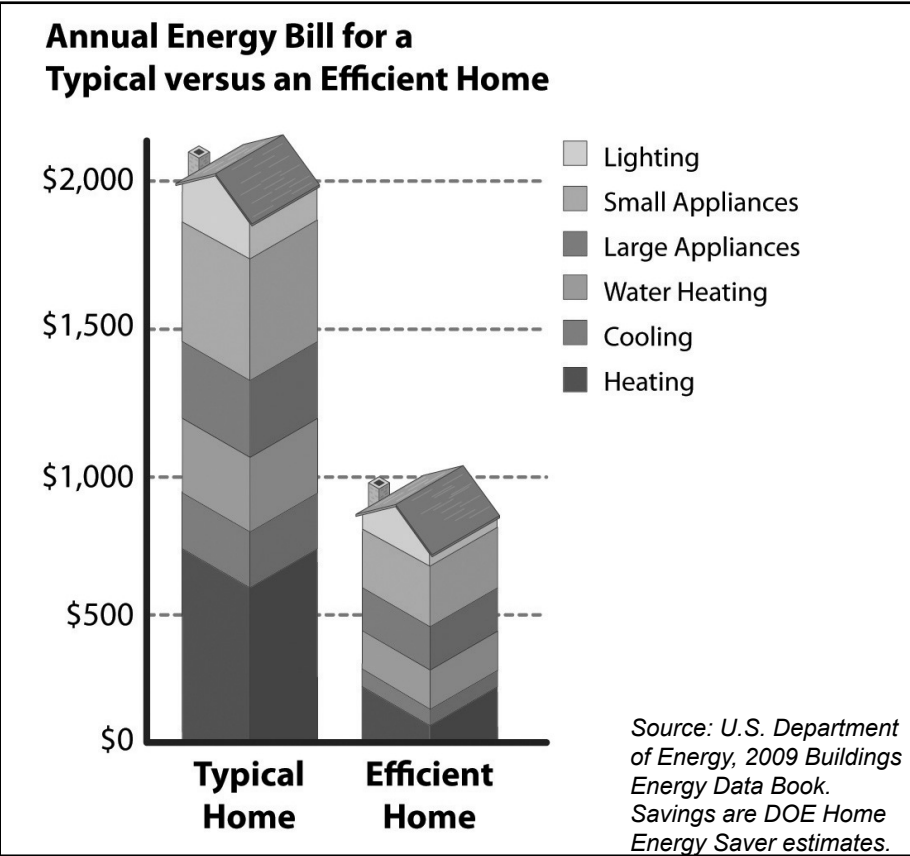
**4. Think sun block**

TogetherWeSave.com points out that by pulling down the shades on your windows this spring and summer, you could save about \$35 a year. Your local hardware store likely carries lots of inexpensive window coverings. Best of all, by blocking the sun, your house will stay cool and comfortable year-round.

**5. Enjoy spring breezes**

Use a clothesline during warmer months and let sunlight and breezes dry clothes naturally. This will reduce your electric bill by not running a dryer, and add a genuine clean scent to your family’s laundry.

You can learn more about ways to lower your monthly energy bill by visiting TogetherWeSave.com or by calling the energy experts at West Central Electric Cooperative at 800-491-3803 or 660-584-2131.



**Efficiency tax credits drop, but they don’t disappear**

**Benefit reverts to \$500 lifetime cap for upgrades**

Energy efficiency improvements are great for lowering electric bills. But sometimes the up-front cost can be a drawback.

Since 2005, Congress has enacted a series of tax breaks for consumers who take steps to make their homes more energy efficient. In December, the outgoing 111th Congress approved extending some popular efficiency tax credits through Dec. 31, 2011, although at greatly reduced levels.

“Because this is a federal program, and frequently changes, we advise members to check with their tax person before making decisions on purchasing equipment,” said WCE Member Services Manager Steve Moore.

The federal Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010 reduces the total lifetime credit that can be claimed on energy efficiency improvements made between 2006 and 2011 (excluding 2008, when no credit was available) from \$1,500 to \$500. It also lowers the percentage of efficiency upgrade costs consumers can recover, from 30 percent in 2009-2010 to 10 percent in 2011.

“Basically, energy efficiency tax credits revert to levels approved for 2006 and 2007, before the federal stimulus bill pumped up the program,” said Moore. “There’s also a lifetime cap of \$500 for any work that’s done. But if you haven’t applied for an energy efficiency tax credit before, this extension gives you a chance to recoup some of the costs needed to make your home more efficient.”

There are also maximum allowances for different upgrades. For installing more efficient windows, the tax credit is limited to \$200, and there’s a \$300 cap for “any item

**Continued on page 3**

# Efficiency tax credits drop, but don't disappear

**From page 2**  
of energy-efficient building property.”  
Other restrictions include:

- Furnaces (\$150): Must have at least 95 percent (up from 90 percent) annual fuel utilization efficiency (AFUE). Oil furnaces and boilers were returned to the single furnace category at 95 percent AFUE.
- Advanced main air circulating fan (\$50): Must utilize less than 2 percent of a furnace’s total energy consumption.
- Central air conditioner (\$300): Must have a seasonal energy efficiency ratio (SEER) of at least 16 and an energy efficiency rating (EER) of at least 13.
- Air-source heat pump (\$300): Must have at least a heating seasonal performance factor (HSPF) of 9, SEER of 16, and EER of 13.
- Biomass fuel stove (\$300): Must have a thermal efficiency rating of at least 75

percent  
**Builders and Manufacturers Benefit, Too**  
The bill reinstates a credit of up to \$2,000 for builders (during 2010 and 2011) of energy-efficient residences that use no more than half the energy of a 2003 national model energy code home (the credit had expired in 2009). In addition, U.S.-based manufacturers of clothes washers, dishwashers, and refrigerators will receive credits ranging from \$25-\$200 for efficient appliance models produced in America during 2008, 2009, and 2010.  
“While consumers cannot take these types of credits directly, these units may be promoted by manufacturers, or by state or utility efficiency programs, during the next two years,” notes the Tax Incentives Assistance Project. The group operates a website, [energytaxincentives.org](http://energytaxincentives.org), devoted to tracking efficiency incentives.

**Renewable Tax Credits Remain Active**  
Renewable energy tax credits created by the federal stimulus bill don’t expire until Dec. 31, 2016. These credits cover 30 percent of the cost of materials and installation for residential solar panels, solar water heaters, small wind turbines, and geothermal heat pumps. Details are available at [energystar.gov/taxcredits](http://energystar.gov/taxcredits).  
**Claiming Tax Credits**  
Tax credits are beneficial because they directly reduce, dollar for dollar, any taxes you owe. Be sure to keep your receipts and your Manufacturer’s Certification Statement (a signed statement from the manufacturer certifying that the product or component qualifies for the tax credit) for your records. Then claim the credit on your taxes using IRS

Form 5695.  
**Looking for Help?**  
Some electric cooperatives and state government offices offer additional subsidies or rebates to consumers who make their homes more energy efficient. [list any pertinent co-op programs]. For a list of federal, state, and local energy efficiency rebates and tax credits, visit the Database for State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, at [www.dsireusa.org](http://www.dsireusa.org).

*Megan McKoy-Noe, CCC, writes on consumer and cooperative affairs 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.*

## Doug Rye Says... Comfort issues? Here’s what to do:



No, it can’t be. It can’t possibly be time for the March column. It seems like I just wrote one for 2010 a few weeks ago. Unless you are a teenager, you know exactly what I am talking about. Well, time really flies when you are having fun. Of course, the frog says that time is really fun when you are having flies. Please smile.  
As I think of a new year, I also think of the past. I just love it when you tell me that you were helped by something that you read in this column. I just got a call a while ago from a fellow who told me that he had just finished reading the last column and wanted to order the attic radiant barrier so that he could install it before his attic gets hot. He is a smart fellow. I hope to continue helping you for a long time, so write my phone number down — 501-653-7931 — and just file it under “energy nut” and continue reading these columns.  
I have received a lot of calls lately from folks with comfort problems in their homes. Some have older houses, and others have fairly new ones. It really doesn’t matter because if you are not comfortable, you are not happy. I can tell you that the subject of comfort has changed over the years. My first bedroom as a youngster was 6 feet by 9 feet. I had my own bunk bed, a place for

my electric train, and I didn’t have to share it with three older sisters.  
The problem was that I had to go through their room to get to my room. And my room had no source of heat whatsoever, except what seeped into my room through the curtain (door) from the big non-vented gas heater in the girls’ room, and they didn’t have to share the heat with me. On many cold mornings, I would draw pictures in the frost on the window before I would jump out of bed and run through their bedroom to get to the non-vented gas heater in the living room. Think of it. My room was freezing; their room was smothering hot; the temperatures of the other rooms were anybody’s guess, and basically we were all thankful and happy just to have a house with heat.  
What a difference a few years can make. Now we expect every room in our house to be the same comfortable temperature. I know of a case this past year where the homeowner threatened to file suit against the builder of his new house because upstairs was always a few degrees hotter than downstairs in the summer. We have proven many thousands of times that there is no excuse for a new house not to have affordable comfort. It is not always possible that every room will have the exact

same temperature 24/7, but it can be very close. All you have to do is build it like the electric cooperatives, and I, have been teaching you to do for the last 20 years. It is easy and affordable, and IT WORKS EVERY SINGLE TIME. Just ask us for help.  
I recently received a call from a lady in Illinois who said that she and her family had been in their new house for seven months and the house was cold. I said, “I assume that you meant cold in the winter.” She said, “Yes, it was just great in the summer.” I said, “You should have built the house to my standards.” She replied, “We did.” My heart skipped a beat and I asked her every question I could think of. Did you caulk; did you use cellulose; did you use good windows, etc.? And yes, they even installed geothermal.  
I couldn’t imagine what the problem might be, so I asked the age-old question. “What is the thermostat setting right now?” Her answer was 60 degrees. I told her to turn it up to 75 degrees. She said that if she did, her husband would come through and turn it back down to 60 degrees. I told her to go whack her husband upside the head and tell him who was boss, and if that didn’t work, stop cooking his meals. She laughed and said that might work.

This is a true story, and it has what appears to be an easy solution. Some problems don’t have such easy solutions, but I am confident I can help all of you. See you next month when I will give you more ways to make your house more comfortable.  
*Note: Doug Rye, a licensed architect 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](http://www.ecark.org).*

**Listen to Doug Rye’s “Home Remedies” show Saturday mornings from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on KKKX Radio, 105.7 FM. or online at 9 a.m. Saturday mornings at [www.1037thebuzz.com](http://www.1037thebuzz.com)**

Planting trees or putting up a fence this spring?

*Make sure to call before you dig.*

# Look inside when you ask why your bill is so high

As this winter draws to a close, many members are stunned at how much electricity they used. Winter tends to be the season that causes electric bills to peak. That’s because no matter what your heating source is, electricity is there powering the blower. Even unusually mild winters can cause the meter to turn more than usual as the furnace works to cut the chill.

### New gadgets to blame?

Another growing source of high bills is a long list of new electronic gadgets, many of them added to the home after Christmas. Virtually any new gadget on the market today requires electricity, and some of these are not very energy efficient.

If your new electronic appliance comes with a brick-shaped box on the power cord, it may be using electricity around the clock. Inside the brick is a transformer that changes the voltage to match the appliance’s needs. Even when the appliance is turned off, the transformer is using electricity.

The best way to cut this phantom energy use is to connect the appliance to a surge suppressor that can be switched off. When you are through using the device, just flip the switch and end the energy drain.

### Infiltration, infiltration, infiltration!

Of course the No. 1 cause of high bills remains air infiltration. Are your windows drafty? Do your doors lack weather stripping? Maybe the kids aren’t good at getting the door shut.

If your home has these problems, invest in solutions like weather-stripping kits available at most hardware stores. They will help you save energy dollars year-round. Other low-cost ways to save include hanging and using insulated drapes, especially on north-facing windows. Close all the drapes when the sun sets during wintertime. Reverse the trend as it warms up to keep the sun’s rays away.

### Plant for energy conservation

Now that spring is approaching, it’s a good time to consider planting for energy conservation. Many books have been written on this subject and University of Missouri Extension offers guidelines for proper planting. If you have an Internet connection you can find these tips at <http://muextension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides/hort/g06910.htm>.

The concept is simple, however. Plant evergreen trees along north and west sides of your home for windbreaks. Plant

shade trees on the south and east sides so that your home is shaded in summer. In the wintertime these trees will lose their leaves and let sunlight through to warm the house.

Shrubs also can be planted close to foundations to provide a block from the wind and cold.

### Don’t blame the meter

When your bills are higher than your budget, it’s easy to blame the meter. After all, it’s the device that records what is used. So it must be the culprit, right?

In reality, the meter is rarely, if ever, to blame for high bills. Blaming the meter is like blaming the cash register when your grocery bill adds up. Your electric meter is a highly calibrated and accurate device. In the few cases where meters are found to be defective, it is to the member’s advantage. That’s because mechanical devices, like people, tend to slow down over time as friction takes its toll.

### Your neighbor is not a good resource

Another temptation when bills are high is to ask a neighbor about their electric bills. If theirs is lower then yours must be wrong, right? Although at first glance it would seem two houses in the same

area would share similar bills, nothing could be further from the truth.

No two homes will share the same combination of factors like insulation, wiring, appliances, heating and air conditioning and other variables that determine energy use. Added to this is the fact that one family may be frugal, wearing heavy sweaters in the winter instead of raising the thermostat when it’s cold.

Family A may have no kids, always turns the lights off when leaving the room, takes short showers and unplugs their TV when it isn’t in use. They do most of their cooking in the microwave and have the smallest refrigerator made.

Family B, on the other hand, has three teenagers and a new baby, stays up late watching TV, keeps their computer on 24 hours a day, doesn’t close the blinds and forgets to turn off the lights. They do a lot of baking, keep the thermostat at 72 degrees in the winter and 65 in the summer.

So don’t compare bills with your neighbors and expect them to be the same. Instead, look inside your walls and see what can be done to cut costs. The answer may be just a light switch away. Just a few changes in your household habits can add up to hundreds of dollars over a year’s time.

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