

HCEC Cares, Ownership Matters, Communities Make a Difference



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER KATHI CALVERT

STUDIES SHOW THAT IN COMMUNITIES where the majority of residents own their homes, people are more successful academically, are more physically fit and have a stronger sense of community. Although owning a home might not be possible or desirable for everyone, ownership does matter. We treat things we own with greater care.

Chances are that you probably don't often think about your ownership role with Houston County Electric Cooperative, but every member of HCEC can take pride in



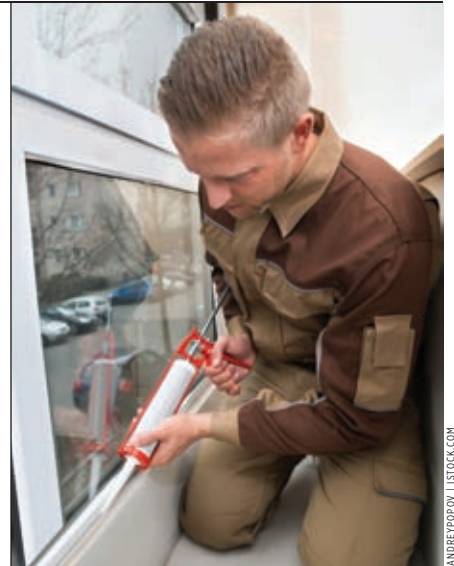
Cooperatives work to build strong communities and find local solutions that keep money and talent close to home.

owning their co-op. It might seem easy to take electricity for granted, but HCEC employees and directors work 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to make sure that you, the member-owners of the co-op, have reliable and affordable electricity.

Our leaders of locally based cooperatives believe that these special bonds and obligations are integral parts of the community. We know we can't sell electricity to a business that has closed its doors, or to people who have left the community because there are not enough opportunities. We know many of our communities have been hit hard by low oil and gas prices. Oil service and support industries in our area have been forced to downsize or close operations. Mining operations are being closed in East Texas due to mounting regulations. It is a challenging time for us. Electricity is a critical need, but it takes more than poles, wires and kilowatt-hours to make a community.

We are owners of our co-op, and we are owners of our community. Our community is resilient and strong. Think about how much greater it can be when we work cooperatively to tackle our challenges. If we consistently act like owners, we will put even more care and attention into our community, and we will look locally for solutions. Finding local solutions can help keep money—and people—right here in our community.

We all have a role to play as fellow owners. As your local electric cooperative, we promise to do our part for the community. If you have thoughts about how we can do a better job, please contact us at (936) 544-5641. You are the owners of HCEC, and we welcome your active participation.



Apply a high-quality caulk to seal any gaps between window frames and siding.

Weatherproof Your House To Stay Warm

WEATHERPROOFING is an inexpensive way to save money on energy bills during winter.

Even the tiniest gaps around windows, doors, light fixtures, electrical outlets and air ducts can slowly let your home's heated air escape to the outdoors. That can add up to substantial heat loss.

Here's how to avoid leaks:

Caulk throughout the house, wherever walls meet floors or door frames, and between the outside of window frames and the siding. Choose caulk designed for the surface you're caulking, and try a high-quality caulk, which will last longer.

Apply weatherstripping to all exterior doors and windows. Weatherstripping is a thin piece of material that seals the gap between where the door or window meets the jamb. Self-sticking foam pieces are quick and easy to apply.

Replace worn door sweeps on exterior doors to help prevent heat loss under the door.

Seal windows with thin plastic sheets using an insulator kit. Shrinking the plastic film with a hair dryer ensures a smooth and tight seal.

Lower Home Energy Bills When It's Cold Outside

WANT TO SAVE MONEY ON YOUR ENERGY BILLS this winter—without spending a lot to make it happen? Here are 10 low- or no-cost changes you can make:

1. Use ceiling fans to make rooms feel warmer. Most people think fans are just for summer, but ceiling fans running slowly in reverse will circulate the heat that rises toward the ceiling.

2. Add weatherstripping or caulk around windows and doors. Light a match or a stick of incense and hold it near the window frame. If the smoke sways, the window is leaking air. Caulking can significantly reduce heat loss.

3. Rearrange furniture. Move sofas and rugs that are blocking vents, which can cause uneven heating. Situate the most frequently used furniture near interior walls; it's colder to sit near exterior walls, especially those with windows.

4. Install a "smart" thermostat that lets you program it or adjust the heat even after you've left the house. There's no need to heat your home at the same level when it's empty as when your family is home. Turning back your thermostat for eight hours a day can save up to 15 percent on your heating bill.

5. Keep the shades open during daylight hours. The sun heats your home for free all day. Close the curtains at night to keep heat in.

6. Check the seams and joints of your ductwork for leaks. Repair leaks with a duct-sealing compound.

7. Pull on a sweater and keep the thermostat at a lower temperature. You could save at least 1 percent per degree on your electric bill.

8. Run your clothes dryer and dishwasher after dark. They produce heat that can help keep your home warm at the coldest time of the day.

9. Install compact fluorescent or light-emitting diode bulbs in fixtures use the most. These use far less energy than incandescents.

10. Limit your hot water use. Wash clothes in cold water and take shorter showers.



Running your dryer and dishwasher at night provides added warmth to the home during colder months.

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Houston County Electric Cooperative

P.O. Box 52, Crockett, TX 75835

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CALL OUR 24-HOUR HOTLINE**

1-800-970-4232 toll-free

BUSINESS HOURS

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

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*For general information
during business hours*

(936) 544-5641 local

1-800-657-2445 toll-free

To report an outage or other problem with electrical service, press 1.

To make a payment over the phone or speak with a member services representative in the billing department, press 2.

For electrical connects, transfers and disconnects, press 5.

For directions to our office, mailing address or fax number, press 6.

For satellite Internet services, press 7.

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Is Your Fridge Ready for Thanksgiving?

IF THANKSGIVING DINNER IS AT YOUR HOUSE THIS YEAR, your family members aren't the only ones who will be stuffed. So will your refrigerator.

Is it up to the task?

If your fridge is more than a decade old, it might not be adequate. Today's models—specifically those bearing the Energy Star label—use at least 15 percent less energy than federal standards require, and 40 percent less than models from the early 2000s, according to the Department of Energy.

Use a dollar bill to check the seal on your refrigerator door.



ANDY DOUGHERTY | TEC

Yet more than 60 million households in the U.S. have refrigerators that are more than 10 years old, according to the DOE. By replacing yours with a new, energy-efficient model, you could save up to \$300 in electricity charges over its lifetime.

When shopping for a new refrigerator or freezer, read the EnergyGuide label. It tells you how many kilowatt-hours of electricity the unit will likely consume over a year of operation. The smaller the number, the better. Look for refrigerators that have a freezer on the bottom or the top, as side-by-side designs consume more energy. Chest freezers are typically better insulated than upright models.

Whether or not you're buying a new fridge this year, follow these tips for more efficient use around the holidays:

- ▶ Brush or vacuum your refrigerator's coils regularly to improve its energy efficiency by as much as 30 percent.
- ▶ Keeping your refrigerator full shouldn't be hard at this time of year, and doing so will help your unit retain the cold better. If you have trouble keeping it stocked, fill the extra space with containers of water.
- ▶ If your milk is icy in the morning, reduce the refrigerator's temperature. Refrigerators should be set between 36 and 40 degrees. Freezers should stay between 0 and 5 degrees.
- ▶ Put a dollar bill in the door's seal to see if it is airtight. If the dollar slips out easily, so will cold air.

In honor of Veterans Day, Houston County Electric would like to recognize three of our very own:



David Hildebrand, right.



Jack Vickers



Steven Millhouse

Busting Myths About Smart Meters

BY NOW, MOST AMERICANS HAVE LIKELY HEARD of the “smart grid.” This phrase is used to describe the digitization of America’s electrical infrastructure. The purpose of this digitization is to improve the reliability, efficiency, resiliency and security of the nation’s electric grid.

A key component of the smart grid is advanced metering infrastructure, known as AMI in the utility world. AMI systems use digital meters and computer technology to measure electricity use at homes and businesses more precisely than was possible with analog meters.

The digital meters communicate via radio or existing power lines and have been loosely termed “smart meters.” AMI benefits electric co-op members through greater accuracy in billing, faster outage restoration, operational savings by eliminating manual meter readings, and detailed data that members and their co-ops can access to manage electricity use much more accurately.

Unfortunately, myths about smart meters have developed over the years. These concerns can be classified into three categories: privacy, security and health effects. Let’s take a look at each.

Privacy Myths

Houston County Electric Cooperative takes great pains to keep your information private—and that information includes the details of your electricity use. The only people who see that data are co-op employees and you. Your co-op will not release this information to anyone else without your specific permission.

The myths are that the data collected can tell someone when you are away or at home, and exactly what you are doing when you are there. Some also fear that this data is being given to the government.

Naturally, the data will show when you are home because for most families, energy consumption is higher then. However, current smart meters cannot identify what activities are taking place based on the specific appliance in use. This myth is simply unfounded.

Security Myths

What about the myth that these meters actually make the electric grid less secure by providing an avenue for hackers to break into systems through a smart meter and wreak havoc? Although hackers continually attempt to break into electric systems, their focus is at higher levels in the operation. Hacking a meter is unlikely for a variety of reasons.

Hackers like to work remotely via the internet, and smart

meters don’t offer that option. Radio-based smart meters would require the hacker to be nearby to catch the weak communication signal; break the proprietary communication protocol; and be there for extended periods of time to collect and



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decode the short bursts of data sent. Therefore, smart meters are an unlikely and unprofitable target for hackers.

Health Myths

Finally, there are myths surrounding smart meters and their perceived ill effects on health. These concerns fret that having a radio-based smart meter invites radiation equivalent to having a cellphone tower attached to the side of your home.

Houston County Electric Cooperative has used power line carrier technology for communication since 2003. With this technology, meter readings for all of our members are sent to us via our power lines. Radio frequency communication is not used with our meters.

We will all benefit from the continued development of America’s smart grid and can rest easy with the knowledge that rumors surrounding radio-based smart meters don’t hold water.

Advanced metering equipment is safe, efficient and helps utilities control costs without any risks to homeowners.

Avoid Kitchen Dangers

Make holiday preparations safely

ALTHOUGH CREATING HOLIDAY FAVORITES IN THE KITCHEN can be fun with the family and soothing for the soul, it can be brutal for the body. Consider the following:

Playing With Fire

The Federal Emergency Management Agency reports that cooking equipment—most often a range or stovetop—is the leading cause of reported home fires and related injuries in the U.S. The agency offers some tips to avoid becoming a statistic:

▶ It's easy during holiday chaos to do too many things at once and forget projects that you started. If you are simmering, frying, grilling, broiling, baking, roasting or



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During the holidays, be sure to keep young children away from hot surfaces in the kitchen.

boiling food, check it regularly. Remain in the kitchen while the food is cooking, and use a timer to remind you that you're cooking.

- ▶ Keep anything that can catch fire—towels, potholders, oven mitts, wooden utensils, paper or plastic bags, food packaging, towels, or curtains—away from your stovetop.
- ▶ Keep the stovetop, burners and oven clean.
- ▶ Keep pets off cooking surfaces and nearby countertops to prevent them from knocking things onto a burner or other heat source.
- ▶ Wear short, close-fitting or tightly rolled sleeves when

- ▶ Keep young children at least 3 feet away from cooking appliances.
- ▶ Make sure ground-fault circuit interrupters are installed in all outlets in areas that might come into contact with water, such as at the kitchen sink. Keep countertop appliances and their cords as far away as possible from the sink and any other water sources.

Contact Burns From Equipment

The oven is modern magic, but all that heat combined with metal components and cookware can lead to burns.

- ▶ Always use oven mitts (not a wet towel) to handle hot dishes or pans, and replace mitts when they're old.
- ▶ Don't reach into the oven to check baked goods; instead, always pull out the rack to test a dish.
- ▶ Stir simmering food with a wooden spoon, not a metal one, which will get hot.
- ▶ Keep metal objects out of appliances. If a piece of toast gets stuck in the toaster, for example, never use a metal knife to retrieve it. Unplug the toaster, allow it to cool, and use a plastic or wooden utensil to remove the toast.
- ▶ Only plugs should go into outlets. Sticking fingers or other objects into outlets could result in an electrical shock and possibly a fire.



TIME TO FALL BACK!

DAYLIGHT
SAVING TIME

Set your clocks back one hour
at 2 a.m. Sunday, November 6.

MARTIN WIMMER | ISTOCK.COM



Happy
Thanksgiving

from Houston County EC

Our offices will be closed Thursday
and Friday, November 24–25, to
celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday.

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**TRUTH BE TOLD, YOUR
ELECTRICITY COMES FROM
PEOPLE POWER.**

Thankfully, there's one energy source that co-op members can always depend on—the hardworking dedication and efficiency of your electric co-op linemen. Learn more about the power of your co-op membership at TogetherWeSave.com.



TOGETHERWESAVE.COM

