

Steady Through a Sea of Unpredictability



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER KATHI CALVERT

HOUSTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE employees have been going through a series of leadership training sessions. This training is translating into more value for you, our members.

Jim Bearden has been our trainer and guide as we strive to continue improving. One of the concepts on which he focuses is accountability—more specifically, emotional accountability. There are few situations in life when we have complete control of all the variables. However, there is one powerful area where we always have control, and that is our reaction to situations we are presented.

HCEC employees and members faced a tough start to 2017 as high winds, thunderstorms and extreme cold resulted in outages. We cannot control the weather, but we

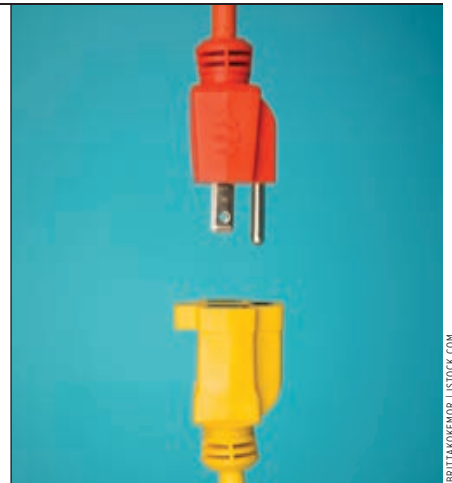
have two options: We can complain about it and deny fault, or we can get to work and help our members. We control our attitudes and how we serve you. It is always our goal to provide you with the best possible service regardless of the circumstances.

Our linemen worked diligently to restore service to members, and we had additional staff to help handle calls. The Houston County EC system is a winter-peaking system.

This means we experience our highest electric loads in the winter when many members use electric heat. Despite planning for peak loads, some members experienced outages due to load-balancing issues. Member behavior and usage change over time, and they also change depending on whether we are experiencing winter peak load versus summer peak load. We have addressed loading issues, and we will continue to monitor our system to handle peak seasonal loads.

Also, bills tend to be high during cold winter months. The peak loads translate into more usage. I know it is hard right after Christmas to see a high electric bill. Please call us if you are struggling to pay a high bill. Our member services professionals will do their best to find solutions to assist you.

I tell my children daily, “It does not matter what others do. What matters is how you react.” It is so easy to say these words but much more challenging to live by them. Life is not always fair. We all face challenging circumstances. Be assured that regardless of the situation, HCEC employees are here to serve you and are prepared to handle any situation presented.



BRITTA KEMNER | ISTOCK.COM

Don't Be Shocked: Counterfeiters Are on the Rise

THE CHEAPEST PRODUCT isn't always the best deal. Sometimes, it's counterfeit. That means one company has packaged a product to look like it was made by a reputable company. You buy it and take it home, and it might not operate as it should. Worse, it might be unsafe.

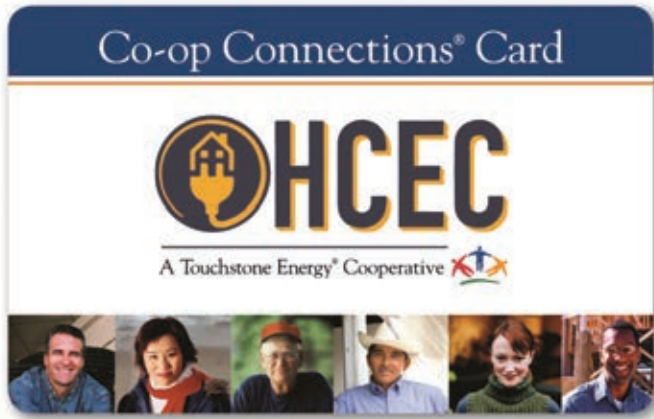
That's often the case with counterfeit electrical products, which can shock you or start a fire. Over the past decade, these products have become more common in the U.S.

Here's how to keep counterfeit electrical products from shocking you:

- ▶ Be suspicious of electrical cords, circuit breakers and appliances from discount stores that are way less expensive than similar products.
- ▶ Never buy electrical products over the internet from unfamiliar vendors.
- ▶ Learn how to recognize certification marks from Underwriters Laboratories and other safety testing labs. Carefully inspect the electrical products you buy for authentication marks.
- ▶ Shy away from products in shoddy packaging. The product inside won't be much better.
- ▶ Read labels carefully. Counterfeiters often change a letter in a brand name: Nike knock-offs, for example, might show up with a label that says “Mike.”



JOSH BANNS | ISTOCK.COM



Co-op Connections Card Puts Value in Your Wallet

HOUSTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE'S commitment to you goes beyond providing safe, reliable and affordable electricity. We're always looking for ways to provide value to our members and our community, especially during tough economic times.

Houston County EC's Co-op Connections card is a money-saving tool that we're proud to offer our membership. The card connects you with discounts on everything from hotel stays to prescription drugs. If you were unable to attend the co-op's annual meeting in November, please contact the HCEC office at (936) 544-5641 to learn how to get this ticket to savings!

Businesses can sign up for the program at no cost. For a complete list of all participating businesses in our area, simply log on to our website, houstoncountyelec.com, and follow the Co-op Connections card link on the homepage.

The card also gives you access to online savings at more than 95 national retailers such as Cabela's, Bass Pro Shops, Office Depot and Best Western. You can check out these great national discounts at connections.coop.

One of the most valuable features of the Co-op Connections card is the pharmacy discount. Although it is not insurance, the discount can mean savings of 10–60 percent on prescription drugs. The logo and information on the back of your card is recognized at more than 60,000 national, regional and local pharmacies. Want to find out more? Log on to locateproviders.com to search for pharmacies in our area honoring the card. Use code 2203 as the group number under the Groups login section. Next, enter your ZIP code.

As a Touchstone Energy co-op, Houston County EC strives to serve our members according to four core values: integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to community. Our Co-op Connections card is one of the ways we live up to those values.

We're eager to answer any questions you have about the card and how to take advantage of the discounts it provides. Call us at (936) 544-5641 to find out more, or visit connections.coop.

Houston County Electric Cooperative

P.O. Box 52, Crockett, TX 75835

GENERAL MANAGER

Kathi Calvert

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Contact Us

**TO REPORT A POWER OUTAGE,
CALL OUR 24-HOUR HOTLINE**

1-800-970-4232 toll-free

BUSINESS HOURS

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

*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.

For staking and construction, press 8.

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Give Your Electric Bill a Vacation, Too

TAKING SOME MUCH-NEEDED TIME AWAY during spring break can be expensive. A great way to save money is to give your electric bill a vacation, too. There are several steps you can take to trim your electricity usage while you're away:

Unplug some of your household appliances. Your house has many items that always use electricity when they're plugged in, even when turned off. Unplugging these items not only saves energy but also can prevent fires during your absence. Some of

the more common items are: TVs, DVD players, cable TV boxes, microwave ovens, toasters and other small kitchen appliances.

Adjust the refrigerator control to a warmer setting. The fridge can be set as high as 40 degrees without spoiling food; the freezer can be set at 5 degrees. On these settings, you can conserve up to 40 percent of the refrigerator's electric usage.

If you are going on an extended trip, consider emptying the fridge and turning it off entirely. Remember to leave the door open to prevent mildew.

Set the thermostat higher (or lower) than the typical comfort level. In warmer weather, you can shut off the air conditioner during your absence, or at least consider setting it to a higher-than-normal temperature, 80 degrees or above.

If it's still cold out, you should consider lowering your thermostat but to no



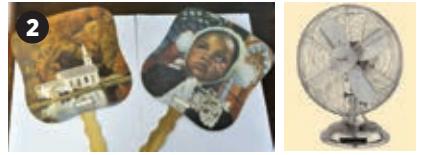
Going on vacation? Adjust your thermostat to give your electric bill a break.

lower than 55 degrees. Typically, you can save 10–30 percent on heating costs by doing this. A programmable thermostat can make these adjustments automatically.

Turn down the water heater. A large percentage of the cost of running a water heater comes from just keeping the water at the selected temperature. If you are going on a lengthy trip, turn down the temperature to the lowest setting. This can save you up to \$10 a month.

Consider using timers to turn lights on and off every night. Timers can save energy and also give an appearance that someone is home. For the lights that will be on the longest—inside and outside—use CFL or LED bulbs. These use at least 75 percent less power than traditional bulbs and last longer.

Follow these tips while you're away for spring break and put your mind at ease about your electric bill. Then you can enjoy that vacation even more!



What Is It?

Then and now

MOST HOUSTON COUNTY EC MEMBERS recognize an electric meter when they see one, but technology used to maintain modern electricity distribution systems has evolved over the years. Compare these images of tools from the 1930s, '40s and '50s with those of today.

Lighting, too, has come a long way since the delivery of electricity. These days even the dimmest LED bulb can light an entire room with a minimum of electricity.

1. This Westinghouse meter with dials is no longer used today. Co-ops now use a more advanced, digital meter.

2. Thank goodness the old handheld fan has been replaced with the modern electric fan—and, even better, the air conditioner.

3. This handheld voltage tester replaced several older, heavier tools and takes up less room on the service truck.

4. It might look like a birdhouse, but this is a sectionalizing cutout used on electric service lines. The new version looks different and is much more reliable.

HCEC Sends Students to ETREYS

HOUSTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE has participated in the East Texas Rural Electric Youth Seminar, ETREYS, for almost 30 years. This leadership camp for 10th- and 11th-graders is sponsored by nine electric cooperatives.

ETREYS is designed to foster positive ideas and values among young people while enhancing skills in leadership, problem-solving and interpersonal relationships in a wholesome environment. The seminar includes workshops, presentations and peer-group activities.

ETREYS also offers students a chance to develop their interpersonal skills while competing for scholarship opportunities.

Applications for ETREYS 2017 are available from area high school counselors, or you can download an application from our website at houstoncountyelec.com.

Houston County EC participants from the 2016 East Texas Rural Electric Youth Seminar



HCEC Offers Scholarships



HOUSTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE offers scholarships for 2017 high school graduates who live in the HCEC service area and whose immediate families are members of the cooperative.

Scholarship applications must be postmarked no later than March 15.

For details, see your high school counselor or download an application from houstoncountyelec.com.

Outage Reports

To report an outage to Houston County EC, please call 1-800-970-4232 and have one of the following numbers available:

- ▶ ACCOUNT NUMBER
- ▶ METER NUMBER

This information allows us to quickly and accurately locate information about your service and will expedite repairs.



Outages also can be reported through your HCEC app or through our website at: houstoncountyelec.com



Houston County Electric Cooperative

Like us on Facebook for energy-saving and safety tips, co-op updates and much more.



Plant the Right Tree in the Right Place

For more tips on smart tree planting in your community, contact your local electric cooperative or visit www.ArborDay.org.

Trees beautify our neighborhoods, and when planted in the right spot, can even help lower energy bills. But the wrong tree in the wrong place can be a hazard... especially to power lines.

LARGE TREES

Height/spread of more than 40 feet, such as:

- Maple
- Birch
- Oak
- Sweetgum
- Spruce
- Linden
- Pine

MEDIUM TREES

Height/spread of 25 to 40 feet, such as:

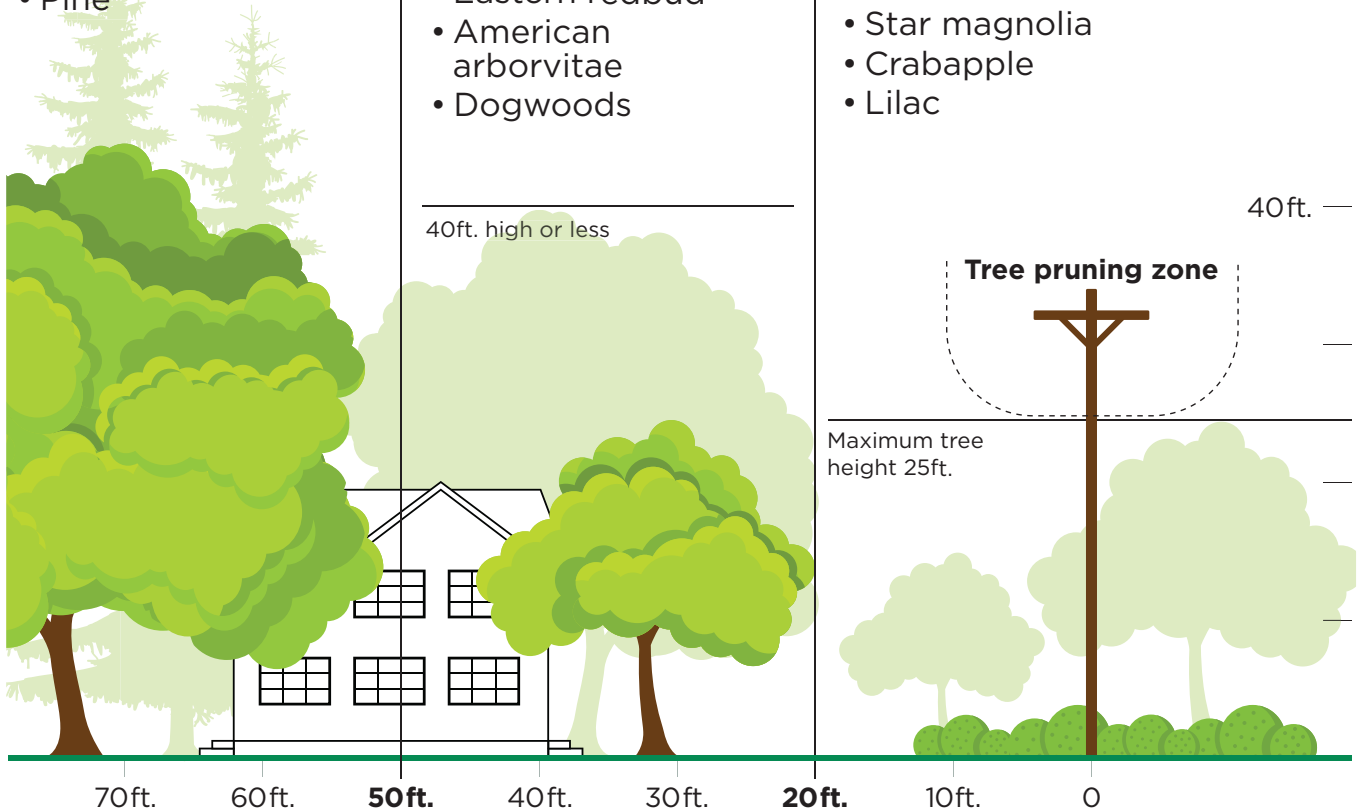
- Washington hawthorn
- Goldenraintree
- Eastern redbud
- American arborvitae
- Dogwoods

SMALL TREES

Avoid planting within 20 feet of power lines. When planting within 20 feet is unavoidable, use only shrubs and small trees.

Height/spread of no more than 25 feet such as:

- Star magnolia
- Crabapple
- Lilac



Be safe! Always call 811 before you dig to locate any buried utility lines.

Tips for Tool Time

Practice power tool safety

EVERY YEAR, THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE in the United States are critically injured or electrocuted as a result of electrical fires or accidents in their own homes. Faced with declining home values and aging properties, more homeowners are tackling do-it-yourself projects than ever before.

However, many do not have the training or experience needed to safely perform home electrical work. This increases the risk of immediate injuries and electrocutions, and potentially introduces new dangers into the home.

If you decide to undertake a home improvement project yourself, Houston County Electric Cooperative strongly recommends that you do not attempt work beyond your skill level. Knowing when to call a professional can help prevent electrical fires, injuries and fatalities.

If you do engage in a DIY project, make sure you plan the project first and understand the electrical system, equipment and materials required. Make sure you use adequate personal protective equipment and follow manufacturer's instructions for all tools used.

Power Tools

Many do-it-yourself projects involve the use of power tools. Working with power tools requires skilled instruction and training. They can be deadly if not properly used or maintained.

A common scenario for power tool-related electrocutions is when the equipment comes in contact with live electrical wires while it is being used.

Facts and Statistics

Nearly 400 electrocutions occur in the United States every year, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Electrical accidents with power drills, saws, sanders, hedge trimmers and other electric power tools account for 8 percent of consumer product-related electrocutions annually. An additional 9 percent are caused by accidents involving the use of lawn equipment, garden tools and ladders, which can come into contact with overhead power lines.

Personal Protective Equipment

Safeguards on outdoor electric tools are there for a reason. Make sure that they are always in place before operating.



PREBRAG_VULKOVIC | ISTOCK.COM

**Keep DIY projects safe—
use the right tools and
wear protective gear.**

Invest in safety goggles, hearing protection, dust masks, gloves and other safety gear recommended for each tool. A few dollars now are well worth the lifetime of functional use that they are protecting.

Wear the appropriate clothes for the job—boots, gloves, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Wearing sandals while mowing the lawn is just asking for trouble. Tie back long hair as well as hoodie strings, scarves and other items that could get caught.

Tips for Tool Safety

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.

If a power tool trips an electrical safety device while in use, stop using it. Take the tool to a manufacturer-authorized repair center for service.

When working with electricity, use tools with insulated grips.

Do not use power tools without the proper guards.

When using a wet-dry vacuum cleaner or a pressure washer, be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions to avoid electric shock.