

Home Energy Saver Website Promotes Money-Saving Self Audits

Did you know that about 25 percent of all energy used in the U.S. is attributable to households? That's why the U.S. Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory has developed an interactive website to help consumers analyze ways to conserve home energy that is tailored to their own specific circumstances. The site has two main sections: "Energy Advisor" and "Making It Happen."

The Energy Advisor is your go-to place for computing your home's total energy use based on the data that you enter. It's even region-specific when you supply a zip code. After entering basic data such as the square footage of your home, the number of occupants and the type of HVAC equipment, the user gets made-to-order recommendations on improving energy efficiency. The site also provides recommendations on energy-

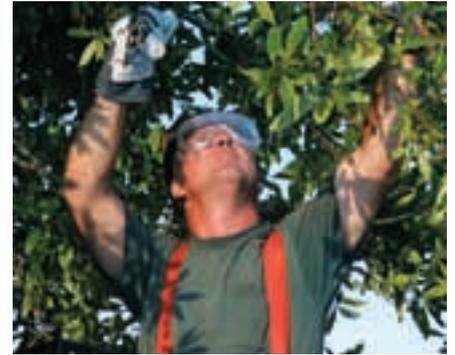
saving improvements regarding water heating, lighting, major appliances and other miscellaneous appliances.

The Making It Happen section is chock-full of internet listings to sites with practical and detailed information on energy-efficient products and service providers. It also has a "Frequently Asked Questions" section about home energy use. And, when that's not enough there is e-mail access to energy experts who can provide direct answers.

Because the Home Energy Saver website tailors the answers to each homeowner and his or her specific circumstances and regions, it's an easy way to self audit to determine which measures will have the quickest return on investment.

To visit the easy-to-use website to perform your own energy audit, go to <http://hes.lbl.gov>.

The Home Energy Saver website can help homeowners calculate energy use and improve energy efficiency.



If there are power lines near your trees, leave trimming to the experts.

SAFE GARDENING TIPS

Trimming trees and tall bushes can take a deadly turn when electricity is involved. Never trim a tree that has grown into a power line. Both metal and wood can transmit electricity into your body if you come into contact with a live wire.

Instead, ask Wood County Electric Cooperative to send a professional to trim the tree or at least to turn off power to the line while you work.

Don't remove those trees, though. If they're growing near east-, west- and south-facing windows, they can help block the sun's hot rays in the summertime. Deciduous trees are best because they shade your home from the summer sun, but then they lose their leaves in winter to let in the extra heat when you need it.

Here are more tips to help keep your gardening chores safe:

- Before you begin digging or landscaping, call 811 for free location of utilities.
- Never trim trees, cut the lawn or garden in bad weather. Wet and windy conditions can cause slipping. Go inside immediately if you see lightning.
- Plug cords for electric tools and trimmers into outlets protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters. Never use tools outdoors when it's wet.
- Work in pairs so you're not using electrical equipment when nobody else is around in case of an accident. And hire a professional if you doubt your ability to safely complete the job.





From left, Earnard Baxter Jr. of Hawkins, June Foster of Mount Vernon and Robert Blackwell of Quitman, all members of Wood County Electric Cooperative, served as the 2008 judges for the "Power My World" scholarship contest. Congratulations are owed them for their hard work in selecting the winners from so many outstanding candidates.

WCEC Awards \$10,000 to East Texas Students

A panel of three independent judges recently awarded \$10,000 in scholarships as part of Wood County Electric Cooperative's "Power My World" program. Ten local high school students residing within WCEC's nine-county service area will each receive a \$1,000 scholarship toward his or her continuing education. The program is funded entirely by unclaimed capital credit payments returned to WCEC by the state of Texas.

Three WCEC members, Earnard Baxter Jr., Robert Blackwell and June Foster, judged the competition. They used various criteria to select the winners, who were chosen from 43 applicants. Each of the judges reviewed the applications, accompanying academic records and lists of civic and community achievements. Additionally, each student was required to submit an essay, which was read by each judge. Based on their exceptional submissions and achievements, the 2008 scholarship recipients are:

LAURA DELILAH BLALOCK, Harmony High School
SAMMIE HANKS, Mount Vernon High School
EMILY HARWELL, Van High School
ANTHONY HILL, Grand Saline High School
BRITNEY HUDGINS, Mineola High School
ANDREW MIKEL RAMIREZ, Alba-Golden High School
THOMAS BLAINE SHACKELFORD, Quitman High School
CRISTEN J. SMITH, Mineola High School
LINDSEY WEEMS, Quitman High School
AUTUMN PAIGE WOOD, Mineola High School

"It is an inspiration to see how many well-rounded and hard-working students we have in East Texas, as evidenced by this year's applicants," WCEC CEO/General Manager Debbie Robinson said. "They are a credit to their parents, our local school systems and fine educators. It will be interesting to follow each of these young men and women as they achieve their various goals."

Want to Save Energy? Save Water



The water company uses electricity to purify water and pump it through your pipes. You use electricity to heat water for showering, washing dishes and doing laundry.

You can save energy—and your energy dollars—by conserving water at home.

STEP 1: Buy water-saving, low-flow toilets and shower-heads when it's time to replace your old ones. Look for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense label on products that meet EPA performance and efficiency standards. These typically save at least 20 percent more water than comparable products.

STEP 2: Don't do laundry until you have a full load of clothes. Even smaller cycles waste energy and water compared with full, large loads.

STEP 3: Run the dishwasher only when it's full. Keep a bowl of soapy water in the sink for quick dishwashing.

STEP 4: Repair dripping or leaky faucets immediately. Even a very slow leak wastes a lot of water. And if it's water you've paid to heat, even more money is going down the drain.

STEP 5: Rig your lawn sprinkler with a timer and cut the length of watering after it rains or the weather cools.

STEP 6: Find out how much water each plant in your garden needs. Overwatering certain types of plants can kill them.

STEP 7: Sweep your driveway instead of hosing it down.

STEP 8: If you have a pool, invest in a swimming pool cover. It will keep heat in your pool and prevent water evaporation.

FREE, OR ALMOST FREE, FOR THOSE WHO QUALIFY?

Many electricity consumers are receiving marketing pitches by letter or phone, indicating that the state of Texas has made funds available that will pay for energy-efficiency upgrades to their homes. Wood County Electric Cooperative members are also receiving these letters. Each of the campaigns takes a different approach. Some target low-income electricity consumers with promises of discounted bills. Others offer "free" or "no-cost-to-you" energy-efficiency home improvement services such as home duct system sealing.

While it is true that the state has set aside limited funds for energy efficiency programs, these funds are available only to those who receive their power from investor-owned electric utilities because those utilities are the ones that, by law, must fund the programs. Electric cooperatives are not required to pay into this state program, as they are member-owned and nonprofit. Cooperatives already have the goal of keeping rates as low as possible and don't operate to put big profits into the hands of shareholders.

The problem with the mass mailings is that the businesses sending out the information have not properly scrutinized their mailing lists. They are unwittingly sending their materials to electric cooperative members who are not eligible for these state-paid rebates or improvements. While the businesses sending the mailings may well be reputable and offer energy-efficiency programs that would be of value, cooperative consumers will be responsible for any improvements they decide to make.

At WCEC, we encourage all members to use conservation measures and employ technologies that provide home energy efficiencies. Even small do-it-yourself changes can make a big difference. And, if you hire a contractor, be sure to research the projected energy savings to determine when your improvement will begin giving you a return on your investment. Also, before you sign a contract, check the business with the Better Business Bureau. The reputable contractors won't mind that you did.

Cool It with the A/C

Tips To Help Your Air Conditioner Take a Load Off



One of the best ways to save energy and extend the life of your air-conditioning system is to have it serviced annually by a qualified professional.

Your air conditioner has to work harder every time the temperature rises 1 degree. Make sure it's up to the task.

Every spring, hire a licensed professional to give it a tune-up. If your unit is old or requires some major repairs, it could be cheaper to replace it with a super-efficient model—one with a SEER rating of at least 12—than to repair it.

SEER stands for “seasonal energy efficiency ratio.” The higher the number, the more efficient the air conditioner—and the more money you save.

Relieve some strain on your air conditioner and knock a few dollars off your energy bill this summer. Here's how:

- Change the air filter every time you pay your energy bill. The unit doesn't have to work as hard to push air through a clean filter as it does through a dirty one.
- Turn up the thermostat and turn on ceiling fans. Ceiling fans circulate the air and help you feel cooler. For every degree you raise your thermostat, you will save 2 to 3 percent on air conditioning.
- Weatherstripping and caulking around doors and windows isn't just

for winter. It can keep hot air from coming into your home during the summer, too. Seal leaky joints and seams around windows and doors to keep cool air in and hot air out.

- Draw blinds or shades during the day. If your windows don't have reflective coatings, add window film to keep the sun's heat from seeping in.
- Cook and operate washing machines, dishwashers and other heat-generating appliances after 9 p.m. Using appliances during these “off-peak” hours can save you money and reduce indoor heat when the sun is blazing.
- Don't use your oven when the weather is hot. Nothing is more energy efficient for cooking than your microwave. It uses two-thirds less energy than your stove.
- Install patio covers, awnings and solar window screens to shade your home from the sun. For additional future savings, use strategically planted trees, shrubs and vines to shade your home.
- Consider changing your old thermostat to a programmable one. You can save up to \$100 a year by properly using a set-back thermostat.

GIVE GRADS SAFETY AND EFFICIENCY

Looking for a unique gift for a graduate heading off to college in the fall? Encourage electrical safety, even away from home.

Help the college students in your life avoid electrical and cooking fires by sending them off with electronics that bear a label from a reputable consumer product testing facility, like Underwriters Laboratories.

Nearly three-quarters of dormitory fires result from cooking accidents, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

Consider these gift ideas for safer dorm living:

- With computers, stereos and MP3 players, your grad will head to college next fall with more electronics than outlets. A power strip is a college must. Buy one with an over-current protector, which will shut off if the strip is drawing too much current.
- Instead of an electric hot plate, give a microwave for easy dorm cooking. These energy-efficient appliances pose less of a fire hazard.
- Candles are a quick way to make a dorm look like home, but they cause so many dorm fires that many colleges ban them. Give an electric candle instead.
- Coffeemakers are a luxury in the dorm room. Give one with an automatic shutoff so the student never has to worry about leaving the burner on.



A power strip with over-current protection can help prevent fires.