

## Electric Bill Savings—Now and in the Future



**MESSAGE  
FROM CEO  
AND GENERAL  
MANAGER  
DEBBIE  
ROBINSON**

**W**hen you're on a road trip, chances are your vehicle gets better gas mileage when you drive at a steady speed. Stomping on the accelerator burns gas more quickly than traveling at a measured pace. And if you do race down the road and happen to run out of gasoline, you might be forced to refill at a station with a higher price.

Similarly, when members of Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) use electricity conservatively, the co-op's wholesale price remains steady. When consumers all at once demand

more power, such as on hot Texas afternoons when everyone blasts their air conditioners, the wholesale cost of electricity increases.

Those wholesale costs ultimately affect your electricity bill because WCEC has to take into account members' demand—and subsequent increased cost to the co-op—when planning for the future. Also, if demand continues to increase, new power plants will have to be built. With increasing government regulation and high cost of materials, creating new sources of energy generation is likely to be expensive.

The cost of electricity, therefore, is partly controlled by consumers. Conserving energy remains the best way to reduce your electric bill—now and in the future.

But saving electricity does not mean you have to stop using your lights, air conditioners, TVs and

washing machines. Members can reduce their electricity consumption by changing a few habits and taking advantage of energy-efficiency options.

One of the best ways to find out how you can more wisely use electricity in your home is to conduct an energy audit. WCEC encourages you to schedule an energy audit. Results of the energy audit's examination of your home's airtightness, insulation and the household's energy-use behavior could reveal some cost-effective ways you could save money on your electric bill.

If you use an auditing firm, be sure to check the company's references and inquire about any complaints with the Better Business Bureau. Also, you should stay with the auditor while he or she examines your home so you can learn or be available to answer questions.

If you are a do-it-yourselfer, you can perform your own home-energy assessment. The U.S. Department of Energy provides details on how to conduct your own energy audit at [www.energysavers.gov/your\\_home/energy\\_audits](http://www.energysavers.gov/your_home/energy_audits), including a description of how to do a basic building pressurization test to find air leaks. This thorough walk-through of your home to check for air leaks, proper insulation, energy-efficient lighting, and up-to-date cooling and heating systems could give you ideas for how to save money on your electric bill.

Another good resource is [www.hes.lbl.gov/consumer](http://www.hes.lbl.gov/consumer), which allows you to input information specific to your home and then provides suggestions for savings.

To find even more ways to cut back on your energy bill, check out articles in Texas Co-op Power and on [TexasCoopPower.com/energy/efficiency](http://TexasCoopPower.com/energy/efficiency). WCEC's website, [www.wcec.org](http://www.wcec.org), also provides practical solutions that can make a big difference in your electric bill—now and in the future.

**Running out of gas can be inconvenient and expensive. The same is true of electricity.**



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Wood County Electric Cooperative's delegates, chaperones and youth director exuded the 2011 theme, 'ETREYS, I'm lovin' it,' during their week at camp. Pictured, top row, from left: Laura Murdock, Jay Murdock and Stephanie Parris; middle row: Mark Carrasco, Alston Johnson, Winter Wilson, Kylie O'Neal, Brianna Willis and Taelor Rawson; bottom row: Jesus Sandoval, Megan Kelly, Jonathan Ladd, Lindsey Kellam and Colby Finch.

# *Lessons in* **Leadership**

## **WCEC SPONSORS LOCAL STUDENTS**



The 2011 delegates, from left: Brianna, Mark, Stephanie, Colby, Megan, Alston, Lindsey, Taelor, Jesus and Winter, show off their certificates of attendance.

**W**ood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) sponsored 10 youth delegates for the 2011 East Texas Rural Electric Youth Seminar (ETREYS) held June 27–July 1 at Lon Morris College in Jacksonville. The youth delegates joined about 120 other participants, each sponsored by one of nine East Texas electric cooperatives, to participate in the ETREYS program. ETREYS is designed to promote positive ideals, offer lessons in leadership and teach the cooperative philosophy.

The schedule consisted of many teambuilding exercises, as well as presentations by several outstanding speakers, including Keith Davis, former NFL championship football player; Tommy Engelke, a longtime cooperative advocate; and Buddy Ritter, a motivational speaker, among others.

The delegates that represented WCEC for ETREYS 2011 were: Mark Carrasco, Yantis; Colby Finch, Quitman; Alston Johnson, Quitman; Lindsey Kellam, Van; Megan Kelly, Mount Vernon; Stephanie Parris, Winnsboro; Taelor Rawson, Yantis; Jesus Sandoval, Yantis; Brianna

Willis, Quitman; and Winter Wilson, Alba. Of those, Alston brought home a \$500 scholarship, and Lindsey was awarded the Carl and Bobbie Morgan Scholarship valued at \$750. The group was led by returning student and Youth Director Jonathan Ladd of Mount Vernon. The delegates were chaperoned by a husband-and-wife team, Jay and Laura Murdock of Winnsboro, and Kylie O'Neal of Quitman. Jay is a power quality technician at WCEC, and Kylie is a business communications specialist.

"Our ETREYS delegates are some of the most outstanding kids in our region," said WCEC CEO/General Manager Debbie Robinson. "It is such a pleasure to be able to offer them an opportunity to shine even more. I know they will carry the lessons they learned at ETREYS forward."

# Play Up Outdoor Safety

Sunny summer days beckon the child in all of us to head outside and play. Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) and Safe Electricity recommend that families review and stress that children follow simple electric safety rules for safe outdoor play.

“Help keep your kids out of harm’s way when they play outdoors,” said Molly Hall, executive director of Safe Electricity. “Children often do not understand the dangers of electricity. Make them aware of overhead power lines and electrical equipment, and emphasize they should never climb or play near them.”

Teach your children these electric safety rules:

- Never climb trees near power lines. Even if the power lines are not touching the tree, they could touch when more weight is added to a branch.
  - Fly kites and model airplanes in large open areas such as parks or fields, safely away from trees and overhead power lines. If a kite gets stuck in a tree that’s near power lines, don’t climb up to get it.
  - Never climb a utility pole or tower.
  - Don’t play on or around pad-mounted electrical equipment.



- Never go into an electric substation for any reason. Electric substations contain high-voltage equipment, which can be deadly. Never try to rescue a pet or retrieve a ball or toy that goes inside. Call WCEC instead.

When designing an outdoor play area for your children, do not install playground equipment or swimming pools underneath or near power lines. Protect all family members from serious shock and injuries by installing and using outdoor outlets with ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Use portable GFCIs for outdoor outlets that don’t have them. Be careful using electrical appliances outdoors, even if plugged into GFCI-equipped outlets.

“Water always attracts kids, but water and electricity never mix,” Hall said. “Teach older children to exercise caution before plugging in a radio, CD player or any electrical gadget outdoors, and keep all electrical appliances at least 10 feet away from hot tubs, pools, ponds, puddles and wet surfaces.”

Make sure that all of your family members know to stay away from downed power lines and wires, and tell children to report to an adult any fallen or dangling wires.

*Source: Safe Electricity*

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## Keep the Sun Out To Stay Cool

One of the best ways to keep your house cooler during the summer is to keep the sun and the heat outdoors.

By following these tips, you’ll be able to inch the thermostat up a few degrees and see a reduction in your cooling bill. Plus, your family will feel more comfortable.

- Replace your window curtains with a style that has a white backing on the window side, and then close them during the day. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) says the heat-deflecting white backing can reduce the amount of heat that gets into the house by up to 45 percent.

- Hang window awnings on south-, west- and east-facing windows. The DOE says awnings can reduce solar heat gain on the hottest days by up to 65 percent on south-facing windows and 77 percent on west-facing windows.

- Try sunscreens. Sometimes called solar shades, they are made from see-through mesh that’s tightly woven to block a lot of heat and ultraviolet rays, but transparent enough that you can see through them, so they don’t block your view.

- Plant shade trees near windows that get the most sunlight during the summer. A young tree won’t keep you cool this year, but as it grows, it will keep more sun out.

- Caulk around windows and doors to keep your conditioned air in the house and the hot air out. Also, look for and patch other holes in indoor walls that are on the perimeter of the house.



**In the summer, set your thermostat to 78 degrees when you are home and 85 degrees when you are away.**

**A programmable thermostat can do that for you automatically to help obtain maximum savings. Many models allow different settings for every day of the week to accommodate varying schedules.**

# Efficiency Upgrades That Make Sense

BY BRIAN SLOBODA

Surveys show that only about 15 percent of folks actually take steps to enhance the energy efficiency of their home. In most cases, people think energy-efficiency improvements are too complicated or expensive to tackle.

However, there are several simple upgrades you can consider that won't break your household budget.

## Lighting

Compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) may look odd, but one CFL uses about 75 percent less energy than a traditional incandescent lightbulb. That can save more than \$40 over its lifetime, according to estimates by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star program. Early CFLs had some issues with color or quality of the light, but with today's versions, you probably won't notice a difference using a CFL.

## Heating and Air Conditioning

The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that heating and air conditioning account for 39 percent of a typical home's annual electric bill. While an air-source heat pump or a geothermal heat pump can be 20 to 45 percent more efficient than an existing central heating and cooling system, up-front installation costs are often a barrier.

Simple solutions such as changing air filters at least every month will increase airflow to rooms, increase the lifespan of your central-heating and cooling unit and improve air quality. Sealing and insulating ductwork can be done in a weekend and result in energy savings of up to 20 percent.

To lessen the amount of work that heating and cooling systems need to do, it's important to find and fix air leaks. Walk around your house on a windy day and feel for drafts around exterior doors and windows, electric outlets and entrance



Video games provide loads of entertainment and consume loads of electricity—most of it when they're turned off. Unplugging them or using a smart power strip can make a big difference.

points for TV and telephone cables. Fix leaks with caulk, spray foam or weatherstripping.

Simple acts such as cooking outdoors on a hot summer day and closing curtains to block the summer sun will keep the interior of your home cooler.

## Appliances and Electronics

Gadgets and equipment that make life easier are also some of the largest electric users in our homes. When buying a new appliance, look for the Energy Star label.

To keep appliances running more efficiently, try these tips:

- Replace worn refrigerator door gaskets to stop cool air from seeping out.
- Clean lint traps on dryers, and don't overdry clothes.
- Clean refrigerator coils and keep refrigerators away from heat-generating appliances such as an oven.

Many home electronics, like computers, TVs and DVD players, consume power even when turned off. Called "vampire" or "phantom" load, the average home loses 5 to 15 percent of its monthly energy consumption to these devices, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). In fact,

the DOE reports a full 75 percent of the power used to run home electronics is consumed when they're turned off. Plugging these items into a power or smart strip and turning off the strip when not in use is a simple way to stop this loss of energy.

## Other Ideas

The best energy-efficiency improvements are often the easiest, such as turning lights off when leaving a room, sealing windows and doors, and cleaning refrigerator coils.

To measure the success of any energy-efficiency upgrades, big or small, first look at the payback period, the amount of time it takes for the improvement to pay for itself. Then consider your home's comfort level. Check whether fixes you've made keep room temperatures level and whether you find fewer drafts around doors, windows and other openings like vents or outlets.

For more information, contact the energy experts at Wood County Electric Cooperative.

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