

Act Now To Avoid High Bill Chill

THERE IS ALMOST NOTHING WORSE than receiving an unexpectedly large bill in the mail. But every winter, many Wood County Electric Cooperative members do receive shocking electricity bills that are, in fact, double or even triple what they are expecting. For many, it can turn into a hopeless economic challenge. Then they become angry, especially if they think they did not change their usage habits. They may even think that WCEC has raised rates, but that is simply not the case.

In the winter, heating costs generally account for the largest percentage of East Texas residential electricity bills. These heating costs mirror outside temperature extremes. While the thermostat may be adjusted some, it's still set for a level that keeps occupants comfortable. That can be a 30-

Adjust How You Pay Your Bills

Levelized Billing: This is a way for members to even out payments to avoid billing peaks and budget better. When you sign up for Levelized Billing, you'll be billed the average amount over your previous 12-month history. Payments are made automatically from your bank account, and they will be close to the same amount each month, so it's easier to budget. Anyone who has been a co-op member for at least a year and has a zero current balance is eligible for the plan.

SmartPower: WCEC has a "pay-as-you-go" program called SmartPower. If members elect to use this prepaid method, large bills can be transferred and paid out over time. What is especially helpful about this program is that it offers mem-

bers unparalleled real-time visibility into their kilowatt-hour usage. This knowledge is indeed power. Members who know how many kWh they are using and when they are using them typically shave about 20 percent off of their bills because they are conscious of their usage and will turn off unneeded appliances and electronics.

Employ Some Energy-Efficiency Measures

If your electricity bills track up and down with peak heating and cooling months, an investment in insulation may offer long-term payback. Another way to keep HVAC-generated air inside is to invest in a little caulking and seal air leaks around windows and

doors. A well-maintained HVAC system also saves money in the long run, as it runs much more efficiently. So annual inspections and tuneups are always recommended. These investments in efficiency measures now can help you start saving on your energy bill immediately and will pay for themselves many times over. Luckily for WCEC members, there is a rebate program that can earn them cash credits for specific actions.

To learn more about Levelized Billing and make bill paying easier and more convenient, call our Member Services Department at (903) 763-2203 or 1-800-762-2203, or email info@wcec.org. To learn about rebates, visit us online at wcec.org and download the rebate forms in the Member Services/ Great Rebates section.

What do the "Old Wives" say about "Old Man Winter"?

According to folklore, the seeds of a persimmon will predict how severe the winter will be. The old wives say to cut a seed open to reveal the design. If you see a knife, the winds will be cutting. If a fork shows, snow will be light. But if you see a spoon, you can expect heavy snow.



True or not, at WCEC we don't want any members to be surprised by harsh winter electricity bills.

Eliminate shocking winter bills NOW by selecting a different way to pay your bill and conserving without sacrificing comfort. Learn how by visiting WCEC.org then choose: Member Services / Eliminate High Bills.

40-degree difference from the outside temperature. The greater the temperature difference between the inside and the outside, the harder and longer a heating unit must work to maintain indoor temperatures.

Sadly, when the shocking electricity bill arrives on a milder day a month down the road, it's really hard to remember that it was THAT cold for THAT many days. Too, people don't remember the coldest temperatures because they occurred during the wee hours of the morning while they were sleeping.

The possibility of a cold winter doesn't mean you are without options for eliminating high bills surprises. You can change the way you pay your bills. You can also reduce your consumption by changing some habits and employing some energy-efficiency measures.



Wood County Electric Cooperative

501 S. Main St. • P.O. Box 1827
Quitman, TX 75783

CEO/GENERAL MANAGER

Debbie Robinson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Pat B. Lindley, President, *District 1*
Dennis Wright, Vice President, *District 3*
Lewis D. Young, Secretary-Treasurer, *District 7*
Burke Bullock, *District 2*
Brent Glenn, *District 4*
Jane Roberson, *District 6*
Cathy S. Roberts, *District 5*

Our Residential Rates						
WCEC - Rate A Residential						
Year	Customer Charge	Rate	PCRF	Rate & PCRF Combined	Overall Cost per kWh for	Cost Per 2,000 kWh
2002	\$8.00	\$0.06667	-\$0.00100	\$0.06567	\$0.06967	\$131.34
2003	\$8.00	\$0.06667	\$0.00250	\$0.06917	\$0.07317	\$138.34
2004	\$8.00	\$0.06667	\$0.00750	\$0.07417	\$0.07817	\$148.34
2005	\$8.00	\$0.06667	\$0.01250	\$0.07917	\$0.08317	\$158.34
2006	\$8.00	\$0.06667	\$0.02900	\$0.09567	\$0.09967	\$191.34
2007	\$8.00	\$0.06667	\$0.01900	\$0.08567	\$0.08967	\$171.34
2008	\$8.00	\$0.06667	\$0.02900	\$0.09567	\$0.09567	\$191.34
2009	\$14.00	\$0.06667	\$0.01600	\$0.08267	\$0.08967	\$165.34
2010	\$14.00	\$0.06667	\$0.02500	\$0.09167	\$0.09867	\$183.34
2011	\$14.00	\$0.06667	\$0.02600	\$0.09267	\$0.09967	\$185.34
2012	\$14.00	\$0.06667	\$0.03300	\$0.09967	\$0.10666	\$199.34
2013	\$14.00	\$0.06667	\$0.03300	\$0.09967	\$0.10666	\$199.34
2014	\$14.00	\$0.06667	\$0.03900	\$0.10567	\$0.11267	\$211.34
CURRENT	\$14.00	\$0.06667	\$0.03900	\$0.10567	\$0.11267	\$211.34

Rates are a snap shot of the month of July each year.

Our Rates Have Not Changed

EVERY YEAR IN THE COLDER MONTHS, Wood County EC members can be surprised by high bills. There are only two factors that contribute to an electric bill: 1) the rate and 2) the amount of kilowatt-hours used.

Please note that our rates have not changed since April 2015, when the power cost recovery factor (PCRF) was slightly adjusted by 8/10 of 1 cent.

See the chart depicting WCEC's historical residential rates since 2002. It's easy to see that the last time the member charge was modified was 2009, and the base rate has been stable since 2002.



Contact Us

CALL US
(903) 763-2203

EMAIL
info@wcec.org

OUTAGE HOTLINE
1-866-415-2951

FIND US ON THE WEB
wcec.org

MEMBER BENEFITS AND SERVICES

- Online account access and bill payment
- Paperless E-Bill services
- Free bill-paying app
- Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover accepted
- SmartPower prepay electric system
- Scholarships and youth programs
- Safety and energy conservation programs

MOBILE CONVENIENCE CENTER

Monday, First Methodist Church, *Van*
Tuesday, Family Dollar, *Mount Vernon*
Wednesday, City National Bank, *Hawkins*
Thursday, Brookshire's, *Winnboro*
Friday, Economy Drug, *Grand Saline*

Always Remember: We Work for You

AT WOOD COUNTY EC, we purchase only the amount of electricity we sell, and we sell the amount we purchase. Most important, there is no incentive to raise rates unless it is necessary; the cooperative is a nonprofit, and any margins are returned to the members. What we charge members is based on the cost of service. Therefore, we truly want to help our members control their usage and their bills. As a cooperative, we're in this with our members.



Sandifer's Tips To Save

LARRY SANDIFER IS A PROBLEM-SOLVER.

It's what he does every single workday. And he's good at it. Sandifer, Wood County EC's meter department and power quality services foreman, is a 37-year employee of the cooperative. In that time, he's learned a thing or two about electricity use, and he uses that knowledge to help others.

Sandifer wears many hats at the cooperative, but the one that is most well-worn is his "investigator" hat, as



he visits members to try to solve their high electricity-use woes. Usually Sandifer's assignments come from the Member Services Department, spurred by a call from a member whose bill has spiked significantly. They may believe their meter is broken, but that is rarely the case. Sandifer is steadfast in helping to find the culprit. Based on his experience, here are a few areas he cites as frequent electricity-use offenders.

Heat pumps: "The major thing I run into is that people have strip heat and no heat pumps. In summertime, your air conditioner will use 48–50 cents an hour. In wintertime, your heater is going to use \$1 to \$1.50 an hour." He says many people believe that it costs more to cool in the summer than to

heat in the winter, and so they are shocked by the price difference.

He also finds members who have heat pumps but don't understand the features and settings. He says, "A heat pump has [settings for] cool, off, heat and emergency heat. When wintertime gets here, members will slide the adjustment arm all the way across to emergency heat." He explains that emergency heat turns off the blower and turns on all of the heat strips, using

three times the amount of electricity. As an example, Sandifer recalls a story of one of WCEC's own retirees who had never had a bill over \$180. Then one winter, he had three successive bills over \$350 each. When Sandifer inspected, he discovered that by accident the thermostat lever had been moved to emergency heat. "On those thermostats, just one little bitty click can change it to a different

mode," Sandifer says, cautioning everyone to be aware.

He also routinely uncovers outside unit problems, such as when the fan quits working or the unit is stuck in the defrost cycle. When either happens, the heat strips run continuously. He recalls one case when a member's unit was clogged with dirt, dust and grass. In that case, he says he tested the amperage, and the AC was pulling more amps than it was rated for. After the member had her AC repairman come out and clean the coils, Sandifer retested the amperage, and it was reduced by 5 to 6 amps, significantly reducing the kilowatt-hour usage. He says this instance was actually in the summer with the AC, but it would make the same

extreme difference in winter.

Space heaters: Sandifer calls out space heaters as another villain in the fight against high bills. He says, "I see people running space heaters in greenhouses to keep their plants warm. They also put heaters in garages for dogs and cats and also heaters in well houses." Because these are in uninsulated areas, they run constantly, and because they're out of sight, they're out of mind.

He says a much better choice for efficiency's sake is to use a 200-watt heat lamp instead of 1,500-watt space heater. That can make the difference between costs of 16.5 cents per hour versus 2.2 cents an hour; that's almost \$4 a day versus about 53 cents a day. He says to use a space heater to warm a small space or a bathroom for a short time. But in a large or cold space, it will run constantly, and that has a high price tag.

Thermostats: Sandifer says thermostats can also be to blame. More than once, he's discovered that a "do-it-yourselfer" has installed a heat pump thermostat on a strip heat system. This causes the unit to run the air conditioner and the heating unit simultaneously. In the summer, he says, this effect happens, too—but it's because of a broken relay switch inside the unit. This can double or even triple electric bills!

Sandifer's Miscellaneous Finds

Dog/cat doors: These are simply big holes that let lots of your expensive heated or cooled air out. Sure, they are convenient, but they come with a continuous price.

Block heaters: Many people use these in the winter to keep their diesel truck engines, tractors and 18-wheeler engines warm. These units are usually 1,000 watts, and they run 24/7 without a shutoff until the user unplugs them.

Circulating pumps for water heaters: These circulate hot water throughout

the house to allow almost instant hot water. Depending on how far the water has to circulate, it can cause the water heater to work 20 hours a day if it's not insulated well. A quick fix is to install a timer on the pump so it only runs in the house when you need access to hot water.

Pool pumps: Most pool pumps have a thermostat. The factory setting is usually around 38 degrees, so that means it comes on even more frequently in winter than summer. Many people leave these on all winter to keep the pump from freezing, but they do drive the bill up.

Hot water leaks: Water heaters have a pop-off valve to reduce pressure by releasing water. Many have a water line near the valve, and this is how the water travels. If that line is hot, it means the water heater is continuously (and needlessly) releasing water then refilling and heating more.

Uninsulated water heater: Many times, people will put their water heaters in an uninsulated area, like an attic or an outside building. But if the water heater is trying to heat water to 120 degrees while the air around it is 30 degrees, it must constantly work to heat the water.

In summary, Sandifer says, one of the biggest things to keep in mind to help you understand the difference between summer and winter bills is the difference between the outside temperature and the desired inside temperature. If it's 98 degrees outside, and you are trying to cool to 78, that's a 20-degree difference. But if it's 30 degrees outside, and you are trying to heat to 68 degrees, that's almost a 40-degree change, and your unit will work harder.

All of us at Wood County EC want to help members detect the cause of out-of-the-ordinary bills and give them the knowledge to prevent them.

"Just call up here, and we will meet you and try to help you figure out what is going on," Sandifer says. "I am always happy to help someone who wants to learn."



Although fascinating to see, ice-laden branches and power lines can cause power outages, so it's important to be prepared.

Prepare for Winter Storms

WHEN WINTER TEMPERATURES DROP and storms hit, it can be challenging to stay safe and warm. Winter storm severity varies depending on where you live, but nearly all Texans are affected by extreme winter weather at some point. Wood County Electric Cooperative cares about your safety, and we want you to be prepared.

Heavy snow and ice can lead to downed power lines, leaving co-op members without power. During extremely low temperatures, this can be dangerous. If there is a power outage, our crews will continue to work as quickly and safely as possible to restore power, but there are a few things you can do to prepare yourself.

Stay warm. Plan to use a safe alternate heating source, such as a fireplace or wood-burning stove during a power outage. These are great options to keep you and your loved ones warm, but exercise caution when using them, and never leave the heating source unattended. If you are using gasoline-, propane- or natural gas-burning devices to stay warm, never use them indoors. Remember that fuel- and wood-burning sources of heat should always be properly ventilated. Always read the manufacturer's directions before using.

Stay fed. The CDC recommends keeping handy several days' supply of food that does not need to be cooked. Crackers, cereal and canned goods are good options. Five gallons of water per person should also be available in the event of an extended power outage.

Stay safe. When an outage occurs, it usually means power lines are down. It is best not to travel during winter storms, but if you must, bring a survival kit along, and do not travel alone. If you encounter downed lines, always assume they are live. Stay as far away from the downed lines as possible, and report the situation to our dispatchers if possible by calling (903) 763-2203.

Winter weather can be unpredictable and dangerous, and planning ahead can often be the difference between life and death. Wood County EC is ready for what Mother Nature has in store, and we want you to be ready, too.



JOSH BANKS | ISTOCK.COM

Seal gaps in your ductwork with metal tape or adhesive duct mastic to prevent heated air from escaping.

Tips To Tame Winter Bills

AS TEMPERATURES DROP, we want all of our members to stay toasty warm, but we also don't want them to break the bank to do it. Here are some simple tips to help members conserve on kilowatt-hour usage, which will also help them keep money in their own wallets.

Watch the Thermostat

In the winter, maintain a 68-degree temperature when you are at home and active; but when sleeping or away, consider lowering the thermostat a few degrees. Typically, the coldest hours are after midnight, so lowering the temperature even just a few degrees while you are tucked under the covers and sleeping can cut usage quite a bit.

Programmable electronic thermostats can help a great deal because you can set them and forget them. Consumer Reports says that programmable thermostats can save consumers about \$180 a year on their electricity bill. There are many types, models, and features, and the more expensive designs are Wi-Fi-enabled so users can control them via the Internet while away from home. There are also more

simplified models that are designed to be programmed once and forgotten.

Remember, no matter the type of electronic thermostat, the key factor to reaping the good savings is to avoid using the "override" function too often and let the thermostat do the job of maintaining the temperature that is optimal for energy savings.

Seal the Leaks

One of the cheapest ways to reduce your winter electric bill is to seal air leaks that let cold air inside and allow the expensive warmed air to escape. To find areas where there are leaks, members can perform a pretty simple test on their own that can help them detect air leaks: Wait for a cold day and then turn on your clothes dryer and any exhaust vents in your bathrooms and kitchens. Then walk around the house and feel for cold air coming in around exterior windows and doors. Once leaks are identified, use caulk, spray foam, or foam strips to plug them up.

Of major importance is ensuring that any ductwork is air-

tight and leak-free. Sometimes it can come loose or get torn. When that happens, heated air escapes into the attic instead of being directed inside the house. When you find gaps, it's best to use a metal tape or adhesive duct mastic to seal seams and joints. If you find cracks or seams wider than 1/16 inch, use fiberglass mesh and mastic. Actual duct tape is not recommended for many types of cracks because the seal does not last very long.

Insulation

While you are in the attic, take time to inspect the insulation. Over the years, it can settle and become less effective. At least 10 to 12 inches of thickness is needed to provide a good insulating barrier between your home's interior and the great outdoors. It may be time to add some more.

Maintain Your HVAC Unit

After you have sealed leaks and properly insulated, take a look at how your HVAC unit is performing. Proper maintenance saves money. Having your unit inspected and tuned up once a year will pay for itself in savings (especially if you claim a \$50 rebate through Wood County EC's Great Rebates program). In addition to tuneups, set up a regular schedule to check and replace dirty HVAC filters. When they are clogged with dirt and dust, the HVAC must work harder to move air.

Heat Pumps

In cold weather, a common misconception about a heat pump is that the unit is not working because the vented air feels cool. Users "remedy" this by turning on the emergency heat setting. This action turns on electricity-guzzling heat strips and tremendously elevates bills. Instead, members should operate in the regular heat mode all the time, which is the most efficient setting for our region. To better explain:

1. Heat pumps extract heat from outside and transfer it inside to raise the inside temperature (and the reverse for cooling).
2. In the winter, they blow 85- to 90-degree air from the vents. Because this is cooler than human body temperature, it feels cold coming out of the vent.
3. In the regular heat mode, the outside blower unit operates.
4. When the unit senses the need, it activates the auxiliary heat strips to help the unit reach the thermostat setting for short periods. When the unit senses the heat strips aren't needed, it turns them off.
5. In emergency heat mode, the unit will operate the heat strips only. This is the cause of many surprising high bills for heat pump users. For example, a 3.5-ton heat pump operating without heat strips pulls 4.3 kilowatt-hours (or \$0.47) per hour. The same size unit with heat strips uses more than three times as much at 10 kWh (or \$1.65) per hour.

Other Tips

Space heaters are inexpensive, but using them can cost a bundle if you are using one in addition to another heat source. Running a 1,500-watt space heater 24 hours a day would cost about \$4.27 per day. Doing that for 30 days would add more than \$128 to a monthly electric bill.

Fireplaces are great for ambiance, but they also let a lot of warm air sail right out the chimney. Fires in an open hearth are only about 15 percent efficient, which translates to about 85 percent of the warm air (including the heat from other sources) going up the chimney. So without certain considerations, your regular HVAC will have to work harder to keep your house warm when the fireplace is being used. Installing an insert, as well as a glass door, can help prevent some of that energy loss. Don't forget to keep the fireplace damper closed when the fireplace is cold to prevent air from escaping.



Electric blankets combined with lower thermostat settings can mean big savings in home heating costs.

Turn on Your Blankets

STOP SHIVERING AT NIGHT with a little help from an electric blanket or mattress pad that could save you up to 3 percent on your heating bill for each degree you lower your thermostat overnight.

Don't plug in an old electric blanket that you haven't used in years. Chances are, it's no longer safe. Newer models have better warming technology and built-in safety features, and they come in up-to-date fabrics, textures and colors.

Most new electric blankets come with temperature sensors that automatically warm the coldest parts of your body and prevent the blanket from overheating. Electric blankets and mattress pads are less bulky than they were in the past, and their wires are hidden.

As you shop for a new electric blanket or mattress pad, rule out any products that are not rated as safe by a trusted product safety testing organization, such as Underwriters Laboratories.

Here are a few safety tips to follow once you get your cozy new bedding home:

- ▶ Don't leave it plugged in overnight unless it is specifically designed for extended use. Instead, turn your blanket or pad on about 20 minutes before bed and turn it off when you get in.
- ▶ Electric blankets can burn the sensitive skin of the elderly and infants, so never leave the devices unattended with the heat on.
- ▶ Buy a product with an auto-off feature, and check it for defects or damage before plugging it in.