How will electric utility deregulation affect my electric co-op?

The legislation approved by the Illinois General Assembly guarantees the right of co-op members to choose the future course of their locally owned, not-for-profit utility through their member-elected boards of directors.

The language embodied principles developed from a series of meetings of electric cooperative leaders from across the state. There were three basic principles:

- regulation of electric cooperatives should remain in the hands of the local members;
- no unnecessary duplication of electric lines, and
- participation in deregulation should be at the discretion of each cooperative.

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Electric Cooperatives of Illinois
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Norris Electric News

Newton, Illinois 62448 • 783-8765

Quest for quality of life leads to country, results in self-sufficiency newsletter

If you're like many of us, you believe the rat race is over, and that the rats won. Just a few years ago, Terry Croslow and his wife, Sandy, were in about the same fix. They lived in the Los Angeles area, and spent many an hour sitting in stationary traffic and wondering why what they were doing was called a "rush hour."

Unlike most of us, they decided to chuck it all and return to the simple life. Fortunately, they were able to do that. Both are certified public accountants, and that profession lends itself well to working from home. All that's needed are the skills, a small clientele, and a healthy computer.

Still, they didn't just jump right in. They moved to Vincennes, Indiana, and lived on the edge of town, where they hoped to practice gardening and raising chickens, and Terry built up a clientele. Before long, they realized they were going to have to quit the city "cold turkey," and bought their place outside St. Francisville.

While they wanted to get out of the crush of humanity, they wanted the move to benefit their kids, too. So they decided to teach Lucas, who's 10, at home. Cassie, who's 7, is also in home-schooling.

"We wanted our kids to be exposed to our values more than those of others," Sandy remarks.

In addition to doing accounting and tax-preparation work, the Croslows are branching out into a venture they hope will provide an extra income.

As they go through the experiences involved in getting back to the basics, Sandy writes a newsletter. She hopes her publication, which she calls, "Let's Go Home!" will give others the courage to try living at home—really living—and working there, too.

The Croslows at the dining room table, where much of the formal home schooling takes place.

The newsletter discusses the merits of the simple life-style, and outlines the problems the Croslows have encountered. It also includes timesaving recipes, ideas on setting up home offices, working in a garden, saving money, home-schooling and just about any topic the family encounters.

Terry notes that they've met skeptics. "We've had people ask us if being together all the time isn't a problem," he says, "but we tell them we got married so we could be together a lot."

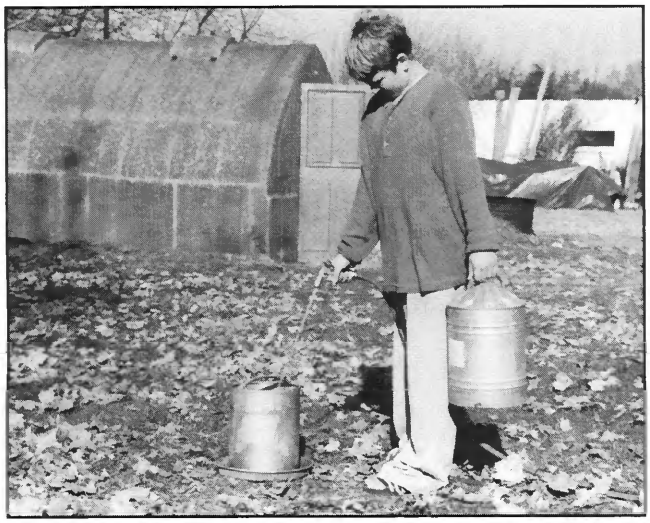
And they are. They're careful to plan lots of interesting and educational activities for the kids. They've helped in the family garden, taken care of the chickens, and have been to various camps to learn the social skills that many people fear are absent in the home-school curriculum.

"I spent four days with Cassie at a day camp last summer," Sandy says, "and she learned to build a campfire and cook over it, and other skills. And we took Lucas to a Cub Scout day camp where he learned Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation, boating safety, archery, BB gun skills, and tree and plant identification.

"Since the school year began," she adds, "we've become a little more formal, and the kids are following a more structured curriculum."

She notes that they use the "Core Knowledge" series by E. D. Hirsch, author of "Cultural Literacy," and that the program enables her to keep track of what the children should know at each age level. She likes it because it provides the requirements for a basic classical education.

While some may feel that home schooling takes a lot of time, the Croslows note that it does, but they see that as an advantage, rather than a problem. "It becomes a problem when someone **has** to stay at home, and that's usually the wife," Terry says, "but we both work at what amounts to part-time



The kids get an education that many miss these days, learning the responsibilities of taking care of farm animals. Here, Lucas fills a chicken waterer.

There's more to education than just the three Rs, and Lucas and Cassie are working on computer skills. Many of their lessons are on computer programs.

jobs, and we share in the home schooling and the chores with the livestock. It's a shame society looks down on 'house husbands,' because we believe both parents should take part in nurturing the kids and working toward their education."

And in addition to their book learning, the kids are getting an education much like farm kids got years ago, learning the responsibilities of raising chickens, gathering eggs, and so on. Terry and Sandy are giving some thought to buying a feeder calf or two, and Terry's weighing the pros and cons of raising a couple of pigs, which would live off table scraps, provide pork, and maybe offer some meat to sell, as well. They're also thinking about goats for milk, but they realize that such a venture requires a lot of commitment.

Their place is tailor-made for self-sufficiency, in a way. There are many sugar maple trees, and the Croslows decided to tap them for maple syrup. "It was an experience," Sandy says, "and it was a lot of work and a lot of fun at the same time. But we boiled gallons and gallons of sap for just a little syrup."

Of course, a major step in living the kind of life-style the Croslows have chosen requires cost-cutting in a big way. They bought a house that was several years old, but that was well insulated. Sandy added plastic film over the windows to keep the heating bill within reason, and they did some of their heating with wood.

They use a lot of fluorescent bulbs, because they give off a lot of light for a little electricity. "They're nice," Terry says, "and they give good light, but they're expensive to buy. We're gradually replacing our incandescents as time goes by.

"We think over time we can show people in our newsletter that the solution is not for the wife to go out and get a job," he adds. "We think it makes more sense for her to find something part-time that she can do at home, and to economize by not using so many convenience foods, like you have to do when you both work."

Sandy adds, "We believe there has to be more to life than just going to work."

And she hopes to spell out the successes and pitfalls in her newsletter, so others will have it easier. If you want to contact the Croslows, or subscribe, you can reach them at "Let's Go Home!", RR. 1, Box 260, St Francisville, IL 62460

Lucas, 10, helps 7-year-old Cassie with her studies and gets a quick refresher in the process. The Croslows use the "Core Knowledge" series to be sure the kids get a basic classical education.

Storms damage more than just poles, lines

As winter settles in, we begin to think of storms, ice and snow, and, possibly, long outages when roads are blocked and days are short. Many times when a storm blows into a co-op's service area and wreaks havoc, you hear a lot about material damage and replacement costs. You read about the number of poles broken, the miles of line down, and how many cross arms had to be replaced.

But while we tend to dwell on the material costs, they actually represent a small portion of the total expense such disasters bring.

The real expense is in labor and machinery. If a widespread storm hits and does a lot of damage, the people at your co-op understand that you want your power restored quickly, and they call for help. Other co-ops—and sometimes investor-owned utilities and municipals—will send crews to pitch in and restore power. Your co-op does the same, when it's okay and others are in trouble.

But from the time those "borrowed" crews are rousted out of their beds until they wheel back into their home office, the damaged co-op pays.

The trucks they bring are expensive to buy and operate, and your co-op pays for every minute.

The crews work hard, and they work up a hearty appetite while doing it. The receiving co-op pays for their meals. And in the few hours each night when they rest, the co-op also pays for that. It's all part of getting your power back on as quickly as possible.

One of the bigger expenses, though, is outright labor. Co-op linemen normally work a 40-hour week. The job is often strenuous and sometimes dangerous, and requires a lot of training. They're paid well, as they deserve to be. When you need to have your power back on as quickly as possible, they work a lot of overtime, and they're paid extra for that.

Lost revenues are another factor. Your co-op budgets for an income based on steady, day-in and day-out operation. A week of lost sales results in about a 25 percent reduction in the monthly money flow, and nobody likes that. Think of it as a week without pay, while you're working harder than ever and your expenses are far more than usual.

With all that adversity and expense, your co-op wants you to know what's going on, and how much it's going to cost, so it talks to you about damage.

And that's as it should be. You own your co-op. Area leaders built it some 60 years ago when the power companies wouldn't, and your predecessors—early members—paid to have it built. Some co-ops are still paying off their construction or rebuilding loans. The whole rural electrification program was an exercise in self-help. And the costs were borne by the member-owners, who borrowed money from the federal government at low interest.

Co-ops were organized as not-for-profit organizations so it would cost less to build the system, without dividends being siphoned off to pay stockholders. It was the not-for-profit nature that made the whole venture affordable.

You still bear the costs, and you deserve to know where the money goes. And that's why your co-op talks of broken poles and downed lines after storms.

So the next time you read about 250 poles being torn down by a storm, and so many miles of line, and a couple hundred cross arms being destroyed, please remember that the cost of replacing them isn't what hurts. What really hurts is the cost of having them put back in place.

It's all part of getting your power back on as quickly as possible. And your co-op (you) will wind up paying for it.

A deregulated electricity market means choice.

You can help choose the future of your electric co-op.

Yes, you. Electric cooperatives were formed by individuals to serve their own needs, not profit-seeking investors. They are run by folks just like you—men and women who care about the future of their communities, and who want high quality service and competitive rates. Your cooperative will be making many important decisions in the next few years that will affect you, your family, and your hometown. That's why it's more important than ever for you to attend your cooperative's annual meeting, learn more about this issue, and cast your vote.

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Newton man is confirmed basket case

Ronald and Marilyn Sidwell of rural Newton spend a lot of time working together out of a spacious shop near their rustic home in the woods. While she works to turn old quilts into various craft items, he weaves baskets: hundreds of them.

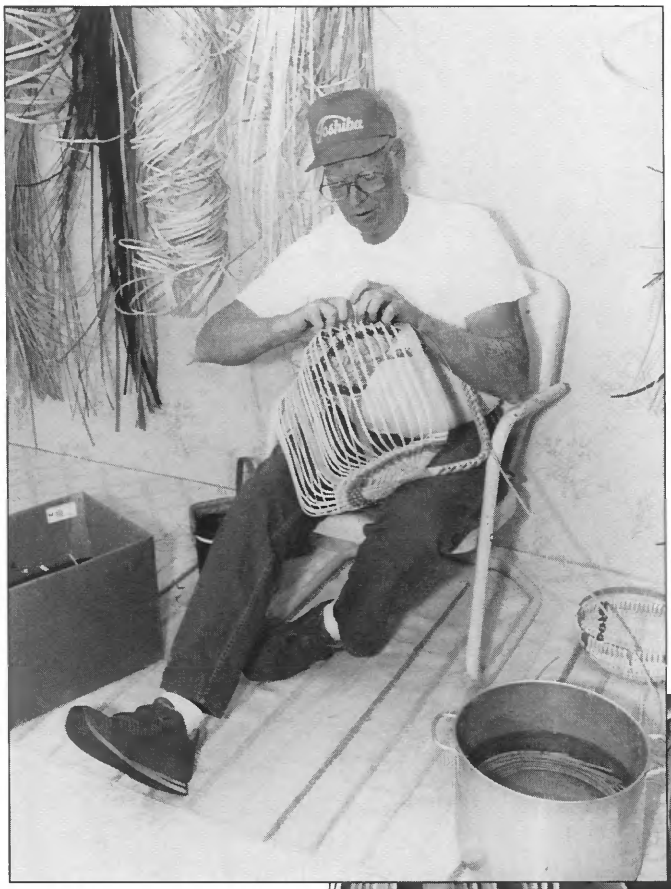
Ronald, who worked as a millwright at Central Illinois Public Service Company's Newton plant, was sidelined by a heart attack some eight years ago, and went from a busy, active lifestyle to doing absolutely nothing in, well, a heartbeat.

Like most of us, he found forced inactivity maddening.

"I was going crazy," he says, "and they wouldn't let me do anything! I finally snuck out into the woods and found a little oak tree. That's what I make the basket ribs out of. The rest is rattan."

He remarks that he had no training, but had gotten his hands on a couple of books that helped. "I did a lot of trial and error work," he says, "and I gave away a lot of baskets in my first year."

Ronald, who grew up in the Brownstown area, on the Kaskaskia River, was not always a millwright/basket weaver. He farmed some, but didn't have a big enough operation to be competitive. "I went to work as a laborer, then as an operating engineer, and then as a mechanic," he says, "and then I went to school to become a millwright.



Ronald, with a coil of rattan soaking in a pan and surrounded by tools of the trade, works on a basket.

"I have a grandfather who was a blacksmith and carpenter," he says, "and I guess I just had that kind of work in my blood."

It's likely that the bent to craftsmanship helped him make good baskets, because while he'd gotten off to a rocky start, he builds some beauties, now. He makes shopping baskets like women used to take to the grocery store, and baskets like those used years ago by people who gathered eggs out of the hens' nests. And he makes sewing baskets, too.

These hoops and baskets are just a small part of the inventory at the Sidwell place. Before long, all those hoops will be on their way to a craft show as part of several baskets.

While Ronald makes quality baskets, he also makes them in quantity. "I try to average just over a basket a day, so I'll have 500 made in a year," he says, "and I can sometimes make several small ones in a day, but it often takes more than a day to make a big one, so I still have my one-a-day-plus average."

Marilyn notes that she provides a fair amount of quality control, and Ronald agrees. "She's my toughest critic," he adds.

What to do with 500 fine baskets? Take them to craft shows, of course! The Sidwells manage to trek to about a show a month, where they enjoy selling baskets and visiting with other craft enthusiasts. "We're both 'people' persons," Marilyn says.

They also sell at some craft stores. There's an Amish cheese place in Atwood that stocks their wares, and so does Country Folk, a Vandalia craft outlet.

Ronald remarks that it's interesting that basket making used to be a joke among college students, and that someone looking for an easy grade might have talked about taking "elementary basketweaving." With an increasing interest in history and things natural, such classes are no longer a joking matter. "I was approached by a nearby community college and asked to teach a course," he says, "but I just didn't have the time. I'm happy to just sit here making my baskets, and going out and meeting people at craft shows."

For those interested in contacting the Sidwells, their address is 1735 E. 500th Ave., Newton, IL.

Ronald works to assemble a first-class basket.

These are but a few of the baskets Ronald makes.

Five free quick and easy ways to save energy in your home. . .

You could probably save a lot on your power bill every year, if you fixed all the energy wasters in your home. Every home is different, but imagine the impact a 5 or 10 percent savings could have! Best of all, none of these ideas will cost you anything but a little time, so why not get started right away?

1. Use your thermostat like the cruise control in your car.

When you're driving your car, you know what happens when you speed up and slow down, or drive fast. You waste gas. That's what happens when you frequently change the temperature setting on your thermostat: You waste electricity. Set your thermostat once in the morning and once in the evening, and resist the temptation to monkey with it at other times. Or install an automatic setback unit to do the job for you.

2. Take advantage of the sun.

You don't need a solar heating system to take advantage of the sun's warmth during winter. Just watch the sun's movement across your home to see which windows get plenty of sunlight, and open their blinds, shades and drapes to let the sun shine in. Close them when the sun's gone, to keep the heat in.

3. Turn off exhaust fans as soon as you're done.

Exhaust fans are handy in a kitchen or bathroom. But as soon as the fan's job is finished, shut it off. Otherwise, you'll pump heated air outside, and your heating system will have to work to catch up.

4. Close the door on wasted energy.

Are you heating a room you don't use? If so, close all registers, doors and windows, and check to make sure none of the items you've stored there need to be kept at normal room temperature.

5. Close your fireplace damper.

Up to eight percent of the warm air from your heat pump or furnace will go right up the chimney every day you leave your fireplace damper open. When there's no fire, close the damper. And even when a fire is burning, it's a good idea to use glass doors to conserve heat.

. . .and five easy ways to make it safer

1. Use safety covers.

Put safety covers on unused wall outlets so kids won't explore them with tiny fingers. Replace broken wall plates.

2.Take care of cords.

Replace frayed or cracked extension cords. Never nail or staple them to the wall or floor. And keep furniture off the cords, even if they're under a rug.

3. Use extension cords wisely.

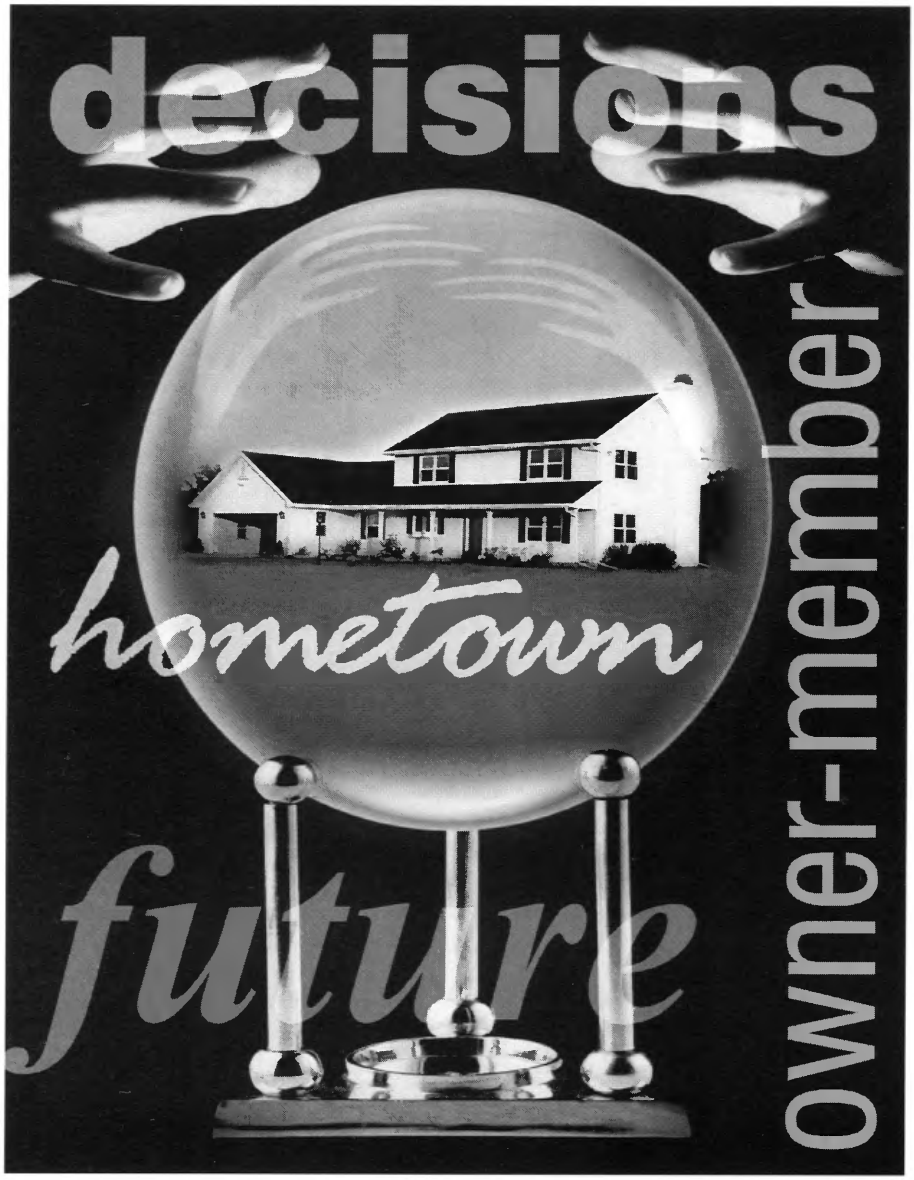
Extension cords are meant for temporary use. Don't use them as permanent household wiring.

4. Don't misuse plugs.

Use three-prong plugs on three-prong outlets. Never cut the third prong off to make it fit. And don't force plugs into outlets if they don't fit easily.

5. Use GFCIs.

Install ground-fault circuit interrupters in bathrooms and kitchens. They help prevent electrocutions where water and electricity might mix.



What's in the future of my cooperative in a deregulated electricity market?

As an owner-member of an electric cooperative, you have a special privilege — and responsibility. The future of the electricity industry is uncertain, but as sure as current finds a path to ground, you have a voice in your cooperative's future. Your cooperative will make many important decisions in the next few years that will affect you, your family, and your hometown. That's why it's more important than ever for you to attend your cooperative's annual meeting.

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Ready or not, deregulation is coming

For several years, a mixed bag of proponents has been promoting "retail wheeling," and the deregulation of the electric utility industry. Many of those involved are people who own no generation facilities nor power lines: they want to broker the sale and purchase of electricity for others, while slicing a tidy share of the pie for themselves.

Primarily, large corporations have been promoting deregulation too, in the hope that they could save millions of dollars by bargaining for their electricity. In short, they'd use their volume buying power to wring concessions out of suppliers.

Trouble is, as they save millions, the suppliers will see a cash shortfall. They hope to make up that shortfall somewhere, and you don't need to be a whiz to figure out that it's going to come out of the hides of those who have little or no bargaining power. Specifically, small residential users, such as most Norris Electric members, will pay more, if the deregulators have their way.

But while deregulation's boosters have a very definite axe to grind, they have accidentally done some good for many consumers. They have gotten legislation passed that will require many investor-owned utilities (IOUs) to reduce their rates.

Commonwealth Edison and Illinois Power Company (IP) are required to lower their rates by more than 20 percent, over a period of time, while other IOUs will also have to cut rates. IP and Com Ed, the state's two largest utilities, serve more than 3.5 million residential users. They will have to reduce their rates by 15 percent on Aug. 1, and will lower them again by 5 percent on May 1, 2002.

Customers of Central Illinois Public Service Co. (CIPS), and Union Electric (UE), will see savings of 5 percent on August 1, and smaller rate cuts on Oct. 1, 2000, and Oct. 1, 2002. Central Illinois Light Company (CILCO) customers will see a savings of some 5 percent over the same time frame.

Theoretically, customers should be able to choose power suppliers as time goes by. Commercial and industrial users are set to begin on October 1, 1999, followed by government users on Oct. 1, 2000. Residential users can choose on May 1, 2002.

Illinois electric cooperative people watched the deregulation maneuverings with care, because such moves always seem to precede an attempt to skim off large loads, while leaving the less desirable customers for others.

When the deregulation idea started heating up, Illinois electric co-op leaders set out to protect their members from the fly-by-night, fast-buck artists who promise lower rates, take a quick profit, and vanish.

Earl Struck, president/CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC), notes that electric utility deregulation is one of the most important public policy issues facing our nation.

"I'm pleased to say that Illinois' House and Senate members took up the challenge of electric utility deregulation and passed legislation that will protect the rights of co-op members. Language in the bill guarantees the right of co-op members to choose the future course of their locally owned, not-for-profit utility," he said.

Governor Jim Edgar signed the bill into law in December, 1997. The bill was long and complex, and went back and forth through the legislative process, being changed and adapted as it went. Recognizing the basic fairness and good sense of the part pertaining to co-ops and municipal utilities, the legislature left that language untouched throughout the deliberations.

"Work to include language to protect co-op members' rights began over two years ago," Struck said, "and electric co-op leaders from across the state spent many long hours hammering out differences and details. Their hard work resulted in a set of guiding principles that was adopted by the AIEC board of directors."

The principles were simple and to the point. Briefly, they supported deregulation so long as it ensured benefits to all electric co-ops and their members, and guaranteed adequate and reliable service to all present and future members.

The first principle states that co-op participation in deregulation should remain at the discretion of each individual co-op, and the second supported the Electric Suppliers Act, which prevents unnecessary duplication of electric lines, adverse environmental impact, taking of farmland, and other unnecessary social costs.

Finally, the most important principle was that regulation of electric co-ops should remain in the hands of the local members. Under this legislation, co-ops and municipal utilities will have three options. First, they can keep the status quo, so no out-of-state power marketer could come in and take their loads. At the same time, they wouldn't be able to go after other utilities' customers.

Second, they could enter the deregulated markets, with the

understanding that they could sell their electricity wherever they could, while other utilities would be free to solicit business from their members. The third option is a blend of the first two. For example, the co-op or municipal utility could decide that it is not in the best interests of its residential members to fully enter the deregulated market. There could be strength in numbers for the co-op's residential customers on the open market. However, in the interest of local economic development, job retention, or some other reason, it might be wise to permit an industrial customer--or customers--to shop around for wholesale power.

Choosing the right path to take will be very difficult, in many cases, but it is always better to make decisions like this as close to home as possible. Co-ops and municipal utilities are not-for-profit utilities established by and for the local citizens they serve. It is only right that they make those choices, not the Illinois Legislature, the Illinois Commerce Commission, or the U.S. Congress.

Deregulation is a very complicated issue, and it's important that members of Norris Electric be informed. Let the members of your board of directors know what you think. It's important for all of us to take the right steps as time goes by. Remember: It's your co-op.

Protect your family from carbon monoxide

It happens every year in many communities — a family is hospitalized because a propane or natural gas water heater or furnace backdrafts and fills a home with carbon monoxide.

In some cases the odorless, colorless gas is detected in time and a tragedy can be averted. However, even then it can take several days to recover from the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide is a common by-product of appliances that burn propane or natural gas. Carbon monoxide is created by propane, natural gas and other fuel-burning appliances including furnaces, clothes dryers, water heaters, fireplaces, ranges and even wood stoves, charcoal grills and kerosene space heaters.

When carbon monoxide is breathed into your system, it eventually replaces the oxygen in the blood, causing your body to literally suffocate from the inside out, resulting in brain damage or death.

As more homes are designed to be super energy efficient and airtight, carbon monoxide-polluted air is more easily trapped inside.

Everyone in your home is susceptible to carbon monoxide poisoning, but the hazard increases for unborn babies, infants, senior citizens and people with coronary or respiratory problems.

There are several ways you can protect yourself and your family from carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Read and follow manufacturers' operating and maintenance instructions on all appliances and equipment. Have a qualified propane technician check the system periodically and make any necessary adjustments to ensure proper combustion.
- Remodeling or repair work around the home may affect how a furnace or appliance performs. Before you do any insulation, caulking or sealing — or before adding an exhaust fan, wood stove or fireplace — call a qualified propane service technician to correct anything that could create carbon monoxide problems.
- Install carbon monoxide detectors in the house.

Battery-powered and plug-in carbon monoxide detectors are now available from many home improvement stores. The detectors constantly monitor the amount of carbon monoxide in the air and sound an alarm as an early warning when carbon monoxide is present. Detectors should be installed near the bedrooms and also near the home's heating source.

The units are about the size of a smoke detector, and if you heat your home with propane or natural gas they are just as important to your safety.

Because it's odorless and colorless, carbon monoxide is difficult to detect, and the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are difficult to recognize. Often they resemble the flu or a bad cold. Symptoms of low-level poisoning can include headaches, fatigue, nausea, dizzy spells and confusion.

Here are some warning signs to look for.

- Are you experiencing chronic symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, nausea?
- Are other members of your family also feeling ill?
- Do you feel better when you are away from home for a period of time?

If so, you may be suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning. To be sure, see your physician and request a carboxyhemoglobin test. This determines the percentage of carbon monoxide in your blood.

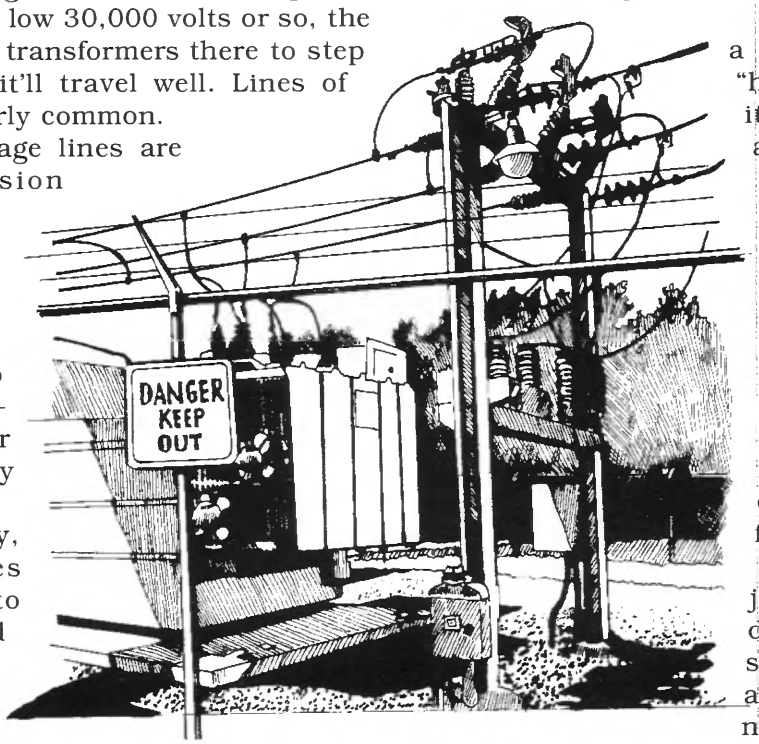
If you think your home may contain carbon monoxide, get out of the house immediately. Have an emergency plan so all family members can be accounted for. Don't go back into the house. Most fatalities occur when people reenter a home in search of loved ones. Call the fire department from a neighbor's home.

Rejoice! You own part of a substation

That's right: those big roadside things that have all kinds of wires going in and out of them are part of your co-op's system, and as a member-owner of the co-op, you own a part, — a very little one — of that substation, or "sub," as it's called.

As you drive by, it may have occurred to you that your sub is a thing of no great scenic beauty. While that's true, it's still an important part of the system. You see, electricity travels better at higher voltages. Generated at the power plant at a relatively low 30,000 volts or so, the power goes through transformers there to step up its voltage, so it'll travel well. Lines of 69,000 volts are fairly common.

Those high-voltage lines are called "transmission lines," and are used to transmit electricity over distance. When it gets to the sub, the voltage is stepped down to 7,200 volts, for shipment over shorter distances to nearby farms and homes.



Needless to say, all those voltages present a hazard to the untrained, and that's the reason for the tall chain-link fences that surround them. They're to protect people from the electricity, not vice-versa.

While a major part of a sub's function is to reduce voltage, the current is massaged in other ways there, too. There are lightning arrestors to minimize the damage caused by lightning strikes and voltage regulators to keep the voltage steady. Sectionalizers are there to help contain damage when something goes wrong. Your co-op has to buy its power, just like you do, and there are meters in the sub to tell how much current went through, and at what time.

From the sub, lines radiate out to various loads on the system, and they tend to get smaller as they get farther out. When they reach your home, farm or business, the power is stepped down again, from the 7,200 in the line to the 120/240 you use.

That's done by another transformer, which is more than likely at the top of a pole near your home. Depending on the size of your load, it may look like a five-gallon paint can, or a fairly large garbage can. Those that draw their current from an underground line are at ground level. They're called pad-mounted transformers, and are covered by a green or olive-drab box. Like subs, they're not for the uninitiated. We encourage you to stay away from them.

Subs are designed to serve a certain number of homes, farms and businesses. Occasionally a large load, like a factory or prison, will have a sub designed mainly to serve it.

Once in a while, a sub needs to be "heavied up" to enable it to serve a growing area. This involves replacing the existing transformers, usually three, with bigger ones. Other components are beefed up, too.

Why not just build big in the first place? Cost. Those big transformers, the main elements of a sub, are frightfully expensive.

Also, growth projections sometimes don't pan out, and a sub that's designed to accommodate a lot of new homes and businesses is underutilized. In that case, the transformers may be moved to a sub in a faster-growing area, and smaller ones installed. Or a sub may be dismantled and its load switched to nearby subs.

Since any sub will serve miles of line and hundreds of members, a component failure can leave many people without power. Large rural grids are particularly vulnerable to all kinds of weather disturbances, and so are prone to outages during any kind of storm.

To minimize problems, co-ops do their best to "feed" subs from at least two different transmission lines, so a power failure from one side can be compensated for from another. While this is also an expensive proposition, it's an important step in ensuring system reliability.

While subs aren't particularly attractive, they are extremely useful. Be glad you own a small part of one.

Taking the Big Step?

When you take that big step and remodel or build your new home, spend as much time thinking about your home's energy source as you did your China and crystal, the floor plans, and the carpet pattern.

When you choose electricity, you choose the safe, dependable, low-cost alternative. No flames. No fumes. No fuel tanks to fill.

Good for *all* Illinois.

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Russell Scherer, a man who truly cares, backs convictions with work.

Meet a man who helps others help themselves

by Betty I. Allen

When you hear everything accomplished by Russell Scherer, R.R. 1, Sumner, you wonder if there aren't 36 hours in a day. While he is involved in many worthwhile activities, there's no doubt about which one is nearest and dearest to his heart. Scherer can't say enough about the Sign of the Kingdom (SOTK), located in Sumner.

In its eleventh year, this fine organization has helped many people in a surprising number of ways.

Volunteer staff sorts through donated clothing, separating wearable items by size. "Even if they're rags, we take them. Buttons are cut off, zippers removed, and the fabric is sold. We must have certain types of material, but we can recycle almost all of it," Scherer said.

In addition to clothing distribution, furniture is available. Hospital equipment is loaned to anyone in need. Appointments with optometrists are available, as are eyeglasses, and uniforms are routinely stocked. "Basically, we're trying to help people find work," Scherer explained. "Most of them are simply people who have fallen through the cracks and need help." It is for this reason that two individuals obtain their GEDs each year with all expenses being picked up by SOTK. "A surprising number of them have gone ahead to college, and we're really proud of that," Scherer said.

The organization also arranges motel lodging for transients, and nursing home residents receive regular visits from volunteers. In total approximately 40 families (150 people) are being given aid of various

types.

Two young ladies, both handicapped, remove name labels from magazines, books, and religious materials. These items are then distributed to laundromats and jails, particularly the Olney city jail. The Red Bird Mission, located in the coal mining area of Kentucky, is also a magazine recipient.

Food distribution remains a high priority of SOTK, and is handled in such quantities that it must be carried on large trucks. Leftovers go to Tri-State SOTK in Evansville.

The SOTK board is fully integrated as to race and denomination. "If we know of anyone who needs help, but is too proud to ask for it, we make quiet arrangements for them to get help."

Their annual Thanksgiving Dinner continues to grow. The "full meal deal" was prepared for anyone and everyone. Carry-outs and home delivery were available.

During the Christmas season, some 100 children received toys from SOTK. Scherer's cousin, Pauline Purcell, takes all donated dolls, thoroughly cleans them, makes clothes for them, then washes and rolls their hair. "She has already begun work on next year's toy supply," Scherer said.

Russell was born in Olney, the son of Chester and Violet Scherer. The family moved to Tank City just south of Bridgeport. Scherer attended local schools but graduated from Olney High School.

Scherer began his horticultural career at the Lawrenceville Green House in 1948, assuming ownership in 1958. Although he retired from the business a few years ago, he has recently returned as an employee.

In addition to his SOTK work, Scherer helps serve meals at the Sumner Senior Citizens Center. He is a member of the Senior Board, an active member of Beulah Methodist Church where he is an associate Sunday School teacher. Scherer is also a member of the Red Hill Cross Association, Sunrise Services, Red Hill Old Settlers Association and a member of Farm Bureau.

He recently worked on improving the landscaping at the Red Hill Nursing Home, and is currently working on packaging hickory and walnuts to sell.

Scherer and his late wife, Roberta, are the parents of three sons, Dan of rural Sumner, Bob of rural Bridgeport, and Scott of Washington, D.C. There are 11 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

His sister, the late Vera Shaw, was a biology instructor in Olney. She was noted for her interest in birds and genealogy.

Citing Island Church, which provides volunteers one week monthly, and Mrs. Rachel Deimel, a 90-year old volunteer, Scherer said, "The Lord said we're to feed and clothe people. We're not always perfect, and if we're taken in, it's between that person and God. We're simply doing what the Lord says."

Editorial note: *Norris Electric Cooperative director Russell Scherer of Sumner was recently featured in a story in the Bridgeport Leader-Times. We liked the story so much that we asked for permission to reprint it, and the newspaper graciously granted permission and provided a photo. Story and photo by Betty I. Allen.*

Home-cooked meals still important to Americans

The traditional "Ozzie and Harriet-style" home-cooked evening meal is still important to Americans, according to a survey by *Good Housekeeping Magazine* conducted with the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers. Call it dinner, call it supper, but the evening meal is cooked daily on the stove 42 percent of the time.

Some 92 percent of the 501 female magazine subscribers said they cook a traditional evening meal at least twice per week. Oven usage was reported at "two to three times weekly" by 82 percent answering the magazine survey, which was conducted in the first quarter 1997.

Who's doing all this cooking? Even though a large majority of married men and women both work outside the home, women are still doing the big portion of the cooking, according to the survey. Women prepare the main meal 92 percent of the time; men just 4 percent of the time.

As to who cleans up after dinner, the results were similar. Women load the dishwasher 86 percent of the time versus only 7 percent for men and 3 percent for children. The numbers change slightly in terms of who unloads the dishwasher: 68 percent women, 13 percent men and 5 percent children.

The Cooperative's office will be closed on April 10, Good Friday.

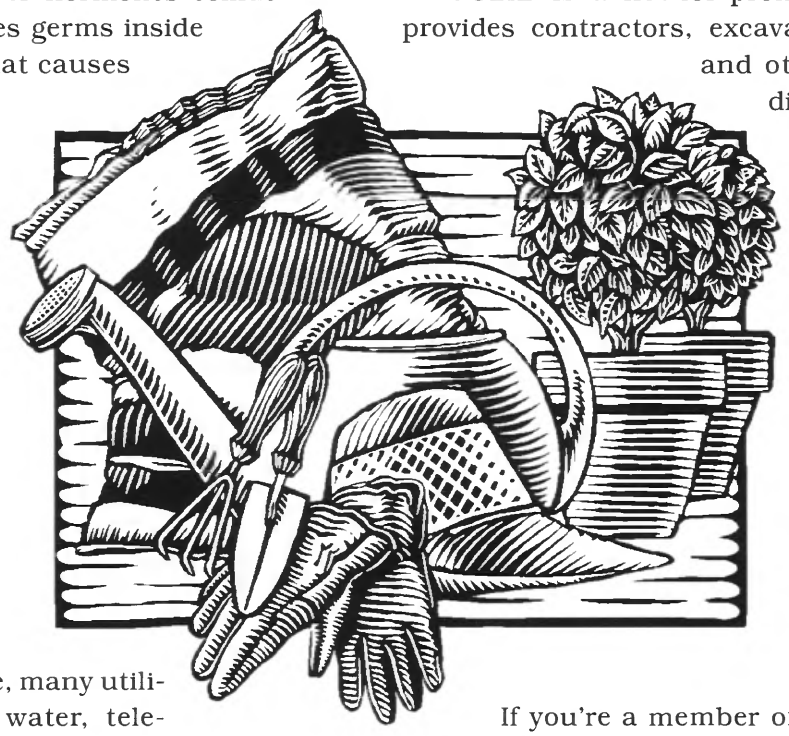
The cooperative office will resume normal business hours on Monday, April 13.

Avoid a shock--call before you 'disturb the earth'!

Experts tell us that the shorter winter days, with their drabness and scarcity of sunlight, give many people S.A.D., or Seasonal Affective Disorder. Regular people call this phenomenon "the winter blahs."

The situation is made worse by another condition health wonks refer to as "cabin fever," which is what happens to people when lousy weather keeps them from getting to the mall. Anyway, as spring approaches and days lengthen, that brings out another condition known as (pardon the scientific jargon) spring fever.

When spring fever hormones collide with the winter blues germs inside the human body, that causes perfectly normal people to do strange things. Some have the burning desire to head for the nearest mall, while others forsake their perfectly good kitchens and go outside to burn their food.



Still others get the uncontrollable urge to dig in the yard or its environs. If you're one of these unfortunates, please dig carefully. You see, many utilities, such as gas, water, telephone and electricity, are buried underground now. There's a very real danger that you may dig into a buried underground power line while burrowing in your yard, or along a roadside. Such an event could spoil your entire day and maybe the rest of your life.

Seriously, we urge you to be very careful when getting ready to dig. Unless you are absolutely sure there are no underground pipes or cables around, call first. Not to be terribly picky, but the law actually requires you to be sure you aren't going to have what's known as a "dig-in." The law is not intended to keep you from planting a tree or digging a hole for a new basement. Its main purpose is to assign financial responsibility, and it states that the one who digs into a utility line is the one who's going to pay for any damage and repairs that such a dig-in causes. If that won't motivate you to pick up the phone and dial the toll-free number, nothing will.

Fortunately, there are two easy ways to avoid such problems, and, as mentioned, both involve simple phone calls. Several of the electric cooperatives in Illinois are members of JULIE, or Joint Utility Locating Information for Excavators.

JULIE is a not-for-profit corporation that provides contractors, excavators, homeowners and others "who may be disturbing the earth," as they put it, with a free locating service through a toll-free phone call.

Also known as the "Illinois One Call System," JULIE was formed in 1974 by owners and operators of underground utility facilities to reduce damage to their pipes, cables and wires.

If you're a member of one of the co-ops served by JULIE, call (800) 892-0123, at least two days before the urge to dig overpowers you.

JULIE co-ops in Illinois are: Jo-Carroll Electric, Elizabeth; Corn Belt Electric, Bloomington; Shelby Electric, Shelbyville; Coles-Moultrie Electric, Mattoon; Southwestern Electric, Greenville; Clinton County Electric, Breese; Tri-County Electric, Mt. Vernon; and Monroe County Electric; Waterloo.

If you're a member of any of the other electric co-ops, you'll need to call their office before digging, and they'll send someone out to locate any of their lines. Be sure to allow them some time. They'll be glad to help you, and they'll appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Plant trees the right way

Your electric cooperative encourages you to plant trees, but not near power lines.

Help us serve you better. Plant tall varieties (like maple, oak, spruce or pine) away from power lines. Or plant a shorter variety (redbud, dogwood, crabapple). Then, with proper pruning, you'll enjoy beautiful trees that won't endanger lines — or lives.

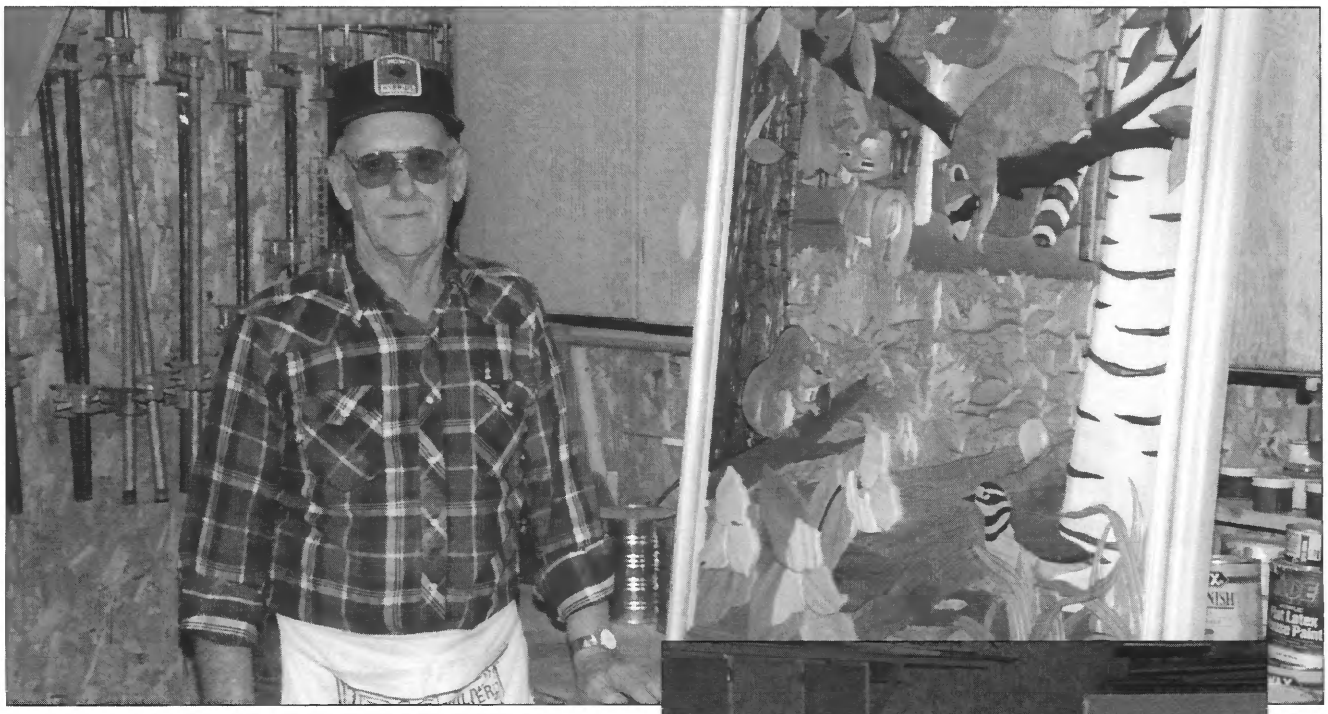
Good for *all* Illinois.

An affirmative action, equal opportunity employer

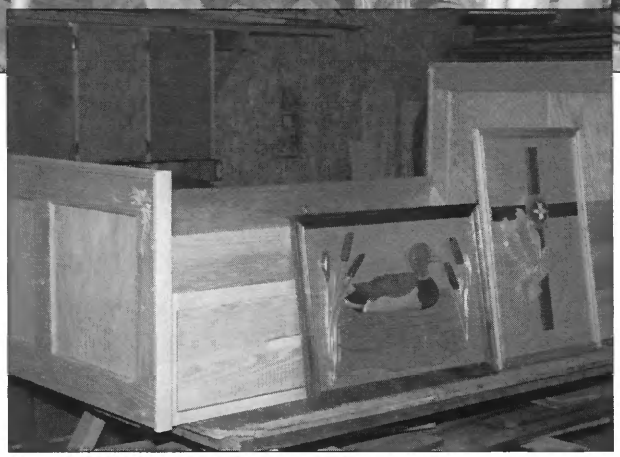
Norris Electric News

Newton, Illinois 62448 • 783-8765

Homebuilder turns to wood mosaics



Charles Fritschle is pictured with his 500-piece wood mosaic made with 11 different kinds of wood.



Before he retired, Charles built houses, but shoulder surgery forced him to get into a lighter line of work. A finely detailed trundle bed is pictured here, along with a couple of modest wood mosaics.

Charles Fritschle, long-time Newton building contractor, is into a different kind of woodworking now. After building 174 houses since 1960, he now builds cabinets and indoor furniture, and makes "mosaics" out of wood.

"I had shoulder surgery last year," he says, "and I couldn't do the heavy stuff any more, but I still enjoy working with wood. This keeps me busy and out of trouble."

Charlie notes that his houses spoke for themselves, and that he never had to advertise to get business. "People liked the houses I built and told others about them," he says, "and that was enough to keep me busy for better than 35 years."

Now, he does smaller work. And, thanks to his craftsmanship, he still manages to keep busy. He's in the middle of a trundle bed project, and the beds are beauties. One bed has a roll-away mattress under it, while its twin has drawers built in.

But his "Hidden Forest" is probably the most interesting of his projects. It represents a wildlife scene, and is made up of over 500 pieces of different kinds of woods. Charlie got the plans for the project from a woman in Texas.

It's made up of many different pieces of oak, luan, pine, walnut, redwood, cherry, western cedar, ash, birch, poplar and maple.

"I've done some crosses that hang in churches," he says, "and they're fairly simple to make, although I take special pains to make them nice."

It's likely that it's that attention to detail that kept him building some 5 houses a year for 35 years, and selling them without any difficulty.

WPCA charge no longer on NEC bills

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED
NORRIS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
Route 130 South - Newton, IL 62448
Phone 618-783-8765

KEEP THIS PORTION FOR YOUR RECORDS

NORRIS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
ROUTE 130 SOUTH
NEWTON, IL 62448
Phone 618-783-8765

PRESORT
FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
NEWTON, IL
PERMIT NO. 5

RETURN THIS STUB
SHOWING CURRENT READING WITH PAYMENT

IMPORTANT!! READ YOUR METER

PAID BY: CASH ☐ CHECK ☐

NAME	DOE JOHN				
ACCOUNT NUMBER	CYCLE	SERVICE PERIOD FROM	THRU	NBR DAYS	
1715602001	10	021198	031398	30	

PRESENT READING	PREVIOUS READING	KWH USED	CODE	CURRENT CHARGES
2997	2897	1000		73.85
			2	3.20

KW-DEM	COST PER DAY	DIAL	MULT
	2.46	4	10

RATE	CLASS	TYPE	TIMES EST	POWER COST ADJ.
1	1	0		.000000

POLE NUMBER	5M
METER NUMBER	12345678
LINE NUMBER	ZD-12-3-5#2
BILL DATE	3/16/98
Add if not Paid by Past Due Date	3.69
PAST DUE DATE	3/31/98

CURRENT BILL	77.05
PREVIOUS BALANCE	.00
TOTAL NET DUE	77.05

DOE JOHN
704 MIMOSA DR
HOMETOWN IL 12345

10
3/31/98
1715602001

PLEASE PAY	IF PAST DUE PAY THIS AMOUNT
77.05	80.74

If you'll look closely at your new Norris Electric Cooperative bill, you'll notice a welcome change: There is no longer a wholesale power cost adjustment charge.

The adjustment, or WPCA, was initiated years ago when the prices for all forms of energy were rising and falling — mostly rising — on a daily basis, and it enabled us to keep a fairly low base rate while still enabling us to factor in the changing costs, without too much fuss and bother.

Sometimes, the WPCA didn't amount to much, while at other times it was fairly substantial. We worked with AmerenCIPS, our power supplier, to negotiate an ending to the WPCA, and if you'll look at the sample bill, you'll see that there are several 0's where your WPCA used to be.

While we're on the subject of rates, we should mention that we had the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives do a rate study for us, and they determined that we may need an increase in the near future.

While this seems to be contradictory to the fact that some utilities are dropping rates, you should keep in mind that some of those decreases were mandated by law, and that their rates were perhaps out of line anyway.

We've played it "close to the vest" for several years, and haven't had an increase since 1983.

In those 15 years when we've held the line, our operations and maintenance costs have gone up 26 percent, and our other distribution costs are up by 52 percent. Our overall operating expenses are up by 29 percent. During that time, when Norris Electric Cooperative's rates increased by 0 percent, the consumer price index went up some 55 percent.

We have worked very hard to avoid any rate increase and we have succeeded. As mentioned, we have negotiated with AmerenCIPS in freezing our fuel clause adjustment at 84 one-hundredths of a cent per kilowatt-hour through the year 2004 and they have agreed to lower our demand charge as well as changing how the charge is calculated.

Therefore, the board of directors decided to eliminate the wholesale power cost adjustment from your electric bill beginning with the April bills and freeze your power cost at the 1996 level, thus avoiding any rate increase in the near future.

In the 60 years that NEC has been providing you with power, we've always served you at the lowest possible cost, and you can rest assured that we will continue to do the same in the future.

Geothermal fits right in with Arbor Day, Earth Day

Arbor Day and Earth Day remind us of the importance of energy conservation and reducing pollution. Planting trees and conserving existing resources are both excellent ways to preserve the earth.

Anyone who has access to electricity also has access to a way to save energy and money — big time. A geothermal system is probably the most earth-friendly solution to the problem of heating and cooling your home. It can also take care of about half your water heating needs.

If you stop to consider that heating, air conditioning and water heating together make up the second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in North America, you'll realize that a better way to heat and cool would help in reducing such gases. While the jury's still out on greenhouse gases and their effect on climate change, the simple fact that geothermal is so energy efficient is enough to recommend it. Think of the great savings as your major reason to go geothermal, and environmental benefits as the frosting on the cake.

Strangely enough, geothermal is a form of solar heating and cooling, without all the big unsightly collectors and exotic, temperamental hardware.

Instead, sunlight on the earth's surface is the key. A geothermal system uses earth-stored energy in partnership with safe, clean electricity, to offer a hard-to-beat way to heat and cool your home.

The heart of the system is essentially a heat pump with a difference: but what a difference! The average air-to-air heat pump is essentially a reversible system that removes heat from your home in the summer and expels it to the outside air. It does the opposite in the winter.

If the air-to-air heat pump has a disadvantage, it's that it starts losing its efficiency at about 10 degrees F., so you have to rely on a backup heat source to make up the difference.

A geothermal system doesn't have that disadvantage. It draws its heat or coolness from a liquid-filled grid of plastic piping buried 5-6 feet underground. Once you get about 5 feet below the surface of the earth, the temperature in Illinois is a fairly consistent 55 degrees F., the year around.

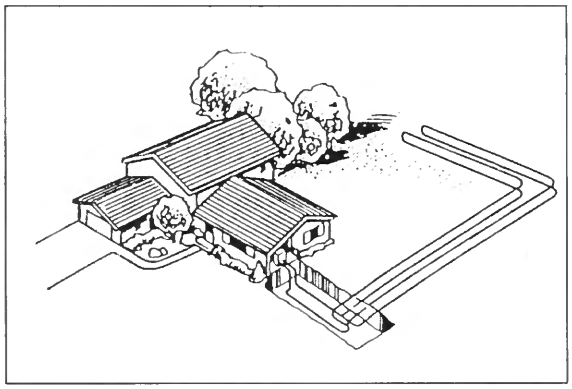
Instead of having to deal with 90-degree air in the summer, or -10 degree air in the winter, the unit is dealing with a 55-degree medium, which it handles very efficiently.

Many closed-loop systems are trenched horizontally in the yard around the home, and this is where a lot of the expense of a geothermal system goes. A pond or well will work, too. It is like burying a giant radiator in the gound.

If you don't have room for a horizontal loop, you can have a well — or wells — drilled. If you need to have your yard trenched, it's usually no big problem. The trenches are about 6 inches wide, and a simple reseeding will take care of the disturbed lawn. The pipes have no adverse affect on plants above them.

A big plus is that the heart of the unit is installed inside the house, in a garage, storage closet or crawl space, where it's protected from the elements. That prolongs the life of the unit. It is very quiet because there is no outside condensor fan.

While geothermal units seem too good to be true, they do have one disadvantage. They're relatively expensive to install because of the trenching or well drilling needed.



But don't let that deter you. A geothermal unit will save you so much money on your heating, cooling and water-heating costs it will pay for itself much sooner than any other kind of system.

And, since geothermal heat pumps don't burn fossil fuels, they don't give off harmful gases. That's good for you, and it's good for the environment, too.

Talk to the people at your local electric co-op. They'll be glad to tell you about the benefits of a geothermal heat pump.

DON'T LET YOUR GUARD DOWN

As the planting season winds down, details weigh on your mind . . . money, weather, factors vital to your livelihood. The most important concern, though, is safety. Tragedy can occur in that flash of an instant when you let your guard down — taking a short cut, overlooking basic safety rules. To ensure future planting seasons, always work the safe way.

- Watch out for overhead power lines.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment.
- make sure helpers are familiar with equipment they are using.
- Shut off power before fixing or unclogging machines.
- Keep extended machinery away from power pole guy wires.
- Keep shields in place.

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES OF ILLINOIS

Norris Electric News

Newton, Illinois 62448 • 783-8765

Standby power: Insurance against Mother Nature

Buying a standby generator is like buying fire insurance—you may never need it, but it is invaluable when trouble hits.

Although our electrical system is highly dependable and reliable, it is subject to the whims of Mother Nature.

How well are you prepared to handle a prolonged outage? Now is the time to take inventory of your home and farm. Determine how you would pump water, move grain, keep pipes from freezing, and provide heat and ventilation for livestock. How will you heat your home and keep foods from spoiling?

Now is the time to inventory your electrical needs. Assume you will experience long outages that could cause you inconvenience and financial loss. The cooperative does not sell standby generators, but we do have personnel to help you analyze your load and make recommendations. And remember, standby generators are not normally stocked in any quantity, so don't plan on buying one after an outage occurs.

Remember, too, the installation of standby equipment requires a positive double-throw switch. Operating a standby generator without one is extremely dangerous and could result in financial liability.

Let us help you guard against any of those acts of God no one can foresee.

What stays on when you go out

"There must be something wrong with our meter. We were on vacation most of the month. We couldn't have used this much."

We hear variations of this comment many times every month of the year. Is there something mysterious going on here?

Not really. The homes of today are increasingly equipped with appliances that consume energy without any active intervention by the occupants. Until we go on vacation, these appliances are considered the benefits of our economy. When we get back from vacation we find they have turned into liabilities simply because they have continued operating automatically while we were gone.

Old refrigerators and freezers are the main culprits in this mystery. And, old doesn't mean ancient. The older any refrigeration unit is the less efficient it is and can account for as much as 25 percent of the monthly electric bill. And an old freezer or two and the percentage is even higher. A hotter house (assuming the homeowner remembered to shut off the air conditioning) will cause these appliances to run longer to do their job.

Add to the list dehumidifiers, instant-on TVs, cable TV boxes, clocks, waterbed heaters, water heaters, anything battery powered with charger, sump pump, water pump, swimming pool pump—they all add to the usage and the bill.

Plus, when we return from vacation, we turn everything back on to bring the house into equilibrium and then begin washing, drying, ironing, bathing, cooling, etc., etc. So the electricity we saved by being away is now used after we get back—and maybe more.

So, enjoy your vacation. But remember, we use electricity whether anyone is at home or not.

Office closing

Norris Electric Cooperative's office will be closed Monday, May 25, in observance of Memorial Day. The cooperative office will resume normal business hours on Tuesday, May 26.

Postdated checks

Norris Electric Cooperative cannot accept postdated checks to be held and deposited at some later date.

The large number of payments handled on a daily basis makes it impractical to give special handling to certain payments. Also, following special handling instructions for certain payments involves additional expenses.

Moreover, our auditors recommend that all payments be deposited promptly.

Please do not send postdated checks to your cooperative. All checks are deposited immediately on the same day received, and if a check is returned by a bank due to being postdated or due to insufficient funds, there normally is a $15 additional charge passed on to the member.

Don't fight that old gas mower—get a new cordless electric one!

While it seems as though this winter has lasted for 14 months, and while it often gives the impression that it'll go on forever, it won't. History tells us that most years in the last millenium or so have had a spring and a summer, and it's reasonable to expect that this one will, too.

With that in mind, it may be time to turn your thoughts to dragging out the lawn mower and getting it ready for the cutting season. And consider this: If you had trouble starting that old mower last year, you'll probably have even more trouble this time around! And if you want to get it into the shop before everyone else takes theirs in, now's a good time to do that.

If your mower's old enough that you dread having to try starting it again, it just might be the time to junk that old dog and buy a shiny new cordless electric mower. They're relatively inexpensive, require little maintenance, are easy to use and don't cost a lot to operate.

Cordless electric mowers, while fairly unusual, have a lot going for them. They're easy to start, quieter and cost less to operate than their fossil-fueled counterparts, and they pollute far less.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted a nationwide study recently to check out the tailpipe emissions of gas mowers. The results were amazing. The agency determined that the typical gas mower emits eight times more nitrous oxides than the electrics, and 3,300 times more hydrocarbons. They also emit 5,000 times as much carbon monoxide and more than twice the carbon dioxide per hour than electrics. Of course, these figures take into account the emissions of the power plants generating the electricity to run the cordless mowers.

But there's more. The study did not even consider emissions resulting from gasoline spills during refueling, which the EPA estimates may amount to 17 million gallons a year. That's more than the Exxon Valdez spilled when it ran aground.

And it didn't consider emissions from leaky gaskets and other engine parts, emissions that are released after a hot engine is turned off, and the hydrocarbons continuously emitted by gas tanks through evaporation. The California Air Resources Board estimates that these four types of emissions combined may actually be more polluting than the mowers' tailpipe emissions.

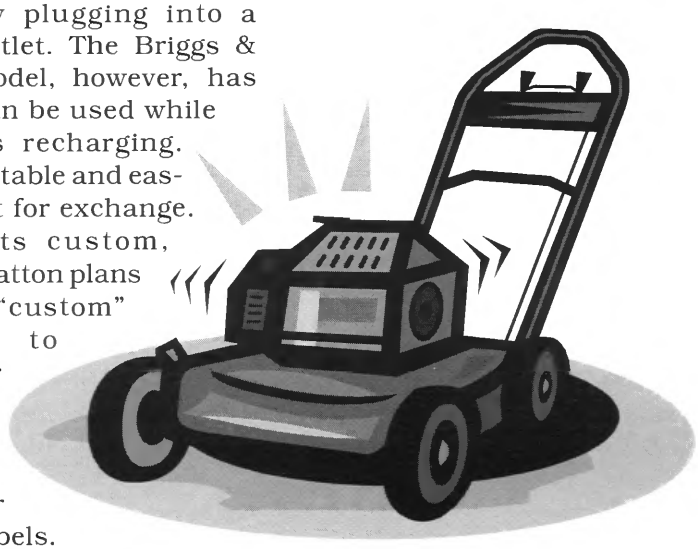
Just a few years ago, there were only two manufacturers of cordless mowers, Ryobi and Black & Decker. Now there are several, and it looks as though there will be more. MTD Corporation and Husqvarna have weighed in with their entries, and so has Briggs & Stratton—the world's largest producer of air-cooled gasoline engines! Most cordless electric mowers come with one lead-acid battery, which can easily be recharged by plugging into a 120-volt outlet. The Briggs & Stratton model, however, has two. One can be used while the other's recharging. They are portable and easily lifted out for exchange.

As is its custom, Briggs & Stratton plans to supply "custom" versions to mower manufacturers who will market them under their own labels. So while you'll be able to find plenty of mowers with Briggs & Stratton powertrains, don't bother to look for a mower under that company's brand.

A recent survey of cordless mower users indicated that most were quite satisfied with their cordless mowers, citing light weight, ease of use and quietness as important factors in their satisfaction.

But they offered suggestions for improvement, too. Some recommended bigger batteries, because their mower wouldn't cut their entire lawn at one go. Others wanted more power because corldess mowers have trouble in tall, tough grass. Even so, most felt that the manufacturers were on the right track, and that cordless mowers will be an even bigger part of the lawn mowing scene of the future. And they're almost certain to be. Some smog-bound municipalities are urging residents to go back to the old reel-type mowers, and many are considering passing laws to prohibit gas mowers.

While it's difficult and often counterproductive to try to predict the future, it's pretty safe to bet that there's a cordless electric lawn mower in your future!



As June rolls around, we need to think safety

June is Safety Month, and while we should practice safety the year around, we might be wise to use the month to recommit ourselves to safe practices in and around the home, much as we use the beginning of a new year to work on self-improvement.

Let us hope we are more successful with safety than with New Year's resolutions.

While we tend to deal with electrical safety most often on this page, it is important to review all kinds of home safety occasionally, and these tips are intended to remind you of the many hazards in the modern household. You may be able to think of more.

Do you have smoke detectors? If not, run out and get some. They're your first line of defense in saving you and your family from fire, and they're very inexpensive. Make it a point to check your batteries twice a year, when you change your clocks back and forth for daylight-saving time.

While not very common, carbon monoxide detectors are being installed in more and more homes, and you should get one if you have any fuel-burning appliances. They are more important now than they were in the past, because homes tend to be tighter, and the natural ventilation that used to provide air exchanges is no longer there.

Ground-Fault Circuit Interrupters, or GFCIs, are also an important part of home safety. Like smoke detectors, they are recognized as being so important that they're now required by law in new construction, in kitchens, bathrooms and for outdoor electrical outlets. Unfortunately, they're uncommon in even fairly new homes, and they offer enough protection that you might want to talk to an electrician about having some put in your home. They're intended to protect you from shock or electrocution if you come in contact with a faulty circuit or appliance.

There are some on the market that can be used with existing wiring, and you'd be wise to invest in some of them until you can get your home wired. Some extension cords intended for outdoor use have them built into one end, and you can buy plug-in units to use in kitchen and bathroom receptacles.

Be sure to have an emergency evacuation plan, so all family members can escape in the event of a fire. Have a designated place to meet outside, so nobody goes back in to look for someone who may be perfectly safe but out of view. Practice your plan, especially if you have children.

It's a good idea to have fire extinguishers where you can get at them, and near an exit. If firefighting efforts fail, it's important to be able to get away from smoke and flames. A multipurpose dry chemical ABC extinguisher is best for general home use.

Keep a well-stocked first-aid kit handy, and be sure the contents are up-to-date, since some medications have expiration dates. Make sure family members know how to use the kit. First aid kits should be checked periodically for expiration dates and to restock those items which are missing from prior use.

It's important to get help quickly in an emergency, and one good way to do that is to have a list of emergency telephone numbers posted near every phone in your home. If you have children, teach them to dial emergency numbers. And stress that they should not dial emergency numbers unless there's a real emergency!

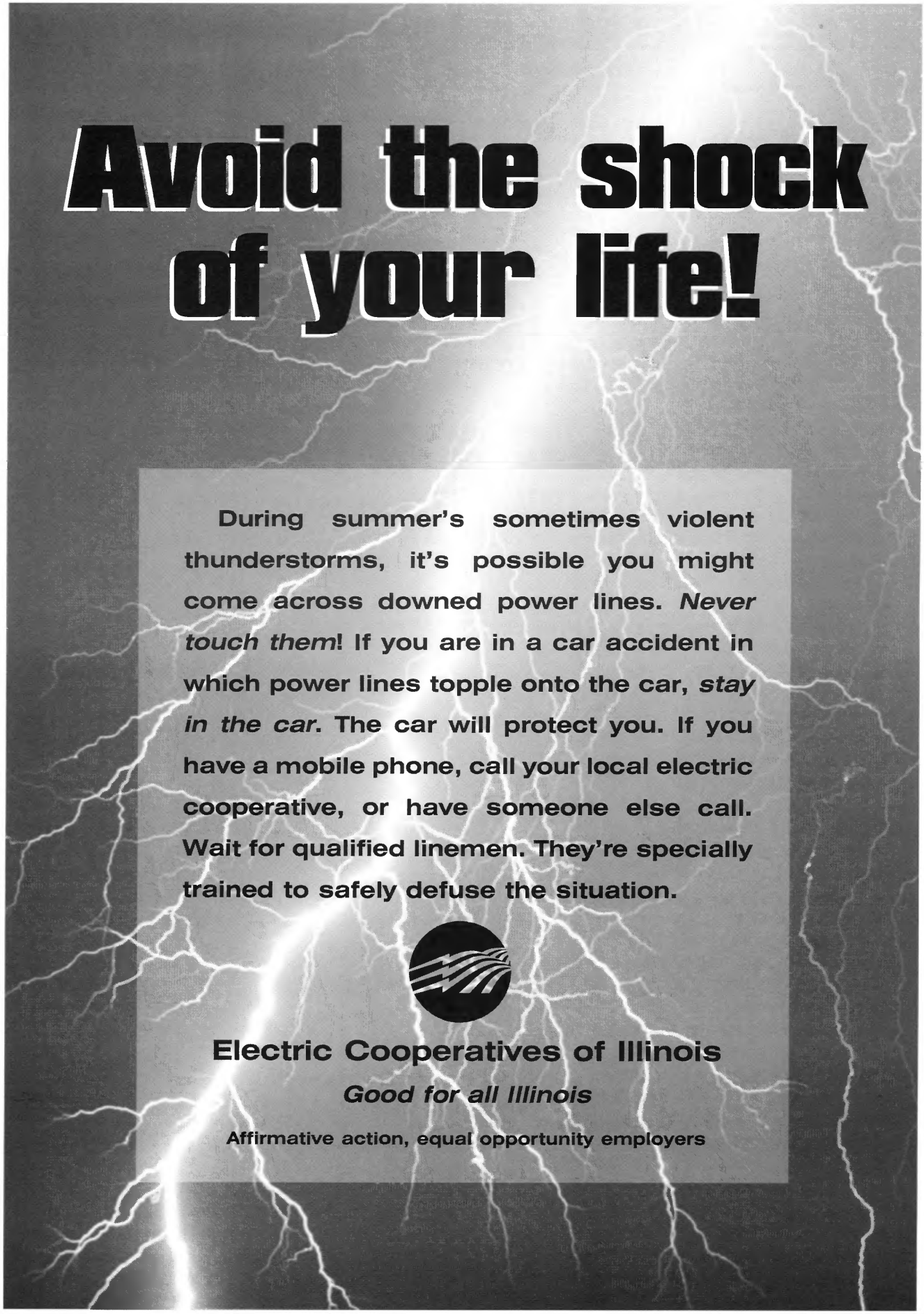
While it's nearly impossible, make a special effort to keep flashlights handy, and try to keep the batteries current. You may want to change them out when you check your smoke detector batteries. It's a good idea to have at least one flashlight for each bedroom. Since kids tend to find flashlights terribly fascinating, get toy ones for them, and tell them they can use them any way they want to, but that the real flashlights are off limits. That doesn't always work, but it's worth a try.

Know how to shut off all the energy sources coming into your home. Put a tag on the valves for gas, oil, water and electricity, and know how to shut them off safely. Some valves take a special wrench, and it's a good idea to have one taped to the pipe leading to the house, or kept in a similarly handy location. Know how to use them.

An emergency kit is essential in Illinois homes, because of the danger, nearly any time of the year, that the weather will do something very unpleasant. Tornadoes can strike at any time, and lesser windstorms can also cause prolonged power outages. Winter storms can do the same thing, and cold weather may be life-threatening. And there's always the possibility, however remote, of a flood or earthquake.

Your emergency kit should include a battery-powered radio (keep fresh batteries, too), a flashlight, clothing and bedding, non-perishable food that needs minimal preparation, containers of water and a first-aid kit. During winter time, you may want to have a portable space heater that burns kerosene, butane or propane, just to be on the safe side.

We're sure you can think of more, but the main thing is to get started planning now — don't wait for New Year's day!


Avoid the shock of your life!
During summer's sometimes violent thunderstorms, it's possible you might come across downed power lines. *Never touch them*! If you are in a car accident in which power lines topple onto the car, *stay in the car*. The car will protect you. If you have a mobile phone, call your local electric cooperative, or have someone else call. Wait for qualified linemen. They're specially trained to safely defuse the situation.
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Prevent tragedy: Lock up poisons in your home

There are precautions to help prevent children from accidentally poisoning themselves. Remember that young children will often eat and drink almost anything and they are extremely curious. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends these safety measures to reduce the risk of poisoning:

• Keep household products and medicines out of reach and out of sight of children, preferably in a locked cabinet or closet. Even if you leave the room only briefly, put the container away! If your child is able to climb, make sure the location is well above where he or she can reach.

• Store medicines and dietary supplements (especially iron pills) separately from other household products and keep these items in their original containers — never in cups or soft-drink bottles. For example, never store cleaning fluids near food.

• Be sure that all products are properly labeled, and read the label before using.

• Always turn the light on when giving or taking medicine to be sure you have the right medicine and the correct measure or dosage.

• Children imitate adults, so don't take medications in their presence. Don't drink medications from the bottle.

• Medicines are not candies. Never refer to them as such, even if you are trying to get the child to take medicine.

• Clean out your medicine cabinet periodically. Flush old medicine down the toilet, rinse the bottle and throw it away.

• Purchase household products and medications (including prescription drugs) that are in child-resistant packaging.

Energy-saving tips for your kitchen

Have you exhausted your little bag of tricks that help you cut energy costs? Never assume you've thought of everything! Norris Electric Cooperative offers the following tips on how to cut energy use — and costs — in the kitchen:

- Do you own gas appliances? Look for blue flames — yellow flames mean the gas is burning inefficiently and needs adjustment.
- If possible, use small electric pans or toaster ovens for small meals rather than your large stove or oven. A toaster oven uses one-third to one-half the energy of a regular oven.
- Use pressure cookers and microwave ovens whenever it is convenient to do so. They can save energy by significantly reducing cooking time.
- If you cook with electricity, turn off the burners and/or oven several minutes before you're done cooking. The heating element stays hot long enough to finish the job without using more electricity.

Don't take your appliances for granted!

Your friends at Norris electric Cooperative want to remind you not to take your appliances for granted. Spend a little time with them — take a few minutes to perform some simple checks that can help prevent electrical fires. Here are some simple things you can do that might save lives:

• To make sure appliances are in good condition, look for breaks in power cords, plugs or connectors.

• An appliance that repeatedly blows a fuse or trips a circuit breaker could indicate a defect that may cause a fire or electrical shock. Unplug the appliance immediately and have it repaired or replaced.

• Unplug any appliance that has given you an electrical shock and do not use it until it has been checked and repaired by a qualified technician.

• Keep all electrical cords and products — such as radios, televisions, hairdryers and curling irons — away from water in a sink or tub.

Do you have questions about electrical safety in your home? Call your electric cooperative for more information — your co-op will be glad to help you.

Safety equipment offered at cost for older tractors

North America's five leading tractor companies are working together to help owners of older tractors equip them with rollover protective structures (ROPS) and seat belts. The safety devices play an important role in reducing deaths and injuries associated with rollovers. As an incentive to owners, AGCO Corp., Case Corp., Deere & Company, Kubota Tractor Corp. and New Holland North America are making it possible to purchase ROPS and seat belts at the companies' cost, according to the National Safety Council (NSC).

This joint effort is aimed at reducing the two leading causes of death and injury to tractor operators. A recent study of 76 tractor rollover fatalities by Iowa State University showed all the victims were operating tractors without ROPS and seat belts. If a tractor rolls over and it doesn't have a ROPS, there's a 75 percent chance of the operator dying, according to Iowa State researchers. However, if the tractor has a ROPS and the driver is wearing a seat belt, there is a 95 percent or greater chance of the driver walking away from the rollover accident. Wearing a seat belt is important, because it ensures the operator remains in the protection zone of the ROPS.

ROPS and seat belts became standard equipment on tractors in 1985. However, according to a 1994 survey by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 62 percent of the estimated 4.7 million tractors in use on farms were not equipped with ROPS and seat belts.

The five tractor companies are offering kits at cost to their dealers and asking them to sell these kits without markup. For tractor owners concerned about storage facilities with low overhead clearance, Folding ROPS kits are also available for some tractors. Most ROPS kits cost less than $600, plus freight and installation. The NSC says tractor owners should contact their local dealer for more information.

Remember to look for the energy star label

If you are considering purchasing a new home appliance, a piece of office equipment or heating and cooling systems, remember to look for the Energy Star label, the symbol for energy efficiency.

Whose symbol? The Energy Star label was created by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy. Together they set energy-efficiency criteria that products must meet in order to qualify for the label. In voluntary partnership with the government, manufacturers and retailers agree to put the Energy Star label on qualifying equipment

By using Energy Star products, you will not only save money, you help the environment by using less energy. For example, Energy Star appliances typically exceed federal efficiency standards by 13 to 20 percent — as much as 110 percent for some appliances.

energy

EPA DOE

SAVING THE EARTH. SAVING YOUR MONEY.

Be alert! 'Tis the season to be tornadoed!

The weather this year has been odd, to say the least, and it's not unreasonable to expect the tornado season to be odd, too. In Illinois, the towns of Mattoon and Bath have already experienced severe damage. While we hope the worst is over, it still makes good sense to prepare.

Although peak storm activity occurs during April, May and June — in a normal year — tornadoes can blow in any time. And while most take place between 3 p.m. and 8 p.m., they can form at any time; late night storms seem to be the norm this year.

There are two different kinds of warnings involving tornadoes. A tornado watch simply means that the weather is getting rotten and that a tornado may develop if things get worse. You can go about your normal business if you keep an eye on the weather.

This might be the time to stash a few items in the safest place in your house, such as a flashlight, battery-powered radio and blankets and pillows to cover yourself, for protection.

A tornado warning means that the weather has gotten dangerous, and that it's time to seek shelter in that safe (relatively) little nest you prepared earlier. Warnings aren't issued unless a tornado shows up on radar, or one has actually been sighted.

If you hear a warning, go to your basement. That's by far the safest place. In many homes, a stairwell or inside hallway on the lowest floor will be the safest place. Get into a closet, if you need to.

If you're in a public building, look for a designated shelter. Normally, there'll be one in an interior area on the lowest floor. Stay away from outside walls, doors and windows. Stay out of large rooms, such as gyms, and avoid parked vehicles.

If you're outside when a tornado comes, head for the nearest shelter. If you're caught out in the open, lie down in the nearest ditch or depression, preferably away from trees and power lines. Since flying debris is a major cause of tornado deaths and injuries, cover your head as well as you can.

If you're in your car, get out and find shelter, if there is any at all. Otherwise, lie flat in a depression. Don't try to outrun a tornado in your car.

One of the worst possible places to be in the event of a tornado is in a mobile home. You're well advised to leave one immediately if you hear a tornado warning and take your chances in the best shelter you can find. Experts agree that you're better off in a ditch or small depression than in a mobile home.

Incidentally, some areas require that you have tie-downs on your mobile home. You might be wise to check into the possibility of having a tie down kit installed. But remember: While they'll help against severe windstorms, they still won't keep a full-blown tornado from shredding your mobile home.

If you're stuck in a tornado-prone area and a house without a basement, there is an option you may look into. Years ago, it was common practice to have a small storm shelter out in the yard, usually about half underground and mounded over. As more and more homes were built with basements, they fell out of favor.

And some weather watchers tell us that the weather between the end of World War II and about 1990 was more stable than we had any right to expect. It was, in short, an aberration. Perhaps the odd weather we've been having the last few years isn't odd at all, but the norm. If that's the case, more people may well need some form of storm shelter, and if a basement isn't a viable option, maybe one of the little outside shelters would be a life saver.

If you have a mobile home, and no access to a better form of protection, you may want to give some thought to building a shelter.

Whatever the case, with the weather the way it's been lately, you'll be wise to keep a special eye out for watches and warnings. We may have a lot of them yet this year.

DO YOU KNOW THE 10-FOOT RULE?

No, it's not a new dance step, and it's not a giant measuring stick.

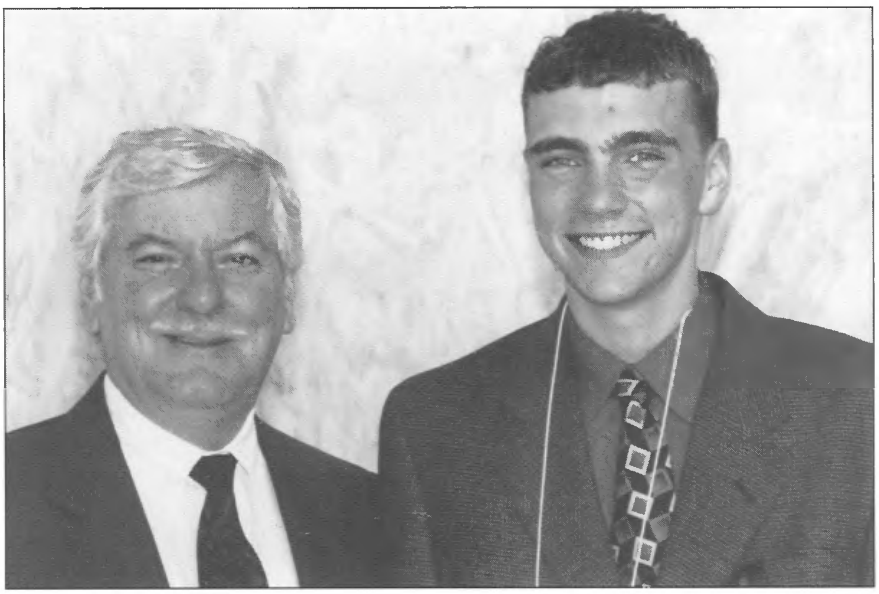
The rule refers to the distance extending ten feet in every direction from any power line. It's the distance you should observe when you're working outdoors with equipment or machinery, such as a crane, forklift, backhoe, dump truck, TV antenna, drilling rig or block loader.

So play it safe, and remind your co-workers and neighbors to practice the "10-foot rule" too.

A safety message from your electric cooperative

Norris Electric News

Newton, Illinois 62448 • 783-8765



The week of June 12-19 was a memorable one for Brian Hetzer of Wheeler. He spent a week exploring Washington, D.C., meeting with Illinois congressional leaders and learning about government during the annual "Youth to Washington" tour, sponsored by the electric and telephone cooperatives of Illinois. Hetzer represented Norris Electric Cooperative, Newton, and traveled as a "Willie Wiredhand" student, paying his own way. He met with Congressman Glenn Poshard on Capitol Hill and was among 62 rural youth leaders selected for the trip. In addition to the Capitol, students also explored Arlington National Cemetery, the Smithsonian Museums, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial, the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia and a number of other historical sites. Pictured are (l-r): Congressman Poshard and Hetzer. While most tour participants win the trip in as essay contest, sons and daughters of employees are ineligible to compete, but are able to go on the tour at their own expense. Brian is the son of NEC board member Kent Hetzer.

Scott Ghast (left) and Tony Zuber, NEC linemen, sharpened their underground splicing and cable termination skills in a week-long class held May 18-22 at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield. The class is part of an on-going hot line training school hosted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, Springfield.

Improve air conditioning cost and comfort

Correctly sizing an air conditioning unit is important. Too large a system will do a poor job of dehumidification and will cost more to purchase and to operate. Too small a system will not cool your home adequately.

Systems are sized to meet peak heating and cooling needs, and units are sized by the "ton," which represents 12,000 BTUs of cooling per hour. Factors such as geographical area, building orientation, insulation, windows and doors are considered in sizing the unit.

Air conditioner sizing should never be based merely on an estimate. Methods are available from professional organizations such as ASHRAE (the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers, Inc.) and ACCA (the Air Conditioning Contractors of America). Computer software is also available to assist homeowners in sizing their own air conditioning systems.

Air conditioners are rated by their seasonal energy efficiency ratio (SEER) and the sensible heat fraction (SHF). The higher the SEER rating the greater the efficiency. A minimum SEER of 10 is required by the National Appliance Efficiency Standard. The SHF expresses the unit's dehumidification ability. The lower the SHF, the better it dehumidified conditioned air. The suggested maximum SHF is 0.80. Units with a higher rating may not adequately dehumidify some homes.

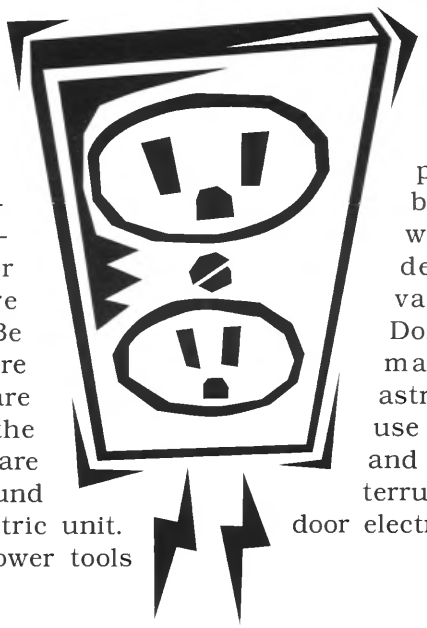
Electric power in your home

Electricity provides power that will serve you in countless ways the rest of your life. It is a controlled energy which your power supplier channels into homes and industries in a safe and dependable manner. At that point, it becomes your responsibility to use this controlled power safely.

One point to always remember — never give this electricity an opportunity to strike you through some unthinking careless act in your daily routine. Exercise Responsible Electric Accident Control Today (RE-ACT) by respecting this power through the safe and efficient use of the many labor-saving devices powered by man-made lightning.

The practice of operating or touching a plugged-in appliance when working in or around your kitchen sink is an invitation for man-made lightning to strike. Those water faucets and sewer connections provide an excellent path to the ground for electricity to follow — *don't let it pass through your body to get there!*

Radios or similar small appliances that are within reach of the bathtub or shower make bathrooms an excellent place for accidents. Exercise caution when using appliances in the bathroom.



Laundry room areas, where water and its associated pipes are ever present, require safe practices. Be sure that three-wire appliance cords are used and that the appliance cases are bonded to the ground wire of the electric unit.

Almost all power tools are equipped with three-wire cords to be used in three-wire outlets. Too frequently, though, work to be done is out of reach of such an outlet. Extension cords are needed, and to avoid a jolt of man-made lightning, make sure they are of the three-wire variety and are connected to a ground fault interrupter-protected circuit.

Outdoor patio living has become enriched with the use of the dependable servant, electricity. Don't let this man-made energy go astray by failing to use three-wire cords and ground fault interrupters on all outdoor electrical circuits.

'Fan' tastic Ideas for Summer

That good old stand-by, the electric fan, can help you save money on air conditioning.

Whole House Fans

In the cool of the night when temperatures are at or below 82 degrees, whole house fans can be the ticket to savings of up to 50 percent of your cooling costs. Exhaust the warm, stale air by putting one in your attic (if you have good attic ventilation), or the central hall or stairway.

Ceiling Fans

A ceiling fan can help to. By moving air, the effect of evaporation makes you feel more comfortable at warmer temperatures. And, it only uses about the same amount of electricity it takes to light a 15-watt light bulb.

Window and Exhaust Fans

In an open area, window fans are very effective, or use your fan for exhausting moist air from the bathroom or kitchen.

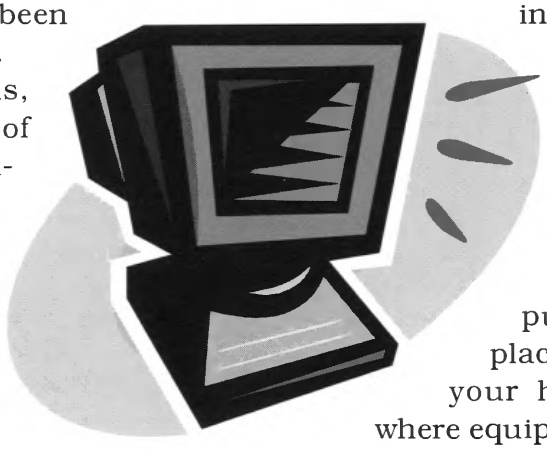
Portable Fans

Place a portable fan facing away from your window air conditioning unit to help spread the cool air around. The fan helps move cool air into other rooms and down hallways. Just as hot air rises, cool air sinks to the floor, so put the portable fan on the floor for best results.

Fried appliances

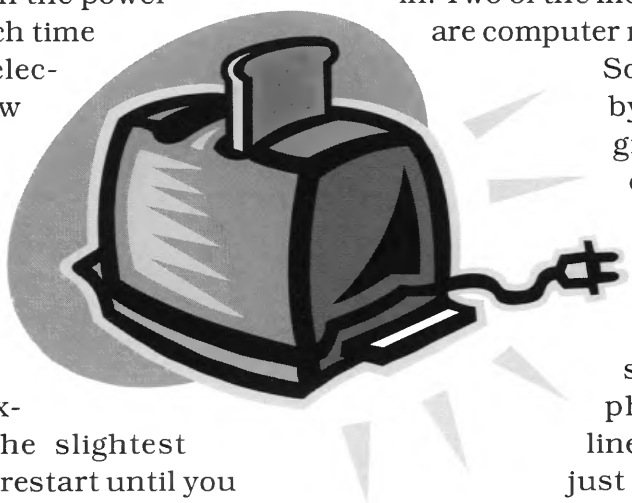
Why you need surge protection for your home

Some things are good fried. Others are not. Household appliances are a case in point. "What is a fried appliance?" you ask. It's one that has been zapped by a power surge.



If you're like most of us, you have a fair amount of money invested in computers, TVs, stereos, refrigerators, washers, clothes dryers and more. But are you protecting your equipment from power surges?

Years ago, clocks and the like were sturdy and robust. If the power went off, they just quit, and resumed when the power came back on. How much time was "missing" on your electric clock told you how long an outage had lasted. Momentary glitches, for the most part, went unnoticed.



But today's electronics and appliances are very sensitive — digital clocks, for example, will stop at the slightest provocation, and won't restart until you reset them.

And remember that *anything* you plug in can be damaged or destroyed by a power surge. A power surge is a brief, unpredictable increase in voltage that can enter your home through the power, telephone or cable television lines.

Your electric co-op is always working to maintain a high-quality supply of power to your home. However, there are several things that can cause power surges in the very best of electric utility systems. The most common one is lightning, but there are other causes, too. These include an object coming in contact with a power line as well as electric-powered equipment suddenly starting or taking extra power. If you have an appliance that causes lights to dim every time the motor starts, you've got power quality problems in your home.

Good surge protection puts up guards in several places: where electricity enters your home; inside your home where equipment is connected to electricity through outlets; on your incoming phone lines; and on your television lead-in. Two of the most often damaged items are computer modems and televisions. Sometimes this is caused by the lack of a common ground for telephone, cable TV and electrical services. Also, computer modems and televisions are often left unprotected from surges coming through phone lines and cable lines. Surge protection at just the electrical outlet is not enough.

A meter-based surge protector guards your home from power surges at the electrical service entrance. Plug-in devices for surge protection inside the home protect your equipment at the outlet stage, and at your telephone and antenna or cable TV lead-in.

Don't wait for a power surge to hit your home. Call your electric co-op today for information about power surge protection — they will be happy to help.

Farm Safety Week is Sept. 20-26

More than 30,000 collisions on public roads each year involve agricultural equipment. A motorist driving 50 mph has less than 10 seconds to react to a tractor 400 feet ahead that is traveling 15 mph. Watch for the triangular slow moving vehicle emblem. Farmers, be sure that faded emblems are replaced, positioned with the point up and clearly visible from the rear.

We urge farmers to renew their commitment to safety, and be extra careful when working around electric lines.

Electric Cooperatives of Illinois

Good for all Illinois

Affirmative action, equal opportunity employers

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More than 100 Million of Americans belong to cooperatives

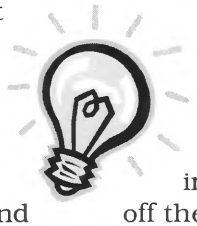
Cooperatives — not-for-profit, member-owned businesses—comprise an important part of the American economy with annual sales of more than $100 billion. For example, about 30 percent of farmers' products in the U.S. are marketed through cooperatives. Electric cooperatives provide service to 30 million member-consumers. In fact, more than 100 million Americans belong to more than 47,000 co-operatives in the United States, according to the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA).

Co-ops are of three types: producer-owned, consumer-owned and worker-owned. Farmers, producers, or small businesses own producer-owned co-ops. consumer co-ops—electric co-ops, for example—buy and sell services or commodities. In addition to electric co-ops, consumer co-ops may buy and sell food or heating fuel or even operate childcare facilities. Worker-owned co-ops are businesses owned and controlled by their employees; in the U.S. these include food stores, restaurants and taxi cab companies, as well as other examples in both light and heavy industry.

Source: National Cooperative Business Association

Electric cooperatives — when being a member really means something

We hate to admit it, but sometimes we have a tendency to forget that all our customers have not always received their electricity from an electric cooperative. You may not all know about the advantages of receiving electricity from an electric cooperative — your rights, your privileges and your responsibilities.



If you receive your electric service from an electric cooperative, you should know:

- You are a member of the cooperative and as a member you are legally part owner of it.
- You have a right to attend your annual meeting of members and to vote for directors of the cooperative.
- You have a responsibility to keep up with developments affecting your cooperative.

Local activists established your cooperative at a time when existing utilities refused or neglected to serve the area where you now live. Most electric cooperatives have received loans from the federal government to build and extend their systems. Some subsidy is involved, but this is not unique in the utility business. Norris Electric paid off the last of its loans years ago, and we receive no subsidies. All types of electric utilities, including the investor-owned utilities (IOU) and municipally owned utilities, benefit in one way or another. In fact, studies show that federal subsidies to electric cooperatives are not as large as those to IOU's and municipals.

When something comes up, Norris Electric won't let you down

Wind, rain, summer or winter storms are just a few things that can cause damage and interrupt your electric service.

Our professional and experienced crews are trained to put things back in order as fast as possible.

As your locally owned electric cooperative, we take pride in serving our members. Our commitment to you and our community is to never let you down, no matter what. In fact, every member of the co-op staff — from lineworkers to receptionists and managers, full-time or part-time — is there to assist you.

So when trouble pops up, so do we. It's all part of being a cooperative. And we wouldn't have it any other way.

Time to buy a new water heater?

Although most water heaters last 10 to 15 years, it's best to start shopping for a new one if yours is more than seven years old, according to the Department of Energy. Doing some research before the old one fails will help you select the best heater for your needs—and help you cut your energy costs.

There are a number of factors to consider:

Types of heaters.

There are now a variety of water heaters—conventional storage, demand, heat pump, tankless coil, indirect and solar. It is also possible to purchase water heaters that can be connected to your home's space-heating system. The conventional storage water heater remains the most popular type for homes in the United States. It releases hot water from the top of the tank when a hot water tap is turned on. To replace that hot water, cold water enters the bottom of the tank, ensuring that the tank is always full.

Energy factor rating.

The Federal Trade Commission requires that many appliances, including water heaters, have labels or fact sheets on energy consumption. For a water heater, the Energy Factor (EF) is the overall efficiency of the heater, with the higher the rating the more efficient the unit. Here are energy rating ranges for water heaters that use electricity, gas or oil to heat the water (these are conventional storage water heaters that can also use propane):

Type	Minimum Range	Maximum Range
Electric	87 to 91	94 to 98
Gas	51 to 56	60 to 86
Oil	48 to 53	60 to 63

The EF is based on recovery efficiency (how efficiently the heat from the energy source is transferred to the water), standby losses (the percentage of heat lost per hour from the stored water compared to the heat content of the water), and cycling losses.

Other factors, including FHR.

When shopping for a new unit, make sure that the one you purchase has at least 1 1/2 inches of insulation around the tank. In addition, consider the First Hour Rating (FHR) of the system. FHR measures the maximum hot water the heater will deliver in the first hour of use — this figure must appear on the unit's EnergyGuide label, and for good reason. Although some consumers base their purchase on the size of the storage tank, the FHR is actually the more important figure. So, before you shop, estimate your household's peak hour demand and look for a unit with an FHR in that range.

Comparing total costs.

Another important factor in the purchase of a water heater is the total life-cycle cost that encompasses purchase price, lifetime maintenance and operation expenses for the entire time you own and operate the unit. For example, units with longer warranties usually have higher price tags. However, the water heater with the lowest purchase price is often the most expensive to operate.

Office closing

We will be closed Monday, Sept. 7, in observance of Labor Day.

Enjoy your holiday!

Summer's over!

The school year has either begun or will soon. Now's the time to get back into the habit of looking more carefully when you're driving. Kids are out and about more, and they're not in the habit of being particularly watchful or careful. So, please be especially careful to avoid them.

Like it or not, there's still lots to do outside — carefully

For many of us, as winter draws to a close and spring arrives, we begin to look forward to getting outside, even if it's just to mow the lawn, do the trimming with our monofilament trimmers, pull weeds, and to do other chores around the yard. We get those urges because winter confinement and snow shoveling has warped our minds.

Unfortunately, the chores that look so fun in the first bloom of spring last well into the summer and fall. Many of us, by now, are a little less enthusiastic about yard work than we were just a few short months ago.

Still, those chores need to be done. Remember, there's always a certain amount of risk when dealing with power tools outdoors, or when working with ladders and poles near electric lines.

There are several things you can do to make your outdoor work safer, and some of the rules also apply to power tool activity. For example, you should inspect power tools before each use. to make sure they are in the same condition they were in when you put them away. Tools sometimes have a way of getting borrowed, broken, and returned, without you knowing about it, especially if you have children.

At any rate, be sure to look for frayed power cords, broken plugs and cracked or broken housings. When using tools or power cords outdoors, be sure they're marked for use outside. And any time you're using power cords, be sure they're rated for a higher amperage than the tool they're powering. Always turn off a tool if its cord overheats.

A ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) is an important part of any circuit that is used outdoors, or where you may come into contact with water. GFCIs sense a fault in a current and can shut off that circuit in a fraction of a second, before it can do any real damage.

The National Electrical Safety Code, often referred to as "the code," requires GFCIs in newly constructed kitchens, bathrooms and outside receptacles. Safety experts strongly recommend that you have them retrofitted into older homes, too.

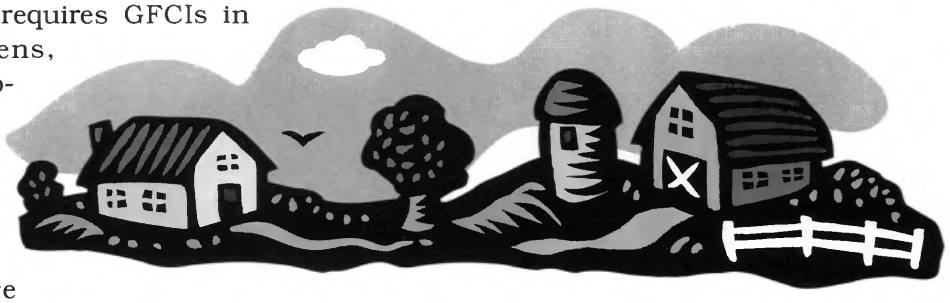
But they're especially important outdoors, where you're more likely to be standing on the ground and working in damp conditions. Working with electricity in wet conditions is not a good idea, GFCI or not. If you have outside outlets on your home, be sure they're weatherproof, and make sure that they're protected by a GFCI.

If you have an outlet and it's not protected, you can buy extension cords with such protection built in. They're not very expensive, and they offer a lot of protection.

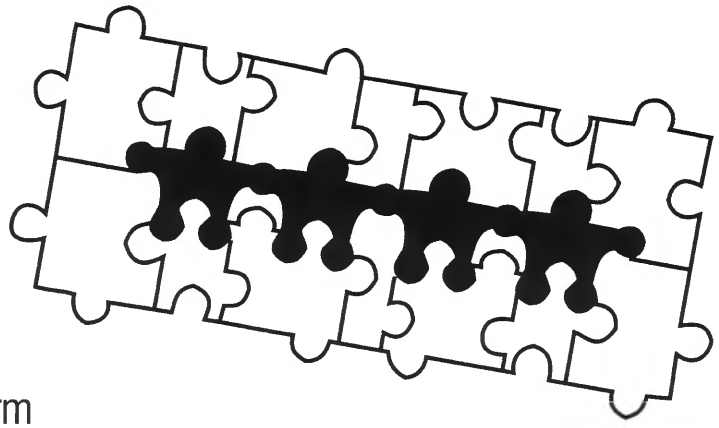
As fall approaches and the urge to plant a tree overcomes you, be sure to look up — and down — before starting to dig that hole. Look up to be sure the tree you plant won't eventually grow into your lines, or those of your co-op. And look down, because more and more homes these days are being served by underground utilities. It wasn't all that long ago that you had one line coming into your house for electricity, a pipe for some kind of fuel, and water and sewer lines. Now you need to worry about electric lines, telephone lines, water lines, sewer lines, and maybe a couple of others. Be sure you know where they are before you dig. Digging into an electrical line could ruin your whole day, if not your whole life.

And while some lines are sturdy enough that your shovel isn't going to damage them very much, telephone and electric lines are sheathed in plastic and will break fairly easily. If you're using some kind of mechanical digger, you can do a lot of harm quickly.

The danger of dig-ins brings up an important safety point for the future: If you don't know where all your underground stuff is, find out, and draw a simple map spelling out all those locations. It may help you avoid dig-ins in the future. If the recent past is any indication, there's a good probability that there'll be more underground things going into your home, not less.



One reason they're called cooperatives



When weather is severe —*from ice storms to tornadoes* — your cooperative has assistance at the ready. Last year, as early as Halloween, an ice storm caused severe damage in the northern part of the state. How reassuring to know help was only a phone call away.

All 26 of Illinois' electric cooperatives participate in an emergency response program. When help is needed, available line crews from cooperatives across the state are dispatched to the trouble spots. Working together in perilous conditions, they combat the obstacles to restore electricity.

We salute the work of the cooperative employees — men and women who are our neighbors — who give meaning to the word *reliability*.

We get our power from you.

Electric Cooperatives of Illinois

Celebrating National Cooperative Month in October

Affirmative action, equal opportunity employers

Norris Electric News

Newton, Illinois 62448 • 783-8765

We don't like outages, either!

This summer has been a trying one for Norris Electric Cooperative (NEC) and its members. It's been a long time since we've seen such unusual weather patterns, and many blame the whole thing on el Nino, the warming of the waters in the Pacific Ocean.

Whatever the case, we know we've had a lot more outages this summer than we've had during previous summers, and we don't know exactly why.

The news media are full of stories of strange weather phenomena, from the fact that Death Valley had a record-breaking 129 degrees on July 17, to the climatologists' report that this June was the hottest month in 600 years. We've all heard about the troubles in Florida and Texas.

Worse still, from our point of view, experts report that lightning activity is five times as high as usual, and that's not good for a co-op with some 3,900 miles of line strung out over about 4,000 square miles of territory.

We do know that our power supplier, AmerenCIPS, has been having some problems. Since they're our sole power supplier, we have trouble when they do. It's as simple as that.

We want to assure you that we're working hard to keep our lines clear, and we want to point out that minor "blinks" in the system show that it's really working. We have thousands of oil circuit reclosers (OCRs) on our lines, and they're designed to sense a fault, which might happen when a limb brushes against a wire. In order to prevent the line from shorting out entirely, the OCR trips momentarily, allowing whatever was in the line to move off, and it then allows current to pass through it again. Ours are set so that after three "trips," they shut down the line and we dispatch a lineman to clear the fault. OCR's prevent longer outages, but the blinks still occur.

As might be expected, we've had some members tell us that they're unhappy with all the blinks and outages. So are we. We like to give you good service, and we're proud of how well we do that. It bothers us when we're not up to snuff.

And, while it may seem tacky, it costs us money. We sell electricity, and if there's an outage, we sell less of it. While we encourage you to conserve so that your bills will be manageable, we don't want to force that kind of conservation on you.

We're working on the problem, and we're working with AmerenCIPS in the hopes that your power quality problems will be solved.

We know it bothers you, and we appreciate your patience.

If you live outside the 783 or 445 area codes, we have a toll-free number you can use to call us. During office hours (8 a.m.-4 p.m. M-F) we urge you to call (877) 783-8765, and after hours and on weekends, you should call (877) 783-3221. And remember that others will be calling too, so you may get a busy signal. Keep trying — we need to hear from you.

Handle harvest with care

If you are handling loose, harvested grain, it is all too easy to get trapped in the grain - or even die of suffocation. Grain handling accidents happen very quickly, and flowing grain can draw in a person in seconds. If you are in a large wagon or a grain bin, you could become completely submerged in as little as 15 seconds.

A grain surface may appear solid, but it's not - a small opening in the unloading gate gives the entire surface the quality of quicksand. When kernels are removed from the bottom, kernels directly above rush in to fill the void, creating a fluid motion. Even if the grain flow is stopped, the danger is not over. It is very difficult to remove people from grain once they are trapped. For example, the force required to remove a person buried in grain can exceed 2,000 pounds - the same as lifting a small car.

• Don't be a victim of suffocation when handling loose grain. Follow these safety tips:

• Lock out power to all types of grain-handling equipment. Disconnect power, and place locks over operating switches. This also helps discourage grain theft.

• Always use the buddy system when you are unloading or loading grain. Notify a second person of your whereabouts at all times, so that he/she can obtain help if necessary. Ideally, have a second person on site.

• Never permit children to ride in grain wagons or enter grain storage areas.

• Apply suffocation hazard decals to all grain wagons, grain bins and storage structures. Instruct everyone who handles grain about the danger of suffocation.

• Lock access doors to grain bins; limit access to the top of grain wagons.

Source: The National Ag Safety Database / Iowa State University Extension

Shuberts are winners of prestigious NWTF awards

If you enjoy turkey hunting and have even caught a good glimpse of a gobbler in the woods; you may want to toss a smile toward Watson, Illinois, where Glynn and Marjorie Shubert live.

Chances are, they played a big part in restoring the turkey population enough to make the difference between a hike in the woods and a successful hunting trip.

In recognition of their efforts, the Shuberts received the Roger M. Latham award, given by the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) in recognition of their outstanding volunteer efforts. They received their plaques at NWTF's annual meeting earlier this year. Only four of the awards were given this year, and fully half of them came to Illinois—and to the same household, at that.

Glynn and Marge Shubert are pictured with the two plaques they received in recognition of their efforts in improving turkey hunting in Illinois.

As a pair of turkey hunting's biggest boosters in Illinois, the Shuberts will take part in several fund-raising efforts in which volunteers will raise and spend more that $150,000 in Illinois for projects that include turkey trapping and restoration, land acquisition, habitat improvement, and youth education.

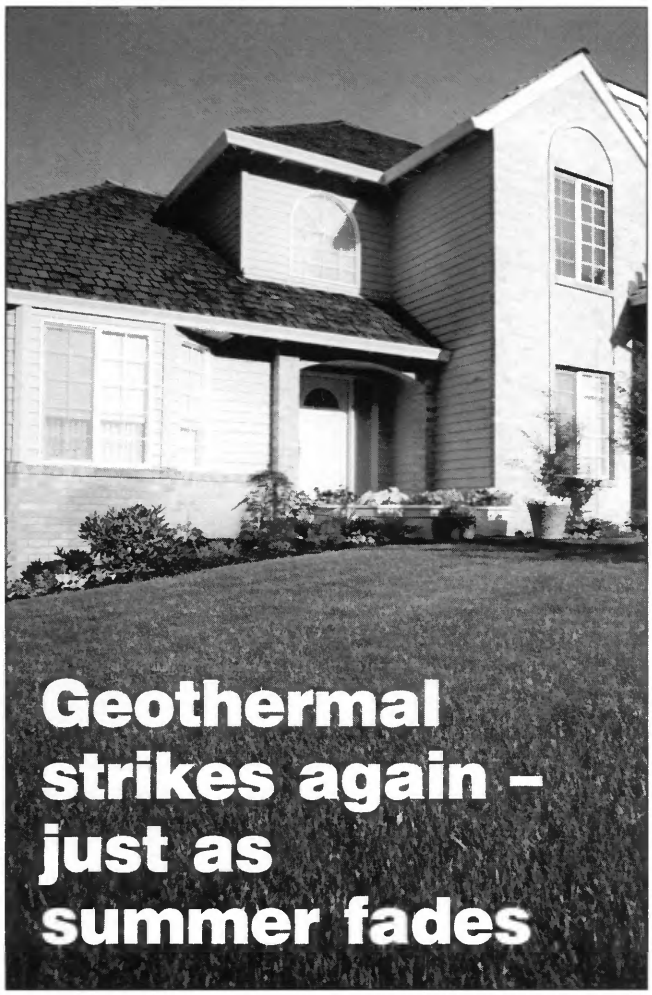
As with many organizations interested in good stewardship, the NWTF is interested in kids, and has a program entitled "JAKES," or Juniors Acquiring Knowledge, Ethics and Sportsmanship, which seeks to instill those qualities in a new generation of hunters.

In all, the federation has more than 180,000 members, and 42,000 young adults have signed on as JAKES for 1998.

With all those people working to improve turkey hunting, it follows that good results should be forthcoming, and they were. Illinois turkey hunters harvested a record 9,124 birds this year, about 2,000 more than last year. And there was a record 79 counties open for hunting, up from 72 the year before.

But it should come as no surprise to those who know the Shuberts and how hard they've worked. While the Shuberts have a lot of credit coming, there are many other enthusiasts all over the country working just as hard, or nearly so. With that in mind, it's no wonder turkey hunting is getting better in Illinois!

Thanks to the Shuberts, there are getting to be more turkey crossings in Illinois, like this one.



Geothermal strikes again – just as summer fades

Mother Nature is a perplexing creature. She hits us with hot weather, cold weather, dry weather and rainy weather, and sometimes it seems that we're getting them all at once.

But she prepares her brood for weather by providing them with ways to get out of the worst she throws at them. For many of our furry little friends, Ma Nature gives them the wisdom to dig a burrow, or to move into someone else's. Hundreds, if not thousands, of species winter underground, and many also escape the summer's worst heat by finding a subterranean snug place, where the temperature's about the same the year around.

We can do that too, and we don't have to go down there where it's dank and dark and musty. We can have a geothermal heating-and-cooling system installed in our homes.

As we've said here many times, a geothermal system is an all-in-one heating, cooling and water-heating system, and it will provide you with definite benefits through all the seasons.

A geothermal heating-and-cooling system can cool your home more efficiently than a regular air conditioner or heat pump, and it can provide you with heat for less money than natural gas. That's right: Geothermal gives you cheaper heat than natural gas. Electric co-ops don't discuss that fact very much because in many places, it's really a moot point. Most co-op members don't have natural gas, and the prospects of them getting it any time soon are slim, except in those areas where electric co-ops are branching out into the natural gas business!

If you heat with propane, remember that geothermal can heat and cool for less than you can perform those chores with propane.

And when you're about to replace that old propane furnace that's limped through the last couple of winters, remember the horrendous price spikes of just a few years ago, when your supplier was forced – because of a shortage – to triple his prices, just as cool weather set in.

That situation has improved for some, since some electric co-ops have gotten into the propane business to help insulate their members from such practices.

Electricity rates in Illinois have been steady for some 15 years now, and while they've been higher than your co-op friends like, they are coming down. That's another thing to consider when you set out to replace that old furnace.

To refresh your memory, a geothermal system is really just a heat pump, but it's like a heat pump on steroids. A heat pump is sort of a reversible air conditioner, bringing cool air into your home in the summer, and bringing in warm air in the winter. You control what it does with your wall-mounted thermostat.

But if a heat pump has a weakness, it's that it begins to lose its "oomph" in the wintertime about the same time most of us do. When the mercury drops to about 10 degrees F., your heat pump's efficiency drops, leaving you hunting supplemental heat.

A geothermal unit is different. It uses a liquid-filled buried loop that circulates underground much like those burrowing little critters we were discussing earlier. It works with a medium that's about 55 degrees F., the year around.

So while an air conditioner or heat pump has to work hard to cool 90-degree air in the summer, your geothermal unit is breezing along with its 55-degree medium, blowing cool air into your home. That's a lot easier than working with the normal outside air temperature. And when it's cooling, it's also transferring heat into a water-heater connection, to help you save about half the cost of that convenience.

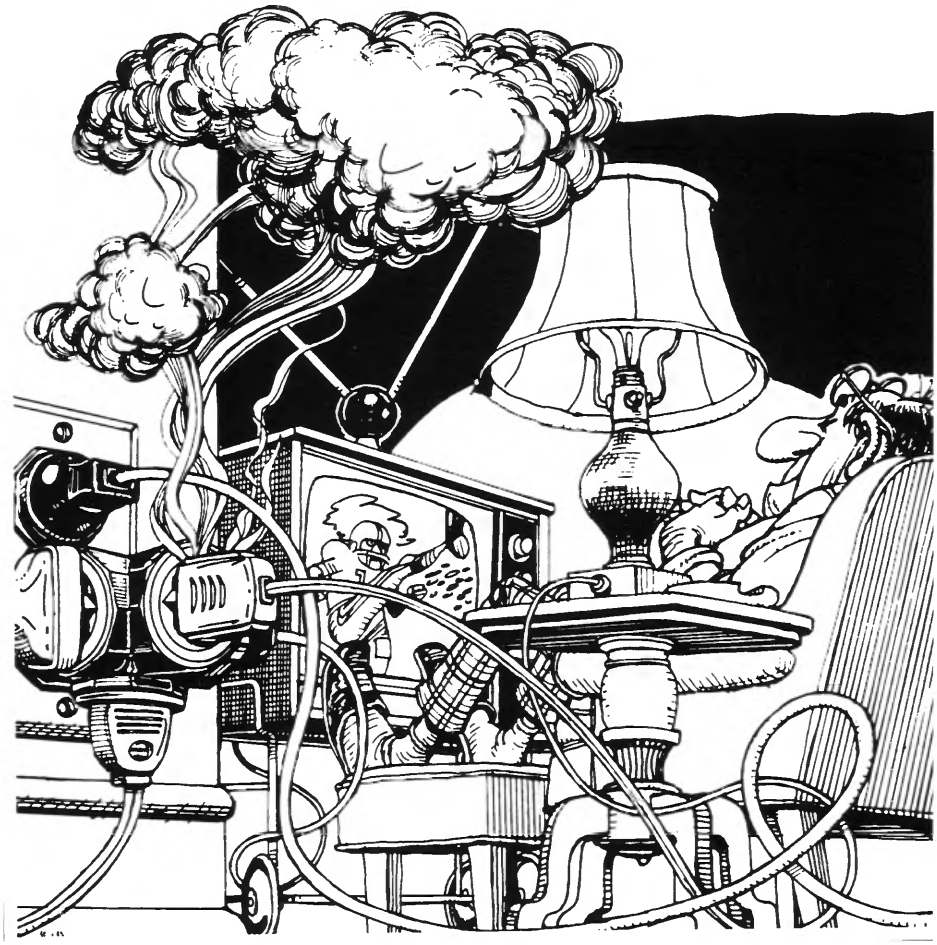
And while the average heat pump struggles to heat zero-degree air in the winter, your geothermal unit is breezing along with its 55-degree medium, taking warmth out of the ground and blowing it into your home. It's a system that can't be beat.

If there's a disadvantage to geothermal, it's that the initial cost can be steep. Those buried loops are often sunk into trenches or wells, and digging those can get expensive. Often, the grid can be sunk into a good-sized pond, since you're really just looking for a hefty heat sink.

But whatever the case, geothermal warrants very careful consideration, because its savings are so great. And it's available wherever there's an electric line.

Be sure to look into geothermal, especially if you're thinking of building a new home or replacing an old furnace. The difference is well worth the trouble, and your friends at your local co-op will be happy to help you make the right decision.

Don't take safety for granted



Electricity is the safest form of energy. You don't have to worry about an open flame, light a pilot light or be concerned about carbon monoxide poisoning. But you still can not take electric safety for granted. Remember these basic rules:

- Don't overload outlets, circuits or extension cords
- Don't use any appliance while you are wet
- Install GFCIs (ground fault circuit interrupters) in areas that can get wet
- Repair or discard any appliance that shocks you, or that sparks or smokes
- Update old wiring to include a ground
- Have a qualified electrician inspect the wiring in your home
- Know the location of your circuit breakers and how to use them

If you have concerns or questions about electric safety, call your local electric cooperative.

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Outage assistance a phone call away

It's 10 o'clock on a Saturday evening and the last lighting bolt from an hour-long thunderstorm just punched out your night lights. The electric cooperative office is closed, your neighbor who's a lineman is out of town, and you're fresh out of ideas. What do you do?

Simple. Call the Norris Electric Lady.

Here's how it works.

During regular office hours, if you experience a power outage, call the Norris Electric Cooperative office at 783-8765. We have five telephone lines coming into our office, and that number will route your call through a line that's avaialble. If you get a busy signal, keep trying. We *want* to take your call, and with several hundred people trying to call at once — which happens with widespread outages such as thunderstoms or iced lines — it may take a while to get through.

But after hours there may be no one in the office to take your call. That's when our "outage operators" go to work. With the new toll-free numbers we've established — (877) 783-8765 during office hours and (877) 783-3221 after hours — you can reach a Norris Electric employee, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Those numbers direct your call to the home of a Norris Electric outage operator.

"Every job I've ever worked at, I've worked with phones," says Norma Beavers — alias the Norris Electric Lady. Norma, a rural West Liberty resident who's lived in the area for 48 years, is one of the few people you'll meet who doesn't mind taking odd hour phone calls. In fact, as a Norris Electric Cooperative "outage operator," she expects them. "Of course I know a lot of the people who call," Norma says. "But we can never stop and talk. I don't have time."

But even a longtime area resident like Norma doesn't know everyone. "That's why I wish more people would have their line and pole number when they call," she says. "And we need the name in which the service is being billed. We really appreciate that. It sure speeds up the reporting process."

Norma Beavers, the "Norris Electric Lady," is a longtime area resident whose knowledge of the area serves us well during outages.

Wanda Green puts her reporter's skills to work when interviewing callers. Having the name under which your service is billed and your location number at hand when you call greatly expedites the interview.

Wanda Green of Newton, Norris Electric's other outage operator, agrees that having all the necessary information ready when you call is key to having a service crew accurately dispatched to your location. "We really appreciate it if you can give us the full location number and name the service is being billed in," says Wanda, pointing out that offering her your nickname can confuse matters and add to the crew's response time.

Like Norma, Wanda is accustomed to handling information quickly and accurately over the telephone. Wanda currently delivers a morning news report for an Olney radio station, and she previously hosted a community affairs program in Robinson.

"This year's been one of the worst in several years," she notes. Wanda joined the co-op as an operator in November of 1994, a week after Norma assumed her duties. "It's been an unusual season," she adds. "I enjoy the job, but it can get

hectic. After a storm, the calls come in from every direction."

Wanda says that despite the circumstances under which the calls are being made, most of the callers are very nice.

Both Norma and Wanda take the role as "outage operator" very seriously. Norma has a phone stationed by her bedside, and Wanda carries a ringer outside to alert her of phone calls when she's doing yard work.

"Our main job is to hold the fort while the other co-op employees get into the office and go into action," says Wanda. Again, she points out that having your billing name and full location number helps linemen make it to an outage scene quickly and efficiently.

So remember, when your lights go out after business hours, here are the steps to take:

First, try to have the name under which your service is billed and your location number on hand. Then, if you live in Newton, call 783-8765. That's a direct line to our office. If someone is present to take the call, they'll take down your information and we will dispatch a crew as soon as possible. If there's no answer, call 783-3221. That will put you in touch with an outage operator, who will take your information and relay it to a service crew.

If you live outside Newton and our office number is a long distance call, please use our toll-free number to report outages. First call (877) 783-8765. Again, that's a direct line to our office. If there's no answer, call (877) 783-3221. That will put you in touch with Norma or Wanda. They'll take your information and contact a service crew.

The cooperative appreciates your business and we'll do everything in our power to get your lights on as quickly as possible. And remember, the after hours operators of Norris Electric Cooperative will be standing by.

Students encouraged to apply for 1999 IEC Memorial Scholarship

Norris Electric Cooperative Manager Ernest C. Weber has announced that for the fourth consecutive year the Illinois electric cooperatives will award academic scholarships in the amount of $1,000 each to two high school seniors. The scholarships are being awarded through the Illinois Electric Cooperatives (IEC) Memorial Scholarship Program.

High school seniors pursuing a college education in the state of Illinois are eligible to participate in the program. One of the two scholarships will be awarded to the child of an electric cooperative member. The other $1,000 award will go to the child of an electric cooperative director or employee. Deadline for applications is Jan. 1, 1999.

"The purpose of the scholarship program is to assist electric cooperative youth while honoring past rural electric leaders through memorial gifts," Weber said. "Norris Electric Cooperative and the other Illinois electric cooperatives want to make a difference in their communities. One of the best ways we can do that is by lending a hand to our youth."

Candidates are judged on the basis of grade point average, college entrance exam scores, work and volunteer experience, school and civic activities, and a short essay that demonstrates their knowledge of electric cooperatives.

The IEC Memorial Scholarship program was established in 1994 by the board of directors of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. For further information on the IEC Memorial Scholarship Program, contact Norris Electric Cooperative at (618) 783-8765, or ask your high school guidance counselor.

Winter outages

Norris Electric is prepared for the worst. Are you?

Ice on power lines is so heavy it's like hanging a small car between each set of poles. Lines sag to the ground and poles can snap like tooth picks. Winter storms can cause long power outages at the worst possible time. Be sure you have the supplies you need like flashlights, blankets, food and water to ride out a winter power outage.

Above all else remember to stay clear of any downed power lines. A power line on the ground can still be energized.

The electric cooperatives of Illinois have an emergency plan and can send crews from across the state during large outages. But even with extra help winter outages can take a long time to repair. Norris Electric appreciates your patience when hundreds of customers are trying to call at the same time. Cooperation is the key to meeting nature's challenge.

Smart responses to electrical emergencies

We've said it here many times: Electricity is wonderful stuff. It lights our homes, warms them, heats water and powers many of our appliances. But the fact that it can do work proves that it is also a source of possible danger, if improperly used.

With that in mind, it's a good idea to know what to do in the event of an electrical accident. A quick, correct response can save a life, while the wrong one might do more harm than good. The National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) offers the following tips for electrical accidents and emergencies.

Shock and Electrocution. A shock victim must be removed immediately from the source of electricity. However, always turn off the power before touching the victim, wire or equipment. If it's not possible to turn the power off, use a nonconducting tool—such as a rope or a dry wooden stick—to move the person; then call for help. Do NOT complete a circuit between one wire and the ground. If the victim is touching a power line, get help—don't touch them.

Injuries resulting from contact with electrical current have their own set of symptoms and complications. To make sure you, or someone you're with, gets help if injured, NECA notes that electrical injuries could include any one or a combination of the following:

- **Loss of consciousness**-it can last from several minutes to hours.
- **Involuntary muscle reaction**
- **Ventricular fibrillation**- the steady heartbeat may be disrupted and the rhythm lost, possibly resulting in cardiac arrest. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) may be needed, but always check the person's airway, breathing and circulation before beginning CPR.
- **Respiratory arrest**-Breathing may stop.
- **Internal bleeding**
- **Nerve cell damage**-This may not be apparent until the victim tries to walk.
- **Electrical burns**-An electric arc generates temperatures as high as 20,000° C, and can cause serious burns.

NECA notes that several factors influence the extent of electrical injuries, including the voltage, the amperage, the path the current takes through the body and the length of the contact.

As mentioned earlier, you should check the person's breathing and pulse before attempting any treatment. Remember that after four to six minutes, oxygen deprivation will cause brain damage. If the victim is not breathing, give artificial respiration.

If there's no heartbeat, start CPR immediately and continue until medical help arrives or the person breathes on his/her own.

Fires. Never use water to put out an electrical fire! If the electrical fire is still small, you can use a Class C or combination fire extinguisher. If the fire is out of control, get out and call for help.

Stay low to avoid inhaling smoke. If your clothes catch on fire, stop and drop to the ground and then roll to extinguish the flames.

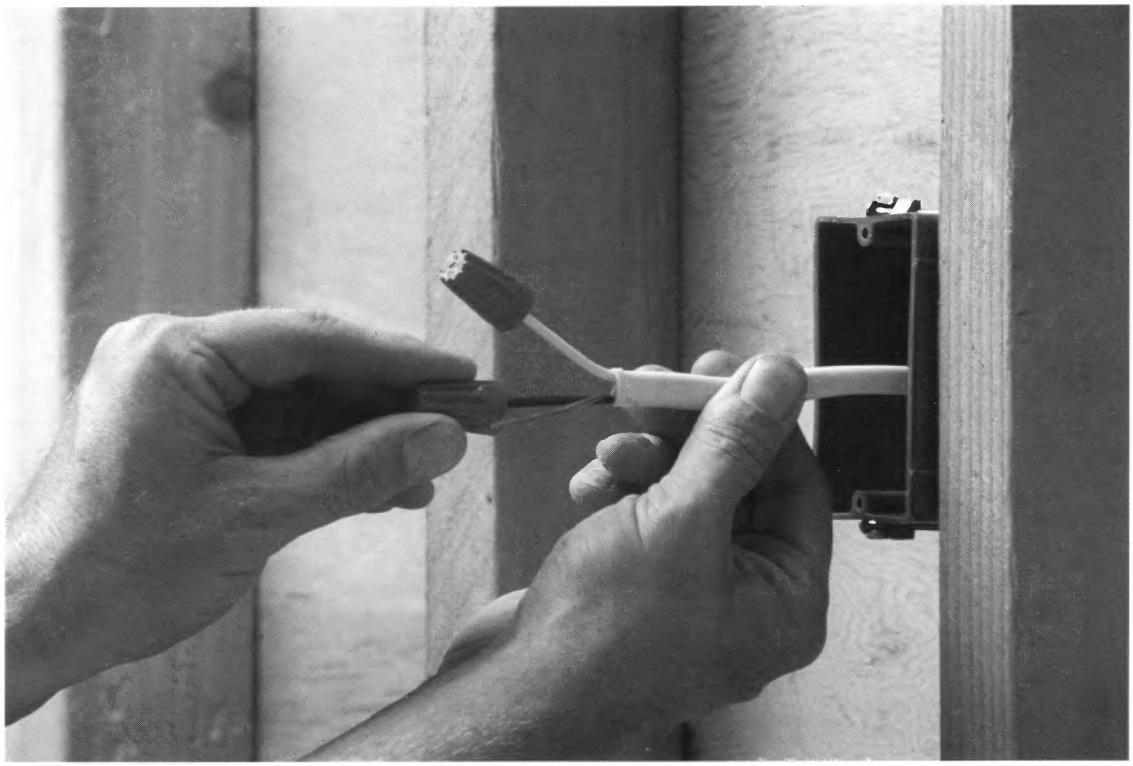
Burns. The first hour after an electrical accident is crucial for treating electrical burns. Treat a minor burn with cool water and cover with a clean, dry cloth. If the burn is more serious, cover it with a sterile, dry cloth and get medical help—immediately!

Remember that electrical accidents can affect a person's skin, muscles and bones. It is possible the victim will go into shock from an electrical burn. Keep the person lying down with feet elevated. Never try to pull charred clothing off burned skin.

If you have questions about electrical safety, please contact your electric cooperative for information. Your electric co-op is always glad to help you.

"...it's a good idea to know what to do in the event of an electrical accident. A quick, correct response can save a life..."

Wiring problem warnings



You can often spot wiring problems if you watch for the following signals. If they occur have a qualified electrician check the wiring.

- Do fuses blow or breakers often trip?
- Do lights dim or does the TV picture shrink when appliances switch on?
- Is the switch box warm to the touch?
- Do you have trouble with faltering motors?
- Have you added new appliances?

Only you can prevent house fires

Check the circuit panel for signs of overheating — discoloration and melting of insulation. Tightening screws in the fuse box can prevent flickering and excessive heating of terminals.

Make sure appliance cords are kept in good condition. If an appliance makes a funny noise, does not work, or has a burnt smell — unplug it immediately. Malfunctioning appliances at the very least increase your electric bill, at the worst they can cause a fire.

Be extremely careful with all portable heaters. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Give someone you love a fire extinguisher for Christmas and buy one for yourself.

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Local farmer produces kid's farm video

Every time Darrell Garbe's nieces and nephews (age 2 to 10) from the city came to visit the family, they couldn't wait to go to the barnyard to visit the cattle, pigs, horses, and other farm animals. Darrell figured there must be plenty of other children that had the same desire to see farm animals close up, but who did not have the benefit of a relative on the farm. So Darrell, who is the son of Norris Electric Cooperative member Gilbert Garbe of Dieterich, produced a 30-minute videotape designed to provide children with a wholesome, entertaining, and educational look at Barnyard Animals.

Barnyard Animals follows 2-year old Brittany, 4-year old Marissa, 7-year old Zachary, and 10-year old Breanne as they visit the many colorful and interesting animals of the farm. Garbe, who grew up on a farm before getting a Masters degree from UCLA, picked up video production expertise while working for major ad agencies in Los Angeles. He then returned to the farm, produced the videotape with professional equipment, and added a catchy musical score to complete the project.

Barnyard Animals has received rave reviews from mothers, fathers, and child-care centers around the country. "We often get calls from parents who tell us their kids watch it over and over", says Garbe.

Barnyard Animals is chock-full of playful, colorful, and zany farm animals. Parents and children learn about horses, dairy cows, pigs, turkeys, and chickens as they frolic on picturesque family farms. Playful goats, deer, elk, ostrich and llamas entertain viewers as they roam in beautiful country pastures.

Everyone loves babies, and *Barnyard Animals* provides plenty of shots of adorable young calves, piglets, colts, rabbits, and lambs taking their first steps in their new barnyards.

"After watching *Barnyard Animals*, parents often call to see if we have other children's videotapes available for sale," says Garbe. His company, *Family Farm Productions*, has produced three other critically acclaimed videos, *Giant New Tractors from the Big Farm Shows*, *Steamers, Threshers, and Antique John Deeres*, and the original *Big Tractors Kids Video.*

Barnyard Animals is available by calling (800) 896-5660, or by writing to Family Farm Productions, 1661 N. 2200 St., Dieterich, IL 62424. The company has a website at http:Hplanetpages.com/farm.

Forget all those wonderful Christmas songs about open fires and Christmas trees

The combination of blazing fireplaces and Christmas trees make for great Christmas carols. But they're a bad combination for your family's safety. A dry evergreen is highly flammable. Sometimes, even a minor spark can ignite it. And, of course, fireplaces open to a room are notorious for all kinds of sparks. So place your tree in a room separated from your fireplace if possible. If it's not possible, be sure there is plenty of distance between them. And never leave an open fire blazing near your Christmas tree when going to bed or leaving home. Norris Electric Cooperative wants you to have a very Merry Christmas, but leave the open fires and Christmas trees to the carols, not your living room.

Office closing

Norris Electric Cooperative will be closed on Thursday and Friday Dec. 24 & 25, 1998, and Thursday, Dec. 31 & Friday, Jan. 1, 1999, in observance of Christmas and New Years Day. We will reopen on at 8 a.m. on the following Monday.

We can't avoid downed power lines in the winter

Winter is here. And your electric co-op is ready for it. But no matter how well we prepare, we cannot avoid downed power lines. Hours of freezing rain can snap a power line without warning. Snowbound trees can fall, taking several lines down with them.

If you spot a downed power line, please stay away from it. Call us immediately and we'll repair it and restore your power as quickly as possible. Rain or shine, day or night.

If you live outside Newton and our office is a long-distance call, please use our toll free number. First, call (877) 783-8765. If there's no answer, call (877) 783-3221.

Use correct procedures with standby generators

It's difficult to do without electricity in today's world. That's why your electric cooperative does everything possible to keep the lights on and to restore service as soon as possible when there is an outage.

However, if you have or are considering purchasing a standby generator, remember that it is vital to follow proper procedures. If used incorrectly, a standby generator can cause serious harm or even death. Here are some important things to know.

Generators can produce power to a home's 120/240-volt service. However, if a generator is not properly intatlled, the "backfeed" will result in an output of 7,200 volts on the distribution line—which a lineman may assume to be dead. As a result, a line crew working on the system would be put in danger.

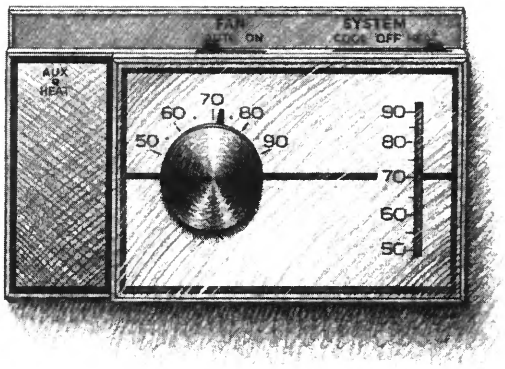
For everyone's sake—yours, the co-op and its crews—generators need to be isolated from the electric co-op's power lines. This means you should connect appliances or other devices directly to the generator with appropriate-sized cords.

You should also install a double-throw switch on your generator to separate it from your co-op's system.

Also, remember to determine the wattage output you need before buying a generator. Manufacturers rate the "strength" of a generator in terms of wattage. The generator's wattage output should at least meet or exceed the total rated watts of the appliances you will operate in case of an outage.

Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations on how to use your generator. If you have additional questions, please call your electric cooperative. Your co-op will be glad to work with you to make sure your generator is used properly.

Think of it as the gas pedal in your car



You know what happens when you constantly speed up and slow down, or run your car at high speeds. You use a lot more fuel. The same is true of your heating system thermostat. Constantly changing your temperature setting consumes more energy. Setting it on high temperatures drastically increases your electric bill. So, pick a comfortable setting – between 68 degrees and 72 degrees; set it and forget it. You'll be comfortable, and you'll get a lot more hours of heat per dollar.

Take precautions when using supplemental heaters

As we move into fall, when the weather often changes from somewhat warm to downright chilly and back again, many of us are faced with the choice of freezing or turning on the furnace. Often, because it's really not that cold, we're reluctant to turn up the thermostat and incur the costs of being warm all through the house.

Often, it's not necessary. Sometimes a carefully placed portable supplemental space heater will provide just the needed additional warmth, without breaking the bank. So if you're in the kitchen enjoying the thrill of washing dishes and begin to feel a trifle chilly, all you need to do is bring in a little space heater.

Afterward, if you want to watch TV in the family room, you can pick up your little heater and move it there to create your own cozy little nook.

Naturally, your electric co-op hopes you'll use a portable electric heater because, overall, they're safer and more convenient than the other kinds. Even so, you must be careful with them. While they don't have an open flame, they do have hot surfaces.

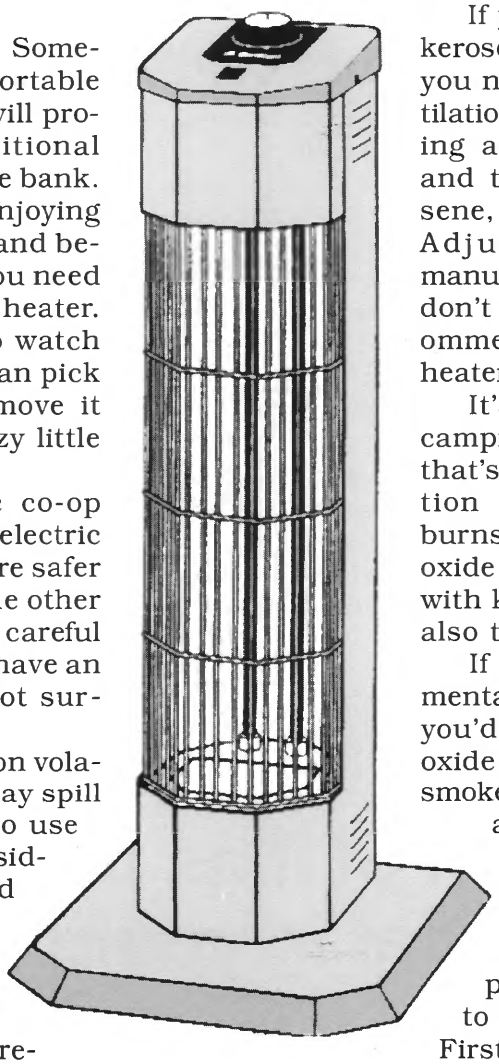
And while they don't rely on volatile liquid or gas fuels that may spill or get out of control, they do use electricity, which packs considerable punch when not used properly.

One of their major advantages, though, is that they do not give off carbon monoxide, and they don't require venting to make them safe.

Be sure to use your portable electric heater only for temporary heating of limited space only.

Be sure not to place them in heavily traveled areas, or in places where children may touch them. Don't use an extension cord with an electric heater if you can possibly avoid it. Most cords you'll find around the home aren't adequate.

Don't conceal the cord under a rug to get it out of sight or prevent tripping. Extension cords wear quickly under a rug, and can become a shock or fire hazard before you know it.



While most portable space heaters built in the last few years have good, solid bases to prevent tipping, older ones may not, and you need to be very careful with them. Newer models also have built-in switches to shut them off automatically if they tip over, and that's a desirable safety feature.

If you decide to use a portable kerosene heater, keep in mind that you need to provide adequate ventilation, which usually means cracking a window to let in fresh air and the cold. Use only 1K kerosene, and no other kind of fuel. Adjust the burner to the manufacturer's specifications, and don't refuel a hot heater. Many recommend that you refuel kerosene heaters outdoors.

It's tempting to bring in gas camping heaters and the like, and that's downright unsafe. In addition to the dangers of contact burns, the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning is as great as it is with kerosene heaters, and there's also the problem of tipping.

If you plan to use any supplemental heater besides electric ones, you'd be wise to buy a carbon monoxide detector in addition to your smoke detector, and make sure both are properly installed and working.

No matter what kind of portable heater you use, there are some basic safety precautions YOU should take to avoid becoming a statistic. First, you should keep children and pets away from portable heaters, and avoid using them overnight in a room where you're sleeping.

Keep heaters at least three feet away from bedding, drapes, furniture and other combustibles, and always follow the manufacturer's instructions in installing, operating, and maintaining your heater.

Properly used, portable space heaters can help you stay comfortable while keeping your costs within reason. If you have questions about the safe use of portable electric heaters, contact your friends at your local co-op. They'll be glad to help.