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JAMUP

published by Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative, Dongola, Illinois

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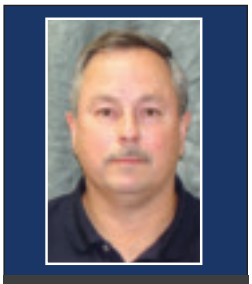
Springtime preparedness in southern Illinois



John Harris
Director of Operations and Maintenance

After a long winter, spring has finally sprung! It is refreshing to see the trees beginning to bud out and the yards starting to turn green. As we welcome those familiar sights of spring, we must also prepare ourselves for the inevitable spring storms. Southern Illinois seems to get its fair share of damaging winds. The question is, are you prepared? Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative prepares year-round for storm season.

As part of our preparation, SIEC strives to inspect all poles on an 8-10-year rotation. Our engineering department recently completed the inspection of poles served by the McClure and Karnak substations. During an inspection, we also look for other signs of failure, such as damaged hardware, leaking transformers or vegetation near the lines that could potentially cause an outage. SIEC crews are currently working to replace those poles that were found to be bad.

Just as we have a pole inspection program, our forestry program works in the same manner to ensure that all areas of our system receive the attention needed to ensure reliability. Our forestry crews have been removing vegetation on the circuits fed from the Cobden and Forman substations. The Dongola substation is scheduled for right-of-way maintenance later this year.

Unfortunately, despite the time SIEC spends maintaining right of way, changing poles and wire, and adding the latest technology, mother nature can and will test our system and cause outages, sometimes lasting for days. Please know that SIEC is prepared for the challenge. We have an order of restoration, very capable and dedicated employees, and the willingness of sister co-ops within the state to spring into action should the need arise.

Matthew Atkinson

From the time the first outage call is received, SIEC has a procedure in place that is followed. If it is a small or individual outage, one person or a crew is sent out to make the necessary repairs. In the case of a large storm that moves through part or all our system, a methodical approach is taken to restoration. I'm sure most members realized this during the ice storms of 08 and 09. We start at the substations and work our way out to the end of the line, always trying to restore the most members with each step that we take. Unfortunately, someone must be last in the restoration process.

All co-op employees receive safety training throughout the year to ensure the safety of our members as well as their own. I would like to encourage you to be prepared as well. Have a safe place to go. Make sure everyone in your family knows the plan. Have a weather radio, or make sure you can monitor the local weather forecast and be prepared. After the storm, be aware of downed lines, treat everything as energized and notify the co-op of any electrical hazards you encounter. I also ask for your patience and understanding while our crews are working diligently to perform the task at hand.

Springtime in southern Illinois is a beautiful time, but always be prepared for the ugly side of Mother Nature! Please stay safe. You can rest assured that SIEC will be here to see you through any storm.

Would your home pass an electrical inspection?

If you're getting ready to sell your home or just wondering how electrically sound it is, there are some general guidelines to assess the condition of your home's wiring and electrical bones. Although it varies depending on where you live, most local codes follow the National Electric Code (NEC).

The NEC is an industry-specific document that outlines required practices for all aspects of residential and commercial electrical installation. Don't worry, you don't have to google it and read it from cover to cover, but know that your local code could vary. Local code always wins out when there are variances, so be sure to check with your qualified electrician or local building department (start with your city or town) for specific code requirements. Thomas Paris

Electrical malfunction is dangerous. U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 45,210 reported U.S. home structure fires involving electrical malfunction per year from 2010 to 2014, according to the National Fire Protection Agency. Home fires resulted in 420 deaths, 1,370 injuries and $1.4 billion in direct property damage annually.

Here are some general guidelines an inspector would look for; remember they may or may not align with your local electrical code, but they are NEC-mandated. If your home has any of the following defects, it may not pass an electrical safety inspection:

- Old knob-and-tube, along with BX cable wiring, common in the U.S. from 1880-1930
- New lights and receptacles installed into old wiring
- Overcrowded wires; i.e. too many wires bundled together producing excess heat
- Spliced wires that were illegally installed (they must be installed by an approved method)
- Broken or missing carbon monoxide detectors or smoke alarms (whether smoke alarms must be hard wired depends on the age of the home and whether any home improvement projects required a permit)
- Non-insulated/non-contact-rated recessed lights that touch attic insulation, which is a fire hazard
- Improper overcurrent protection, which means the breaker or fuse is too large for the wire rating
- Improper grounding and bonding of electrical panels and devices
- Some other room-specific things to look for include:

Kitchen

- Does your electric range, cooktop or oven have a dedicated 240-volt circuit?
- Is the breaker for the range, cooktop or oven sized correctly?
- Does your island have its own outlet? (The NEC has outlet requirements for kitchen islands, peninsulas and countertops.)
- Does your microwave, refrigerator, microwave and garbage disposal each have its own circuit?

Bathroom

- Are outlets GFCIs (ground fault circuit interrupters)? GFCIs are designed to protect people from electric shock around water.
- Do your combination fan/lights have their own 20-amp circuit?
- Do the light fixtures in the shower or tub area have a "lens" cover? Are they moisture resistant?

Other rooms

- Does each room have a wall switch installed beside the entry door?
- Are outlets installed no farther than 12 feet apart?
- Are ceiling fixtures controlled by a wall switch and not just a pull chain?

There are also hallway, staircase and garage code requirements, as well as those for the electrical service panel and wiring. Check with your qualified electrician or the city or town where you live for specific code requirements in all areas of your home.

For more about electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org.

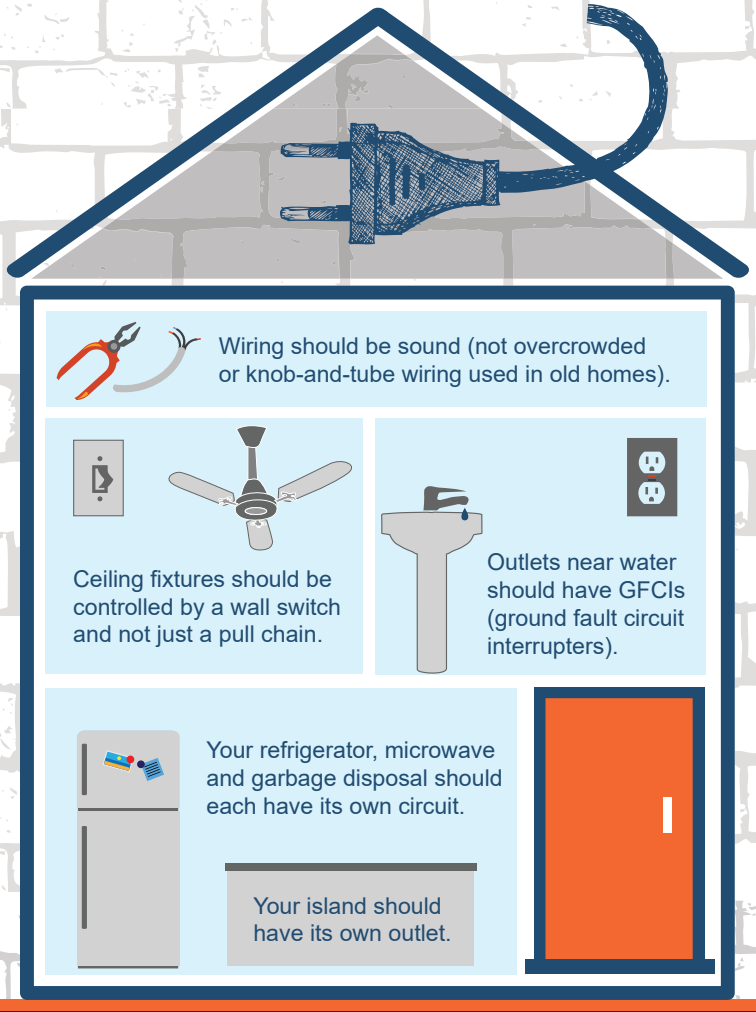
Member prize

In this issue of the JAMUP, we printed the names of three SIEC members who are eligible to receive a $10 credit toward their utility bill. If you find your name printed in this center section and it's not part of the story, call Bree with your account number at **800-762-1400** to claim your prize.

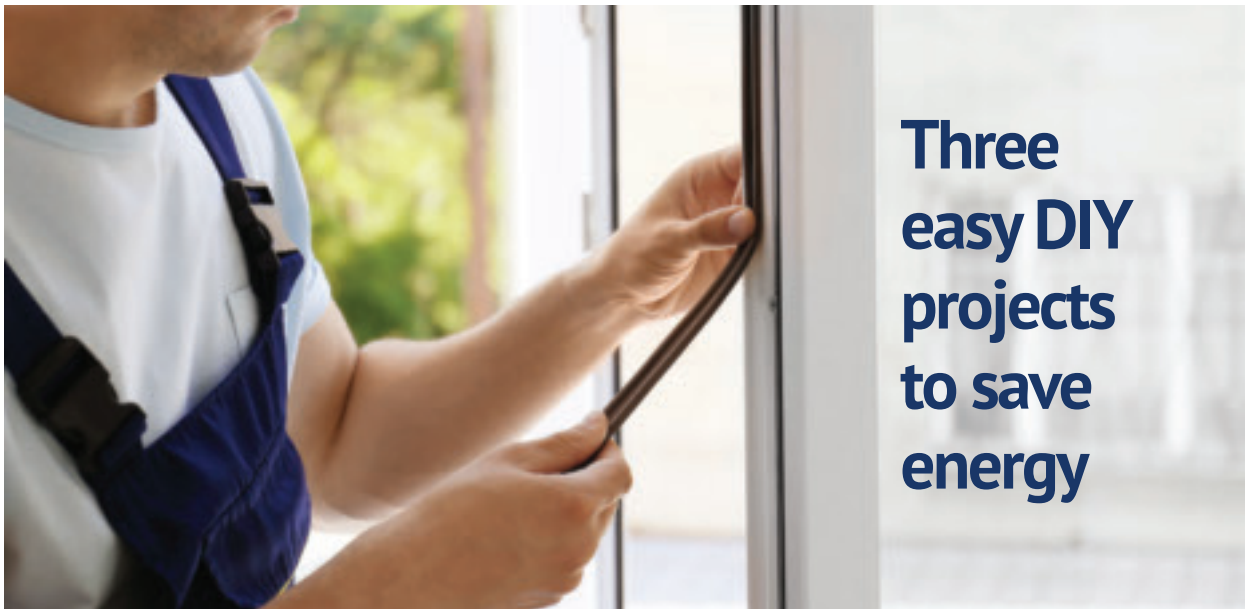
Home Electrical Inspection:

Pass or Fail?

Would your home pass an electrical inspection? Local electrical codes vary, so check with your qualified electrician, but here are **five things your home should have:**



Learn more at SafeElectricity.org



Three easy DIY projects to save energy

Winter weather can have a big impact on your energy bills, hitting your pockets a little harder than you would have liked. Now that spring is just around the corner, it's the perfect time to tackle a few DIY efficiency projects for your home. The good news: You don't have to be an energy expert to do this!

There are several easy ways to save energy, but if you're willing to take a hands-on approach, here are three projects you can do now to start saving.

Make the most of your water heater.

Let's start with one of the easiest projects: insulating your water heater. Insulating a water heater that's warm to the touch can save 7 to 16 percent annually on your water heating bills. It should also be noted that if your water heater is new, it is likely already insulated. But if your water heater is warm to the touch, it needs additional insulation.

You can purchase a pre-cut jacket or blanket for about $20. You'll also need two people for this project. Before you start, turn off the water heater. Wrap the blanket around the water heater and tape it to temporarily keep it in place. If necessary, use a marker to note the areas where the controls are so you can cut them out. Once the blanket is positioned correctly tape it permanently in place, then turn the water heater back on. If you have an electric water heater, do not set the thermostat above 130 degrees, which can cause overheating.

Seal air leaks with caulk.

The average American family spends $2,000 annually on energy bills, but unfortunately, much of that money is wasted through air leaks in the home. Applying caulk around windows, doors, electrical wiring and plumbing can save energy and money. There are many different types of caulking compounds available, but the most popular choice is silicone. Silicone caulk is waterproof, flexible and won't shrink or crack.

Before applying new caulk, clean and remove any old caulk or paint with a putty knife, screwdriver, brush or solvent. The area should be dry before you apply the new caulk.

Apply the caulk in one continuous stream, and make sure it sticks to both sides of the crack or seam. Afterwards, use a putty knife to smooth out the caulk, then wipe the surface with a dry cloth.

Amanda Morse

Weather strip exterior doors.

One of the best ways to seal air leaks is to weather strip exterior doors, which can keep out drafts and help you control energy costs. Weather stripping materials vary, but you can ask your local hardware or home store for assistance if you're unsure about the supplies you need.

When choosing weather stripping materials, make sure it can withstand temperature changes, friction and the general "wear and tear" for the location of the door. Keep in mind, you will need separate materials for the door sweep (at the bottom of the door) and the top and sides.

Before applying the new weather stripping, clean the molding with water and soap, then let the area dry completely. Measure each side of the door, then cut the weather stripping to fit each section. Make sure the weather-stripping fits snugly against both surfaces so it compresses when the door is closed.

By completing these simple efficiency projects, you can save energy (and money!) while increasing the comfort level of your home. And you can impress your family and friends with your savvy energy-saving skills.