



More Power to You

# SAFETY & RELIABILITY ARE YEAR-ROUND PRIORITIES



**O**n November 15, 2020, a rapidly strengthening storm produced high winds and led to property damage and power outages of more than 750,000 customers in the Midwest and northeastern United States, along with flooding along the shores of the Great Lakes. A broad area of wind gusts ranging between 40 and 50 mph extended from Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin to Ohio and Kentucky. Across the Great Lakes, winds reached 50–60 mph in some places, strong enough to knock down trees and break large tree limbs, as well as cause power outages, property damage, and lake-shore flooding.

Preparing for high winds and dangerous storms, like the one that occurred last November, is always top-of-mind here at Rock Energy. Line maintenance, including tree trimming for instance, can significantly reduce the number of storm-related outages.

Rock Energy dedicates a significant amount of time for tree trimming, because it's a priority for us. Tree trimmers traverse our 1,200 miles of line to remove tree branches and other vegetation growing too close to power lines in the right-of-way. Our tree-trimming program focuses on two things: safety and reliability. Most everyone can agree that trees are beautiful and an important part of our landscape. However, they can become deadly for kids playing in the neighborhood if the branches grow too close to power lines and become energized.

Trees also can be a power line's worst enemy. Strong winds, heavy snow, and ice can cause trees and their branches to snap, pulling down power lines and causing outages.

Line maintenance though involves more than just tree trimming. A complete pole and line inspection of our northern system was completed recently, and we have a schedule that calls for one-tenth of all equipment on our lines — poles, wires, transformers — to be inspected every year. If serious hazards are discovered, repairs are made immediately.

Working to minimize and prevent outages is a year-round effort. Our crews work diligently to clear branches away from power lines, and we make sure our equipment is in top-notch shape. We maintain proper engineering and an adequate inventory of parts, as well as continually train our employees. Everything we do focuses on providing you — our member — with reliable electricity. If we can do a better job servicing your energy needs, please let us know.



MY CO-OP

# PREPARE YOUR HOME & REDUCE WINTER BILLS

No matter how careful you are, there's a good chance that you'll use more electricity during the winter months. It's not surprising that our homes use more energy in the winter — energy bills can double or triple as the heat is turned up and electronics and appliances are used for increased periods of time and more often.

Even though using more electricity in the winter may be hard to avoid, these three easy steps can help you understand a higher bill and avoid high bills down the road:

- 1) **Compare Your Usage** — view your consumption, not just the cost, to see if it has increased.
- 2) **Find Opportunities to Save** — if your consumption is higher, look for ways to reduce it.
- 3) **Track Your Progress** — use your online account to track your savings and electricity usage.

Although it can be tempting to reach for the thermostat, it can be costly, so before you fight the winter blues by cranking up the heat, make sure your home is ready to make the most of that heat.

## Is Your Home Properly Insulated?

Even if your home doesn't have visible cracks or leaks, you can still be losing heat if you have inefficient insulation, particularly if you have an older home.



If your home is at least 10 years old, your insulation may have sagged or settled over time, leaving gaps and seams. Consider upgrading your insulation to newer options that can help you save energy.

- Start in areas that lose the most heat, such as attics, basements, and crawlspaces. A well-insulated attic can reduce year-round energy use by 20–60%.
- Choose newer spray foam insulation in spaces where you don't want to take down interior walls.
- Install insulation on the underside of the floor in an unheated or vented crawlspace. Fiberglass batts or blankets are usually easiest.
- Upgrade your insulation when you're undergoing other renovations, such as replacing a roof or upgrading a basement. You'll save time and it's a low-cost way to add energy efficiency to your project.

## Check For, Prevent Drafts & Reduce Heat Loss

One of the easiest ways to avoid extra heating costs is to keep heat in your home by preventing it from slipping around doors and windows.



Preventing drafts in your home can reduce your heat loss by 10 percent.

And since it's relatively easy and inexpensive to do, it can make sense to start there.

- Holes or cracks around doors and windows can let heat out, let cold air in, and keep your furnace working overtime.
- Strips of light around your weather stripping or caulking can indicate costly cracks or holes.
- Caulking or other expandable material can be used to seal the spaces between interior joints, around non-opening windows, and in spaces around water pipes and vents. Materials like weatherstripping or caulking are available at hardware stores. You can hire a professional to do the work for you, but this task should be easy enough to handle on your own.

## Keep Your Thermostat (& Your Bill) Down

If it isn't an option to upgrade your insulation and you've made all the changes that you can, sometimes it just comes down to how you manage your thermostat.



Programmable thermostats give you the flexibility to be effective with your heat. Here are a few tips:

- Turn the heat down by just two degrees — it can reduce your home heating costs by 5%.
- Program your thermostat to set back the temperature by five degrees for eight hours every night and save approximately 10% on your heating bill.
- Set the thermostat to 61° at night or when you're away. When you're home, most people are comfortable at around 68 to 70°.
- Get cozy: wearing sweaters, slippers, and using a blanket may make it easier to adjust to lower temperatures instead of turning up the heat.

# KNOW WHAT TO DO

## WHEN WINTER TAKES DOWN POLES & POWER LINES



### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Overhead power lines carry thousands of volts of electricity. If a line is down, always assume it is energized and dangerous, even if the power is out in your area. Touching or getting near a live power line can injure or even kill.

Never approach an accident scene where a line is down or damaged. If you run toward the accident to help, you too could become a victim by entering the energized area.

Power lines can come down or sag close to the ground for a few reasons: severe weather or damage due to a car accident, for instance. And a downed line isn't always visible. After severe weather, lines can lurk underneath water or debris.

*Source: SafeElectricity.org*

### STAY IN YOUR VEHICLE, CALL FOR HELP

If a power line falls on your vehicle while driving, do not attempt to drive away or get out. Call for help and **STAY INSIDE THE VEHICLE** until utility crews say it is safe to get out. If there is a fire or you smell gasoline, hop out without touching the vehicle at the same time and **DO NOT WALK**, but hop away to safety.





## LAST CHANCE TO APPLY FOR THE 2021 ROCK ENERGY SCHOLARSHIP

January 10 is the deadline to apply for Rock Energy Cooperative scholarships for 2021.

Rock Energy Cooperative offers scholarships of \$1,000 to graduating high school seniors who enroll at an accredited school. Students whose parents or guardians are active members of REC are eligible.

To apply for a 2021 Rock Energy Cooperative Scholarship, please fill out and submit the application on our website at [www.rock.coop/content/scholarships](http://www.rock.coop/content/scholarships).

Since 1989, Rock Energy has awarded more than \$122,000 in financial aid to deserving students.

Go to [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop) for details or call 866-752-4550.



**Rock Energy Cooperative offices will remain closed and REC personnel will be out on Thursday, Dec. 31, and Friday, Jan. 1, for the New Year's holiday. Members can make payments in the drop boxes at both offices throughout the holiday weekend and at the payment kiosk outside our South Beloit office, 15229 Willowbrook Road. Even though our offices are closed, standby crews are available. If you need to report a power outage, please call 866-752-4550.**

## VISIT REC WEBSITE BEFORE MAKING SOLAR DECISION



If you're thinking about installing a solar generation system on your property, make sure to learn all the facts before signing a contract.

To get started, go to [www.rock.coop/distributed-generation](http://www.rock.coop/distributed-generation). There you will find a list of frequently asked questions, guidelines for technical requirements, our interconnection agreement, and details about our Small Distributed Generation Rate. This information can be provided to potential vendors so they are aware of the cooperative's technical requirements.

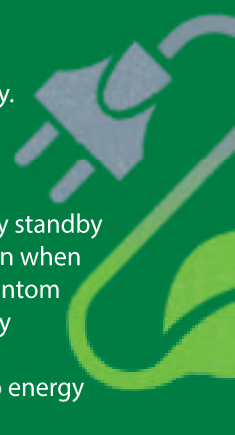
Another good source of information to help you get started is the short video "Solar 101: Learn the Basics" on our website. You can go to [www.rock.coop/content/info-videos](http://www.rock.coop/content/info-videos) to check it out.

If you have any questions after reviewing the information, please call us at 866-752-4550 or email [questions@rock.coop](mailto:questions@rock.coop).

### ENERGY EFFICIENCY

#### Tip of the Month

Replace standard power strips with advanced power strips to save energy. Advanced power strips look like ordinary power strips, but they have built-in features that are designed to reduce the amount of energy used by standby electronics that consume energy even when they're not in use (also known as phantom load). The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) estimates that the average home loses \$200 annually to energy wasted by phantom load.



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Empowering Members Since 1936