

Tree Trimming

Icestorms reinforces the importance of ROW maintenance.

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Great Gift Idea

CEC Cookbooks make perfect stocking stuffers.

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Life's Little Surprises

When unexpected expenses put you in a financial bind, remember prepaid billing.

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For members of **Choctaw Electric Cooperative**

DECEMBER 2020

80^{YEARS} CEC **inside your co-op**

This Winter

Spend Less On Electricity

CEC energy audits help you stop energy loss —and keep more money in your pocket.

Every year about this time, Brad Kendrick's phone begins to ring. As Choctaw Electric's energy use specialist, Kendrick devotes a good portion of his time to helping members find easy, affordable ways to lower their energy use and their monthly electric bills.

During the winter, the temperature drops, the sun sets earlier, and people spend more time indoors. As a result, most co-op members notice an increase in their monthly electricity costs. Often the uptick is a natural consequence of severe cold and an overworked HVAC system, but sometimes the problems are more serious, causing big spikes in usage and much higher bills.

That's where Kendrick's energy expertise comes into play. After completing some 75 residential energy audits a year for the past six years, Kendrick has seen the lion's share of home energy goblins — rat nests in duct work, HVAC units swamped by vines, missing window panes, leaky faucets, air filters heavy with dust, gaps under doors, malfunctioning appliances, and worse.

That experience coupled with his understanding of household energy use patterns, and CEC's hourly energy use



analytics helps Kendrick pinpoint problems. Often he is able to solve the problem without making an on-site inspection, which is a safety concern during the pandemic.

"Usually, I can tell what is causing the problem by when and how much electricity is being used," Kendrick explained. "For example, when I see continuous, around the clock usage that is higher than normal, it tells me to look for a water leak, or maybe a space heater that was left running in the well house."

One of the biggest culprits in high winter electricity use hides in the emergency heat setting found on home thermostats.

"It's easy to flip the thermostat to emergency heat by mistake. When that happens, your unit runs non-stop using heat strips, causing a huge spike in your electricity use," he said.

The good news is most energy use problems are an easy fix. "Often it is the simple solutions that provide the biggest savings," Kendrick says.

A tube of caulking to seal leaks, a water heater blanket, a free energy evaluation. Get started by contacting Kendrick today at **800-780-6486**, ext. 209. ☎



WINTER ENERGY TIPS

Stay cozy indoors this winter without sending your energy bills soaring.

- **Set your thermostat at 68°F.** For greater savings, try lowering your thermostat by 10 degrees at night. Use a heating blanket for extra warmth.
- **Check your attic insulation.** An R-38 value insulation is best, applied at least 16 inches deep. *Note: Many new homes fail when it comes to insulation. Most use R-11 value insulation throughout the home, which isn't sufficient for our climate.*
- **Cover non-insulated windows with plastic.** Caulk around doors, windows, and electrical outlets. Check baseboards for cold drafts and seal them off.
- **Try this quick trick for sealing windows:** Open the window, clean the seal at the base, and apply a thin layer of vaseline. You'll help the rubber stay pliable and seal off leaks!
- **Electric space heaters can cost more than \$100 per month to operate.** Minimize use, except for limited spot heating. Be sure to turn them off when leaving the room.

To learn more about our energy saving services, please visit www.choctawelectric.coop or give us a call at **800-780-6486**.

MANAGER'S REPORT



Tree Trimming Of A Different Sort

BY KOONEY DUNCAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The freak ice storm that struck central Oklahoma in late October put a lot of people to work trimming trees—and I don't mean decorating. Because it hit before the trees lost their leaves, it was 40 percent more devastating than a typical winter ice storm.

“Sure, willy-nilly cutting here and there on an “as needed” basis saves a bundle of money—until the storm hits.”

At Choctaw Electric, we were relieved the storm missed us, but it certainly gave me pause to think. Storms of this magnitude have a way of revealing our vulnerabilities. For instance, a utility might have the cleanest rights of way in the country, but that won't stop an 80 foot tree growing beyond the easement from crashing into the line. Some problems are unavoidable, but we can lessen their effects by revisiting our commitment to reliability, and making sure our right of way maintenance stays ahead of rapid vegetation growth.

Sure, willy-nilly cutting here and there on an “as needed” basis saves a bundle of money—until the storm hits. At that point, any utility willing to risk that gamble will lose their savings

quadrupled times four, while sacrificing equal amounts of consumer confidence and trust.

Fortunately, your board of trustees didn't like those odds. In 2017, they made a commitment to improving system reliability and strength through intensive, ongoing trimming, spraying and clearing in CEC rights of way. So far, we've cleared some 2,200 miles of right of way; 700 of those miles in the past year alone.

To put it in perspective, imagine carving a road from Hugo, Oklahoma to Yakima, Washington using a chainsaw and hydroaxe. It's not fun, but it is the most important thing we can do to protect the public, our employees, and our electric service to you.

When it comes to storms in Oklahoma, it's not a matter of *if*, but *when*. You can count on us to be prepared.

Have a safe and happy Christmas! 🎄



2,200

Miles of right of way maintained since 2017.

Choctaw Electric Cooperative

Serving members in Choctaw, Pushmataha, Atoka, McCurtain, Bryan and LeFlore counties.

Monday-Friday • 8 am - 5 pm

HUGO OFFICE

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Hugo, Oklahoma 74743
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Local: (580) 326-6486
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IDABEL OFFICE

2114 SE Washington
Idabel, Oklahoma 74745
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ANTLERS OFFICE

HC 67 Box 62
Antlers, Oklahoma 74523
(One mile east of Antlers)
Toll Free: (800) 780-6486
Local: (580) 298-3201

On the Web:

www.choctawelectric.coop



24 Hour Outage Hotline

800-780-6486

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If this account number belongs to you, contact CEC by the 5th of the month to claim your \$25 bill credit. Unclaimed bill credits roll over each month by \$25 for a maximum credit of \$100. To claim your credit, please call 800-780-6486, ext. 207.

OFFICIAL MINUTES OF YOUR CEC BOARD MEETING

Scan this code with your smartphone or tablet to read the monthly minutes of your co-op board meeting. Minutes are also available at any CEC location and online at www.choctawelectric.coop.

To scan the code, install a Bar Code Scanner app, available at the App Store.





Cookbooks Make Great Gifts

Order an 80th Anniversary Cookbook and get to cooking!

Hot off the press is Choctaw Electric's 80th Anniversary Cookbook, the perfect holiday stocking stuffer for your family and friends.

With new contributions from members, plus a few historic recipes from our pioneer members, these recipes have been approved by generations of CEC families. From main dishes and desserts to breads, salads and side dishes, you'll find 120 pages of yummy recipes sure to please your family and friends.



Grab a copy while supplies last!

Pick up a copy at the CEC office in Antlers, Hugo or Idabel, or order by calling **800-780-6486**. Cost: **\$10.00**

For more details, please visit www.choctawelectric.coop, or give us a call at **800-780-6486**, ext. 209. ☎



IT'S CHRISTMAS!

LEAN INTO IT.

From all of us at Choctaw Electric, please have a safe holiday. It's a privilege to serve you.

Holiday Hours:

**Closed Christmas
December 24-25**

**Closed New Year
January 1, 2021**

To report service problems, please call 800-780-6486.

THE HOME Energy DETECTIVE

By Brad Kendrick, CEC Energy Use Specialist



Are LED Christmas Lights Worth The Price?

If you're planning to decorate your home for Christmas, you may want to consider LEDs.

LEDs— short for light-emitting diodes—are much more efficient than traditional incandescent lights. The initial purchase price of LED lights is higher than standard lights, but LEDs cost a lot less to operate. They're also safer because they generate less heat.

Before you plan your lighting design, compare the operating costs for LEDs and traditional incandescents. It could save you money this Christmas, and for many holidays to come.



Standard C-7 Mini Incandescent Lights

125 bulb strand/ 4 watts per bulb
On 12 hours/day for 40 days
Operating Cost.....\$25.13



LED Christmas Lights

300 bulb strand/ 0.4 watts per bulb
On 12 hours/day for 40 days
Operating Cost.....\$6.03



Do you have questions for CEC's energy sleuth? Please call Brad Kendrick, CEC energy use specialist, at **800-780-6486**, or email your questions to: bakendrick@choctawelectric.coop.

Prepaid Billing

For Life's Little Surprises.



- *No deposit*
- *No late fees*
- *No reconnect charges*

Unexpected expenses, changes in salary or retirement income can wreck your household budget. At Choctaw Electric Cooperative, **we understand why members need flexible payment plans.** That's why we created prepaid billing, a payment option that lets **you decide when and how much you pay for your electricity.**

Prepaid is for members who appreciate the freedom to choose. When you enroll in prepaid billing, you **pay ahead for your electricity based on what you normally use or can afford.** When your account drops to \$25, CEC issues a low balance alert so you know it's time to watch your usage, or pay the amount of your choice to extend your service. **There are no late fees or reconnect fees.** When your account balance reaches zero, your service stops until you pay again.

To make a payment, prepaid members can use our Smarthub app, or pay at one of our PaySite kiosks located throughout our service area, by mail, or at your nearest CEC office.

Find out why more than 1,300 CEC members use prepaid. Prepaid members love this plan because it puts control in their hands. To find out how prepaid can work for you, please call 800-780-6486, or visit www.choctawelectric.coop.

WHEN THE ENDS DON'T MEET

If you are having difficulty paying your utility bills please contact your co-op before your bill is due. Our billing representatives are happy to provide a list of agencies that help qualifying families and individuals with winter heating costs. Please contact our office at **800-780-6486** to learn about utility bill assistance, as well as CEC payment plans that will help you avoid late fees.



SAVE MONEY ON MEDICARE

New program offers help for your prescriptions.

The average person's savings equals about \$4,900.

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services is asking electric co-ops to help them reach persons who may be eligible for new programs that could save them money.

The **Extra Help Prescription Program** helps qualifying people on Medicare save an average of \$4,900 a year on their Part D expenses and prescription medications.

The **Medicare Savings Program** helps cover Medicare premiums and help pay for your hospital benefits and doctor visits by reducing or eliminating your co-pay and/or deductibles.

For details and information, please call **405-521-2281**.

REPORT OUTAGES FAST!

Use Smarthub to report an outage and you'll never get a frustrating busy signal! Two ways to access Smarthub:

1. Download the app from the App Store or at www.smarthubapp.com. You will be asked to register by providing an email address, password, and CEC account number. Once registered, use Smarthub to report an outage via smartphone, tablet or computer.
2. Visit www.choctawelectric.coop and click Report An Outage at the upper right of the homepage.

Questions? Please give us a call at **800-780-6486**.