

# Save Money on your Energy Costs

Electricity is so easy to buy. We often forget that every time we adjust our thermostat, every time we turn on a light switch, and every time we turn on the television we are using and buying electricity.

Old habits are hard to break. And sometimes it's even harder when you tackle several at a time. But adjusting your lifestyle to incorporate good energy conservation habits will really pay off in the long run. If the following tips and suggestions are too much for you to bite off all at once, why not commit to adopting one of these practices this month. Then, next month, start practicing a new one. In a very short time, you'll see some real savings on your energy costs.

Heating and cooling your home typically uses much more energy than any other use category. So it makes good sense to start here.

- **Avoid over using your air conditioning unit and heating unit(s) as much as possible. Use ceiling fans or floor fans to move air.**
- **Close the shades or curtains on sunny windows during summer. In winter keep these shades open during the day.**
- **Thermostats should be set no higher than 70° F in the winter and no lower than 78° F in the summer.**
- **Chimney flues should be closed except when the fireplace is in use.**
- **Keep the filters on all your heating and cooling units clean.**
- **Make sure your home doesn't have major energy leaks. Weather stripping, insulation, caulk, and storm doors and windows are typically home improvement projects that can quickly pay for themselves in energy savings.**
- **Closing vents in unused rooms can cut heating and cooling costs, but closing too many can force your heating or cooling system to work harder. So strike a balance.**
- **If you use window air conditioning units to cool your home, try not to put these units in windows that receive a lot of direct sunlight. That makes the unit work even harder.**
- **Homeowners who are looking to upgrade their heating system with a new, energy efficient electric heat pump may qualify for financing through the TVA energy right® program. Contact your local VEC Customer Service Center for more details.**

Next month we will look at ways to keep you from getting taken to the cleaners on energy costs while you are doing your laundry.

## Be Prepared

When thunderstorms threaten or when blizzards strike, a Midland weather radio will help you monitor the latest weather developments and keep you one step ahead of the weather.

Keep track of the latest weather information in up to seven different counties at once.

Stop by your local Volunteer Energy Cooperative Customer Service Center and take the guesswork out of weather watching.



## TVA is not Immune to Spiraling Costs

By Rody Blevins President/CEO

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) recently announced they will increase the rate they charge power distributors like Volunteer Energy Cooperative by 7.6%. That is not good news to electricity customers in the Tennessee Valley but it is also not a big surprise.

TVA officials say the main reason for the rate hike is the rising costs of coal, natural gas, and power purchased by TVA.

Our regional association, the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association (TVPPA), has met several times with TVA over the course of the summer to review data supporting TVA's case for a rate hike. Based on the data presented, TVPPA's Rates and Contracts Committee concluded the need for the rate hike is understandable.

TVA officials also presented the results of their efforts to contain costs and increase efficiency. TVA has made significant strides in keep the lid on costs and TVA's capability to generate power in several different ways has helped the October 1 rate increase from being an even bigger one. But we believe even more can be done. VEC and the other 156 power distributors TVA serves are encouraging TVA to find even more ways to cut costs.

For every dollar VEC receives from its customers, 78 cents goes to TVA to purchase power.

That leaves us an extremely small margin with which to operate and maintain our distribution system, maintain our customer service centers, and pay our other bills. And we are also subject to the same pressures of rising costs. Anyone who has made a trip to the gas pumps recently can probably imagine how much rising gas prices affects us in our efforts to keep our trucks on the road and serving our customers.

Higher gasoline prices also add to the costs of materials that VEC has shipped to us. Copper, aluminum, and steel are costing more and more. TVA and VEC are not immune to these higher costs of doing business. But it is worth noting that customers in this area enjoy some of the lowest electricity costs in the nation.

We at VEC are just as committed as always to bring you the best possible service at the lowest possible price.

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## Wamp Talks Energy Bill, Project Funding During Visit to VEC Headquarters

U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Chattanooga, recently addressed a luncheon meeting of the Meigs County Chamber of Commerce at Volunteer Energy Cooperative's Decatur, TN corporate offices and updated the audience on various provisions in the energy bill that was recently signed into law by President George Bush.

Wamp said alternative energy sources were a big winner in the new energy bill. He said the bill is loaded with incentives for consumers as well as manufacturers and researchers.

He said the bill promotes green power sources such as wind and solar electricity generation, hybrid gasoline/electric automobiles, and hydrogen fuel cell technology.

"All these things are going to help us reduce our dependence on foreign sources," Wamp said.

VEC President/CEO Rody Blevins said he believes rural electric cooperatives are generally pleased with the energy bill.

"It includes tax credits for renewable energy sources and that's something we really wanted to see included," Blevins said. "We also worked hard to avoid additional regulations that would have increased our costs."

Wamp also announced that \$1.3 million in federal funds have been appropriated for the Cherokee Memorial Park in the southern part of Meigs County. The park will ultimately include nature trails, a Cherokee monument and displays, an overlook, a genealogical research center, canoeing, and fishing.



**Blevins and Wamp**  
VEC President/CEO Rody Blevins, right, welcomes Congressman Zach Wamp to VEC Headquarters.





# VECshare

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) customers funded grants totaling \$33,200 in July. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, a total of \$1,504,465.20 in grants has been awarded. The deadline for grant applications is the last day of each month. For additional information, contact the office of Marketing and Economic Development, at 423-334-7051. Applications are also available online, at [www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org).

## Organizations receiving grants in July include:

McMinn County Amateur Radio Club - \$5,000; New Beginnings Garden Club (Decatur) - \$3,030; Cumberland County Playhouse - \$2,230; Monterey Special Projects - \$2,000; Anchor Club of McMinn Central High School - \$1,894; Cleveland/Bradley Chamber Foundation - \$1,800; Fentress County Public Library - \$1,000; Hilltoppers, Inc., (Crossville) - \$1,000; BASIC of TN, Inc., (Birchwood) - \$1,000; Good Neighbors Theatre, Inc., (Byrdstown) - \$1,000; Luminary Children's Fund (Spring City) - \$1,000; McDonald Cemetery Association (Ooltewah) - \$1,000; Relay for Life of Pickett County Committee - \$1,000; Church of the Harvest Food Bank (Grimslay) - \$1,000; Meigs County Lions Club - \$976; Mayland Community Organization - \$900; Plateau Pregnancy Services (Crossville) - \$870; Polk County Education Foundation - \$750; Linsdale Community Services - \$750; Child Advocacy Center (9th Judicial District) - \$600; Cleveland Express Track Program - \$500; Chilhowee Fire Station No. 5 - \$500; Byrdstown Senior Center - \$500; Shiloh Cemetery Association (Ten Mile) - \$500; McMinn County Historical and Heritage Society - \$500; Three Rivers Antique Tractor Club (Kingston) - \$500; Charleston Elementary PTO - \$500; Midway High School PTO - \$400; Rogers Creek Elementary School PTO - \$200; Pilot Club of Athens, Inc., - \$175; and Calhoun Elementary Booster Club - \$125.



VECustomers Share Board Member Bobby Scott, left, presents a grant check to, from left, Hoyt Branham, Sylvia Beavers, and Carolyn Roark of BASIC of TN, Inc.

## Impending Electrical Safety Foundation Says Test GFCI Receptacles Monthly

a nightlight or similar device into the outlet when conducting the following test:

1. Push the "Reset" button of the GFCI receptacle to prepare the unit for testing.
2. Plug in the light and turn it on. Light should be ON.
3. Push the "Test" button of the GFCI receptacle. Light should go OFF.
4. Push the "Reset" button again. Light should go ON.



A light plugged into the GFCI receptacle should go out when the test button is pushed. If the light remains on when the button is pushed, either the GFCI is not working properly or has not been correctly installed. Consumers should consider the GFCI as a back-up safety device, and not a replacement for common sense and prudent behavior whenever using electrical products. Wherever water and electricity are present, consumers need heightened awareness and should follow the safety instructions that came with the appliance.

There are three steps to be sure of your GFCI's reliability:

1. Use only GFCIs which have been listed or certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory or certification organization;
2. Have your GFCIs installed by a qualified electrician; and
3. Test your GFCIs at least once each month or whenever there is an unusual occurrence such as a severe electrical storm.

An interactive demonstration of a proper GFCI test is available at the National Electrical Safety Foundation website ([www.nesf.org](http://www.nesf.org)) along with other graphical support.

A Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) is a device designed to minimize shock and reduce the chances of electrocution, especially when electrical circuits in appliances inadvertently come in contact with water. GFCIs are those outlets that have a reset button on them and they are most often installed in kitchens, baths, laundry rooms, and out-of-doors where electricity and water are most likely to be used in close proximity. They are great safety features, but they are of little use if they are worn out, damaged, or faulty.

An estimated 400-million GFCIs have been installed across the country. Many consumers, however, don't check their GFCIs to verify they are working. GFCIs have a built-in test button, which should be used regularly – every month according to experts.

"GFCIs have probably saved hundreds of lives and prevented thousands of serious injuries in the last three decades," according to NESF Executive Director Walt Biddle. "Regular testing of all GFCIs is an important part of protecting your family. This is even more important in locations with frequent and severe electrical storms or power surges."

There are three types of GFCIs. The most often used "receptacle type" GFCI, similar to a common wall outlet, is the type with which most consumers will be familiar. Additionally, circuit breaker GFCIs are often used as replacements for standard circuit breakers and provide GFCI protection to all receptacles on that individual circuit.

Circuit breaker GFCIs should also be checked monthly by pressing the "Test" button on the breaker, which should disconnect power to all lights and appliances on the circuit. Temporary or "plug-in" GFCIs are frequently used in construction and in outdoor settings with electric tools, mowers, trimmers, and similar devices. They should not be used as a permanent alternative to a regular GFCI. Temporary GFCIs should be tested prior to every use.

The trip button may activate when the test button is pushed, but the circuit may still be energized (connected). To be absolutely certain that your receptacle GFCIs are operating correctly, consumers should plug

## Enjoy the Ultimate Flavor Experience!

Meco portable electric grills are now available at your local VEC Customer Service Center.

*You can direct cook steaks, hamburgers hot dogs, pork chops and chicken pieces. You can also indirect cook roasts and whole poultry.*

*The Meco portable electric grill is safe, clean, and very economical. A large cooking area fits neatly into this compact, tabletop design.*



JUST \$66 PLUS TAX

NEW!

Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) will soon be putting some new technologies to work to help keep customers up to date on the status of their VEC accounts.

Duel Grubb, vice president of VEC's Information Technology Department, recently announced that VEC's Interactive Voice Response system will soon be used to notify customers when their account becomes severely delinquent.

Grubb said the idea is to make sure customers are aware of potential problems before VEC is forced to discontinue service.

"We performed some tests in the Spring City area and it worked very well," Grubb said. "Our plan is to give the customers a courtesy call about 24 hours before service is discontinued."

Grubb said that during the test, the majority of customers responded and brought their accounts up to date before VEC was forced to go out and discontinue service.

"It saves money for the customer because they save on any disconnect or reconnect fees," Grubb said. "And it saves VEC the expense of sending crews out twice – once to disconnect and again to reconnect."

The courtesy call will be done in addition to the mailed notices that VEC will continue to use to notify customers of impending disconnects.

Grubb said that no system is perfect but if errors are made, it is more likely that customers who are not scheduled for disconnection will receive one of the calls. He said that it is less likely that a customer who is scheduled to be disconnected will not receive the call.

One of the most important ways we can avoid these mistakes is to have a correct phone number on file for every customer, Grubb said.

He urged customers to phone their local VEC Customer Service Center to verify that the phone number we have on file for their account is correct.

Grubb said it will not only increase efficiency with these courtesy calls, it will also make reporting an outage faster and easier for customers, and it will help insure that VEC can reach a customer when we need to.