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Don't overfill your refrigerator-freezer; cool air needs to circulate freely throughout the interior of the appliance.

Defrost frozen food in the refrigerator before cooking. Use food storage containers with tight-fitting covers to prevent excessive moisture buildup in your refrigerator and to reduce energy consumption. Covered containers will prevent unwanted flavor transfer too.

Get rid of that extra refrigerator in the basement or garage. An inefficient refrigerator with an ill-fitting door can cost hundreds of dollars per year to operate. Your freezer works best when it is filled to capacity. Place covered plastic water-filled containers in your freezer for maximum efficiency, and buy the smallest model that will meet your needs. Label frozen food clearly to minimize the amount of cold that escapes when searching for specific items. Upright freezers are generally more expensive than chest freezers and are 10 - 25% less energy-efficient. Defrost your freezer whenever ice buildup is more than 1/4 inch thick.

In the laundry room

String up a clothesline. You'll save money and your clothes will smell summertime-fresh. Don't use your washing machine for a few small items; wait for a full load. Use the cold water cycle whenever possible. Clean the clothes dryer filter after each load, and clean the dryer duct regularly. Clogged filters and ducts restrict airflow, decrease energy efficiency and can be a fire hazard.

Using your air conditioner

Inspect and maintain your cooling system. Simple measures such as cleaning and replacing clogged air filters can reduce cooling costs up to 10%. An annual service call will extend the life of your expensive cooling equipment and boost efficiency. Don't forget cooling system ductwork. Leaking joints, elbows and connections can boost energy consumption 20 to 30%. Seal loose joints. Shade your air conditioner from direct sunlight. Adjust your air conditioner's thermostat when you go out, and shut your system down when you are away for extended periods. Unnecessary cooling costs money. Close all windows, doors and chimney dampers when using your air conditioner. Don't use your hard-earned money to cool the great outdoors.

Young Writers Win Spot on Washington Youth Tour

Four high school juniors within the Volunteer Energy Cooperative service area have been awarded an all-expense paid week in Washington, D.C. Erin Chambers of Pickett County High School, Erica McMurray of Midway High School, April Melton of Stone Memorial High School, and Kirby Deal of Bradley Central High School wrote winning short stories to earn their spot on this year's Washington Youth Tour. The tour, scheduled for June 13 through June 19, brings together high school students who are served by electric cooperatives from across the country for a week of sight-seeing and fun in our nation's capital.

The tour is sponsored by Volunteer Energy Cooperative and other rural electric cooperatives from across the nation and is organized by the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. About 140 students from across Tennessee and about 1,700 students from across the nation will be attending.

Erin Chambers was selected as the overall winner from VEC's service area. Her short story was forwarded for statewide judging where three winners will be selected. Statewide winners will receive a \$3,000, a \$2,000, or a \$1,000 college scholarship. Chambers' English teacher at Pickett County High School, Judy Shoat, was also awarded a spot on the trip. VEC Communications Coordinator Robert McCarty coordinates VEC's participation in the program. He made in-class presentations at the three participating high schools and will chaperone on the trip. Chambers' short story, Electric Cooperatives: Energizing Our Communities appears in this edition of Powerlines.



Copper Theft is Costly for Customers and Can Be Deadly for Thieves

As I write this column we are still assessing the damage thieves did to our Goodfield Substation in Meigs County in an effort to steal somewhere

between \$200 and \$450 worth of copper.

The thieves caused a power outage that lasted about four and a half hours for nearly 6,000 VEC customers. And the damage they caused to our substation equipment could be as high as \$200,000. The thieves caused all this inconvenience and expense for a relatively small amount of money – but they also risked their lives.

Much of the copper wiring that was taken from the substation was grounding wire. These wires provide a safe path for excess voltage that periodically builds within the system. They safeguard the substation's equipment. The lines can have electricity flowing through them at any time. VEC crews receive extensive training before they are allowed to work on these lines. They also use tools, clothing, and equipment that have been specifically designed to offer the most protection possible and they also work in teams so co-workers can watch carefully to make sure all safety techniques are carefully followed. Judging from the crime scene, these thieves were not nearly that careful.

Around the region several deaths have resulted from this type of copper theft. I've seen the grisly photos myself. While VEC has suffered a few copper thefts like this one, there have been no deaths on our system – YET. But if these thefts continue, it won't be a matter of IF such a death will occur; it's just a matter of WHEN. Sooner or later the odds are bound to catch up with these thieves.

It will be a tragic and senseless death. No amount of money warrants taking such a risk. But it makes it particularly tragic when you consider the relatively small gain for which the thieves are risking their lives.

VEC joined with other rural electric cooperatives in urging Tennessee lawmakers to pass legislation that encourages scrape metal dealers to assist in the apprehension of copper thieves. That legislation has now passed, but in the case of the Goodfield theft it may not be necessary. A few hours after the thefts law enforcement officials apprehended suspects.

If jail time is the only repercussion these thieves face – they can count themselves very lucky.

A Penny Saved ...

Save Money on Energy Costs this Summer

In your garden and around your home

Longer days mean shorter nights. Don't forget to adjust your outdoor lighting timers. You'll save money and extend bulb life. Avoid excessive lighting levels on the patio and in other outdoor living areas. Illumination should be just bright enough for safety and for relaxing on summer evenings. Install a timer, or better yet, use patio lights only when needed.

Gas lawn mowers are a major source of air pollution and smog in many areas. Electric mowers pollute less and are much quieter too. Consider using electric grass and hedge trimmers instead of gas-powered trimmers. Well maintained manual trimmers are preferred by many expert gardeners and professionals. A broom will clean your driveway and walkways as effectively as a gas-powered leaf blower; it will also save money and boost your popularity with the neighbors.

Plan your garden with the changing seasons in mind. Shelter the south side of your home from summer sun with deciduous trees. Evergreens will protect the north side of your home from icy blasts.

For indoor comfort

Shelter sun-exposed windows with awnings and shrubbery. Keep your blinds and draperies closed on hot, sunny days. Keep windows closed in the heat of the day. Open windows in the cool of the night. Your attic gets hot in the summer temperatures of up to 65°C (150°F) are common. Insulation in your attic protects your home from excessive heat penetration in summer and cold penetration in winter. Invest in attic insulation for year-round comfort and efficiency.

Use floor and ceiling fans to create gentle breezes to keep you and your family comfortable. If your basement is dry, use the furnace fan to circulate cool basement air throughout your home. Maintain your furnace air filter at peak efficiency to reduce indoor pollen levels. Use compact fluorescent lighting wherever you can.

Compact fluorescents use very little energy and produce much less waste heat than incandescent and halogen lights. In general, you will find lower indoor lighting levels more pleasant in warm weather.

In the kitchen

Coordinate meal planning with the seasons. Remember, nothing tastes better than a cold salad on a hot day. Keep your oven door tightly closed. Use the oven light to check on progress when baking or roasting. Timers and meat thermometers save energy and help you avoid overcooked meals.

Select right-sized pots and pans with tight-fitting lids and cook at lower temperatures to reduce energy use. A six-inch pan on an eight-inch element, for example, wastes 40% of the element's heat output. Make full use of microwave ovens in hot weather. Microwave cooking can reduce energy consumption by two-thirds and produces much less waste heat than your stove. Toaster ovens and slow cookers are also a great way to reduce energy use in the kitchen. Convection ovens consume up to one-third less energy than standard ovens. Heated air is continuously circulated by the oven's fan, for more even heat and reduced cooking times.

Full loads only, please, when you run the dishwasher. Vacuum your refrigerator's cooling coils every three months. Excessive dust buildup will reduce the energy efficiency and life expectancy of the compressor. Make sure there are no gaps in the door seal.

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VEC Customers Share

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

By allowing their electric bills to be rounded up to the next dollar Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) customers funded \$34,300 in community service grants in March. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, more than \$2.5 million 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. Organizations receiving grants in February include: Plateau Longbeards, Crossville - \$2,500; Church of the Harvest Food Bank, Grimsley - \$2,000; Pickett County High School Pottery Club - \$1,677; Midway High School Basketball Boosters, Kingston - \$1,500; Children's Advocacy Center of Hamilton County - \$1,500; Spring City Quarterback Club - \$1,373; Ocoee Outreach, Cleveland - \$1,200; South Roane County Volunteer Fire Department - \$1,000; Health Occupations Students of America, Decatur - \$1,000; Polk County Retired Teacher's Association - \$1,000; Cleveland/Bradley County Chamber Foundation - \$1,000; Community Outreach Prevention Education, Byrdstown - \$1,000; Meigs County Middle School PTO - \$1,000; Old Fort Community Club - \$1,000; Samaritan Center, Ooltewah - \$1,000; Hamilton County 4-H - \$1,000; Stone Memorial High School Rocketry Club - \$750; Cumberland Adult Reading Council, Crossville - \$750; Fairfield Glade Lions Club Charities, Inc., - \$750; Sewee Church Youth Group, Niota - \$750; Hillisview Volunteer Fire Department - \$750; Central Outreach Center, Spring City - \$700; Friends of the Park, Spring City - \$600; Putnam County Advocates for Aging - \$550; BASIC of TN, Inc., Birchwood - \$500; Meigs County Senior Center - \$500; Chilhowee Youth Girls Softball, Benton - \$500; Hull-York DAV Chapter 5, Byrdstown - \$500; Fentress County Advocates for Aging - \$500; E.K. Baker PTO, Athens - \$500; Crossville Lions Club - \$500; Midway Athletic Club - \$500; Partners of the Cherokee National Forest, Cleveland - \$500; Mt. Carmel Ladies of Action, Decatur - \$500; American Legion Post #81, Cleveland - \$500; Women United in Community Service, Athens - \$400; Polk County K-8 D.A.R.E. Club - \$400; Athens Area Council for the Arts - \$300; J.L. Cook School Alumni Association, Etowah - \$300; Shenandoah Baptist Academy - Junior/Senior Booster Club, Cleveland - \$250; Cumberland County Advocates for Aging - \$200; Linsdale Community Services - \$100; and Monterey High School Softball Booster Club - \$500.



VEC Customers Share Board Chairman Charlton Norris, left, presents a grant check in the amount of \$1,000 to Angela Baerg of The Samaritan Center.

Right-of-Way Spraying Schedule

Volunteer Energy Cooperative's right-of-way (ROW) spraying program is scheduled to get under way in mid June to September, according to Steve Scott, VEC's vegetation control specialist.

Scott said the spraying is necessary to help prevent extended power outages caused by falling trees and to assist with quick power restorations by improving access for service crews. "We spray when growth is most active," Scott said. "We only use EPA-approved herbicides that are rated the safest and we use them in low concentrations."

Scott said the herbicides work on woody growth without affecting flowers and grass. The herbicides VEC will be using have been tested and deemed harmless to humans and animals. Copies of the Material Safety Data Sheets for each herbicide are available at VEC customer service centers. Scott said the spraying technique used is selective, low volume and low concentration, backpack spraying to prevent drift.

Organic growers with questions in the Cleveland and Decatur service districts should contact Scott at 423-334-7034. Organic growers in the Crossville service district should contact Tommy Walker at 931-839-2217 ext. 7434 and organic growers in the Jamestown service district should contact Butch Smith at 931-864-3685 ext. 7651.

2008 ROW Spraying Schedule

Benton Service Area

Reliance, Lost Creek, Kimsey Mountain, Fairview, Archville, and Highway 314.

Byrdstown Service Area

Bloomington, Caney Creek, Eagle Cove, Greenbrier, Love Lady, and Jones Chapel.

Cleveland Service Area

Charleston, Upper-River Road, Highway 11 South, Chatata Valley, Council Road, White Oak Valley, and Old Freewill Road.

Crossville Service Area

Creston, Lawson Road, Tabor Loop, Sunset Ridge, Highway 127 West, Potato Farm Road, Rinnie, Pigeon Ridge, Halstead, Foxfire, Lantana Road, Brewer Road, Cumberland Mountain Retreat, Smithtown, Biglick, and Taylors Chapel Road.

Decatur Service Area

Ten Mile, Highway 58 North to Kingston Bridge, River Road, Keylon Hollow, Mans Hollow, Grigsby Hollow, Woody Lane, Behind Shaw Industries, and Cottonport Ridge Road.

Georgetown Service District

Birchwood, Highway 60 West, Birchwood Pike, Highway 58 South, Dolly Pond, Greenwood, Wolftever, and Harrison Bay Road.

Jamestown Service District

Forbus, King Mountain, Little Crab and Riverton.

Monterey Service District

Cumberland Cove, Jim Garrett Road, Highway 70, and Mayland.

Spring City Service District

Black Valley Road, Muddy Creek, Evansville Mountain, Grandview, Hinch Mountain, Highway 302, Highway 27 South, Jewett Road, Possum Trot, Toe String Road, Wolf Creek, and Yellow Creek.

Tree Trimming Notifications Not Always Possible

One of the great things about this part of Tennessee is the abundance and variety of trees that beautify the area. But when tree limbs grow to the point of threatening power lines, Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) has no choice – the tree must be trimmed.

VEC's certified arborist Steve Scott says that, before VEC crews or contract crews trim a tree, every effort is made to notify the property owner. But in some cases when the property owner cannot be notified, crews will still be forced to trim. "We won't do a tree removal without notifying the property owner but sometimes, when the tree is a considerable threat to the power lines and when we've tried and failed to talk to the property owner, we will be forced to trim without the notification," Scott said. "We would prefer to be able to speak with the property owners first, but that is just not always possible." Scott said trees located near power lines must be pruned periodically to prevent power outages and damage to equipment. He added that VEC uses the natural/lateral cut method that is recommended by the National Arbor Day Foundation, the International Society of Arboriculture, the National Arborist Association, and other professional trade organizations.

Electric Cooperatives: Energizing Our Communities

Erin Chambers, Pickett County High School

As the early spring sun rose, Teresa Marchfield left her new apartment for a walk. The air was clean and the ground was trash-free. Because she was city born and bred, Teresa couldn't help but wonder at the lack of pollution.

"They use hydroelectric power here," she recalled, spotting the electric lines. A scowl crossed her face when she saw a man at work on one of the poles taking some sort of reading, or at least she thought he was. Teresa didn't know much about electric companies, nor did she want to. They were all the same – run by men with power complexes who jacked up prices for no other reason than to line their own pockets. She sped up from a leisurely walk to a jog.

The worker caught sight of her, broke into a smile and waved. "Hey there!"
Wasn't he working? Teresa snorted to herself. Realizing it would be rude to ignore him, she returned his wave.

He turned back to the pole, writing on his clipboard. "I don't recognize you. Are you new around here?"

Teresa nodded. "I'm Teresa Marchfield. I'm from New York."

He whistled. "Walter Schmidt. New York... that's an expensive place." She gave him an odd look and Schmidt laughed sheepishly. "Sorry. When I'm on the job, everything goes back to electricity."

Teresa rolled her eyes. "New York electricity averages a little less than sixteen cents per kilowatt hour. With an average salary, it's workable." Her scowl deepened. "That is, it's workable until greedy CEO's issue rate hikes for no reason other than to up their profits."

"Ah," Schmidt laughed again. "No wonder you keep looking at me like a poisonous toadstool. That's the difference between a cooperative and IOUs, or 'investor-owned utilities.'"

The worker stopped by another pole to repeat his reading, and despite herself Teresa stopped with him.

"IOUs have been in business since the 1880s," Schmidt continued as he worked. "In those times, big cities like New York could get electricity, but running lines out into rural areas was not considered feasible. It wasn't profitable for the bigwigs, so rural areas had to do without. This went on for fifty years, in fact, until President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Tennessee Valley Authority Act in 1933 and created the Rural Electrification Administration in 1935. Since the power companies still showed little interest, the people decided to make their own electric companies. These became cooperatives."

Schmidt certainly seemed proud of these 'cooperatives.' Teresa frowned. "Is that why Tennessee's average price per kilowatt hour is so much cheaper? I thought it was just supply and demand."

"Ma'am," said Schmidt, sounding distinctly amused, "TVA is the largest provider of energy in the United States. Cooperatives buy the energy and then sell it to the people. Our rates are lower because cooperatives are non-profit businesses. New technology factors in a percentage of the price, yes, but we don't have any 'rate hikes for no other reason than to up our profits.'"

He scrawled down another note while Teresa tried not to feel embarrassed. Maybe it was wrong to group all electric companies together like she had.

"Any profits," he added after a moment of thought, "are given back to the community. The cooperative presents electrical safety programs; provides training to firemen, policemen, and ambulance personnel; and funds several college scholarships. The list goes on."

If the companies back home did anything of that sort, Teresa thought darkly, it would have been with much grandiose speech about great kindness and philanthropy. It would've been a business ploy. She started walking again, basking in the gentle warmth. "It's a wonder how clean the environment is around here," she murmured.

"I could talk about that too..." Catching up, the worker quirked a grin.

Teresa stared at him. "You are impossible."
Schmidt laughed. "Whatever you say... anyway, although coal and natural gas are cheap to burn, not only are they nonrenewable resources, they're also bad for the environment.

Scrubbers can cut down on the pollutants released into the atmosphere, but they can't get rid of it entirely. For that reason TVA has been working with the environmental community to develop what's called 'Green Power Switch.' Green power is produced from renewable resources like wind and sunlight, and it's much cleaner."

Is he saying that the electric companies are partly responsible for the lack of pollution in the environment on top of everything else? Teresa took a look around, half-expecting for her initial impression of a minimally polluted ecosystem to have been mistaken. It wasn't, and she thought that maybe cooperatives were different than the money-hungry power companies she was used to.

The sun was markedly higher than when she had left the house, Teresa noticed, and she checked her watch. "I have to get home," she said. She had a job interview in about an hour.

"It's been nice talking to you." It was ironic that prior to today saying 'nice' about electric companies would have been nearly enough to make her choke.

"It's always my pleasure to talk with my bosses," Schmidt replied with a sideways grin.

Teresa blinked. "What?"

"You don't know? In a cooperative, customers own the company." Schmidt stopped by a beat up blue pickup truck and tipped her a joking salute. "See you around, boss."