

Why Does It Take So Long To Get Power Back On?



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER KATHI CALVERT

WHEN THE LIGHTS GO OUT, some folks wonder why it takes Houston County Electric Cooperative so long to turn them back on. Isn't it as easy as a flip of a switch? Unfortunately, it is not. To help members understand the time and effort involved, let's examine the meticulous process of restoring power after an outage.

When an outage is reported, the dispatcher's system can "ping" other meters near the reported area to help pinpoint the affected location. Then linemen are dispatched to the area. Once crews arrive, they investigate potential causes. Our crews already know where the fuses and breakers are and which one is predicted to be open. (Fuses and breakers are closed when operative and open when there is an outage.)

When a crew identifies the open device, the dispatcher enters this information into the system, providing an indication on every account affected.

Next, linemen patrol the line that is without power. This could mean driving or walking past miles of line, closely examining every pole, transformer, wire, crossarm and insulator to see if anything is out of the ordinary. The crews also look for animals, balloons, tree limbs and other objects that could be touching the lines. If it is dark, stormy or foggy, weather conditions can make this process longer and harder for our linemen.

Once they locate the cause of the outage, the linemen verify again that the line is not energized before installing grounding devices on the line to ensure their safety. After placing the necessary safeguards, they can begin working to solve the problems—and those can seem endless.

Linemen might have to cut up a tree that has fallen on a line, requiring chain saws and other ground-maintenance equipment. They might need to remove broken lines and string new ones. They might have to remove a broken pole and install a new pole, transformer and other equipment. In that case, linemen must call the co-op office with details, such as size and type, then wait while the equipment is delivered.

Also, if a new hole must be dug for a pole, the linemen must call for someone to locate underground telephone or gas lines in the area. This kind of "emergency locate" requires a minimum of two hours to respond to the request, but it might take longer to get a state-certified contractor to check the area for other underground utilities. The linemen are not permitted to dig until the contractor has approved the area for digging. For this reason, our men will often attempt to pull the old pole out of the ground and put the new pole in the same hole.

Once a new pole and equipment are installed, wires spliced back together and any other required repairs made, the grounding devices must be removed from the lines. Then finally, power can be restored.

As you can see, outage restoration is a complicated process, requiring painstaking attention and compliance with many safety measures. It can't be accomplished with just the flip of a switch. But our linemen always work as quickly and safely as possible to ensure that your power returns as quickly possible.

As always, we thank you for your patience and cooperation as we work to restore your power.



Houston County EC member Kelly English captured this photo of an HCEC lineman working to clear downed trees following a storm.



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Keep your rooms warm and bright by washing your windows inside and out.

A New Year's Resolution You Can Keep

GOING ON A DIET THIS JANUARY? Opening a savings account? Joining a gym?

Here's another resolution—and it might be easier to keep for longer than two weeks: Do one thing a month that will make your home more energy efficient.

Here are 12 ideas:

January: Get into the habit of turning your thermostat down by about 10 degrees before your family turns in for the night or leaves home in the morning. You can save as much as 1 percent on heating for every degree you lower the heat for eight consecutive hours.

February: Pull your refrigerator away from the wall and vacuum or dust its condenser and coils. Clean coils prevent your fridge's working parts from overheating.

March: Spring for an annual inspection of your air-conditioning system. It can keep your central AC running smoothly and efficiently all summer.

April: Hire a licensed electrician to inspect your home's wiring system—not every year, but at least once a decade.

May: Wash your windows—inside and out—and open the drapes. The sun can't warm and brighten your rooms if it can't find its way through grimy windowpanes.

June: Trim your hedges. Overgrown shrubs and trees can shade your windows too much and keep the sunlight from warming up your home come winter.

July: Grill your dinner outside and serve fresh, cold salads as side dishes. Giving your stovetop and oven a rest also gives your air-conditioning system a break on hot days.

August: Start running your clothes washer, dryer and dishwasher after dark. That will keep the heat and humidity out of the air—and help out your electric cooperative, too.

September: Get that heating and air-conditioning tech back to your house for a heating inspection. A tuneup can save you as much as 5 percent on your heating bill.

October: Close off your masonry fireplace and resolve not to use it anymore. Every time you use it, your home's heated air flies up the chimney.

November: Seal air leaks around windows, doors and other openings—such as the place where cables and wires come into the wall from the outside—with caulk and weatherstripping.

December: Replace your old holiday lights with LED fixtures, which last years longer and use far less energy.

Houston County Electric Cooperative

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Kathi Calvert

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Contact Us

**TO REPORT A POWER OUTAGE,
CALL OUR 24-HOUR HOTLINE**

1-800-970-4232 toll-free

BUSINESS HOURS

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

*For general information
during business hours*

(936) 544-5641 local

1-800-657-2445 toll-free

To report an outage or other problem with electrical service, press 1.

To make a payment over the phone or speak with a member services representative in the billing department, press 2.

For electrical connects, transfers and disconnects, press 5.

For directions to our office, mailing address or fax number, press 6.

For satellite Internet services, press 7.

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Sealing your home means fewer indoor allergens.

Why Seal and Insulate?

Save Energy and Money

Air that leaks through your home's envelope—the outer walls, windows, doors and other openings—wastes energy and increases your utility costs. A well-sealed envelope, coupled with the right amount of insulation, can make a real difference on your utility bills.

Saving money on electricity isn't the only reason for you to take a look at what's separating your indoors from Texas' outdoors. Consider these other benefits of sealing your envelope.

Increased Comfort

Sealing leaks and adding insulation can improve the overall comfort of your home and help alleviate many of these common problems:

Noise pollution seeping into your home. Better insulation means the rumble of dump trucks outside stays there, and you can hear your TV and each other better.

Less pollen and dust, and fewer insects (or other pests) entering your home. Keep Texas' critters and allergens out.

Better humidity control. Whether it's for health reasons, pest control or the longevity of your wood trim, a sealed envelope ensures that you're in charge of moisture levels.

Significant Savings

Most older homes in the United States don't have enough insulation and have significant air leaks. If you added up all the leaks, holes and gaps in a typical home's envelope, it would be the equivalent of having a window open every day of the year.

Easy-To-Spot Leakage

There are easily identifiable spots around your home where air is leaking in or out, diluting the conditioned air in your living space and adding unnecessary kilowatt-hours to your electricity bill.

Air commonly leaks into the house on all levels: through window casings, the stove vent fan, dryer vent, outdoor faucets and crawl space. These leaks can be plugged by caulking and weatherstripping around windows, doors, vents and faucets.

Upstairs, air can leak out of your home through any attic hatches, roof soffits, plumbing vent stacks, recessed lights in ceilings, skylights and HVAC duct registers. Mitigate these leaks by increasing attic insulation.

Statement of Nondiscrimination

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The person responsible for coordinating this organization's nondiscrimination compliance efforts is Kathi Calvert, general manager. Any individual or specific class of individuals who feels that this organization has subjected them to discrimination may obtain further information about the statutes and regulations listed above from and/or file a written complaint with this organization; or the Administrator, Rural Utilities Service, Stop 1510, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC, 20250-1510; or the Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410; or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal-opportunity provider and employer. Complaints must be filed within 180 days after the alleged discrimination. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible.



HOUSTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Energy Savings for Every Season

SAVING MONEY ON UTILITY BILLS through greater energy efficiency is a year-round objective for many co-op members, but the methods for achieving this goal change with the seasons in Texas.

Several factors affect energy efficiency, including weather, the age and condition of your home, and desired comfort levels. During fall and winter months, when it's cooler outdoors, you'll want a warm home as you seek to keep the cold air out. In the spring and summer, the focus is on keeping hot air from infiltrating cool abodes.

Fall and Winter: Keeping Heat In

To maintain a warm indoor environment in chilly weather, there are simple steps you can take to increase energy efficiency.

There's no better time to examine seals on doors and windows for air leaks. Caulk and weatherstrip as needed to seal in warm air and energy savings. Similarly, examine electrical outlets for air leaks, and where necessary, install foam gaskets behind them to prevent drafts.

During the day, open curtains or drapes on south-facing windows to let sunlight heat your home naturally. Close window treatments at night for an added layer of insulation.

As the temperature drops, schedule a service appointment for your heating system to ensure that it is operating at an optimal level.

Low-cost or no-cost steps for energy savings include affixing heavy, clear plastic to the insides of your windowpanes to create an additional barrier against cold air. Ensure that the plastic is sealed tightly to the pane to help reduce infiltration.

Use a programmable thermostat to set the temperature as low as is comfortable when you are home (ideally around 68 degrees). When you are asleep or away, turn the temperature down. A downward adjustment of 10–15 degrees over long stretches of time can save about 10 percent a year on heating and cooling costs, according to the Department of Energy.

Spring and Summer: Keeping Your Cool

During warm months, energy savings and efficiency will require different measures, many of which are just as inexpensive.

Close blinds and drapes during the day to keep the sun's



No matter the season, there is always a way to save electricity around the house.

warming rays at bay. Where practical, plant trees and shrubs that offer shade in summer and allow sunlight through in winter.

In extremely hot weather, your cooling system works harder to close the gap between the high outdoor temperature and the cool indoor thermostat setting. To lessen the difference and lower cooling costs, set the thermostat as high as you can while maintaining your comfort level.

Employing a ceiling fan in conjunction with your air conditioning can allow you to increase the thermostat setting by about 4 degrees with no reduction in comfort. Just make sure to turn ceiling fans off when no one is in the room.

Use a programmable thermostat to adjust the settings a few degrees higher when nobody is home or your family is sleeping.

During the hottest months, it's all the more critical to replace any remaining incandescents with light-emitting diode bulbs. The unwanted heat from the old bulbs affects energy use.

To learn about additional energy-saving tips and programs, contact Houston County Electric Cooperative at 1-800-657-2445.

Post-Holiday Check: Extension Cords Gone?

THE EXTENSION CORD you needed to stretch from your Christmas tree to the nearest outlet isn't needed anymore now that the holiday season is over. The same goes for the one you needed for the extra space heater you put in the guest room.

Pack up the extension cords and put them away until next year.

Lots of people leave their extension cords plugged in all year long. Those people are putting their homes and families at risk because extension cords, when used for extended periods, can overheat, shock someone or cause a fire.

Extension cords are designed for temporary use. Continuous use tends to make them deteriorate, and that's not safe.

Some tips for extension-cord safety:

- ▶ Overloading an extension cord makes an already-dangerous situation even more risky.
- ▶ As with any cords or electrical devices, keep them away from water. They're not safe when they run through snow and ice.
- ▶ A cord hidden under a rug or otherwise covered might overheat, and that's a fire hazard.
- ▶ Plug only one thing at a time into an extension cord.
- ▶ Replace worn and damaged cords. Do not use them.

If you're relying on extension cords past the holiday season, that's a sign that you don't have enough outlets. Call a licensed electrician to add more.



Resolve to make this year the safest yet by hiring an electrician.

Make Electrical Inspection a Resolution

HAVE YOU EVER HIRED AN ELECTRICIAN

to do a whole-house safety inspection? Make it a priority in 2017.

If your home is older, you could be using light fixtures and outlets that are waiting to burn your house down. The components of overhead lights and behind-the-wall wiring don't last forever, but most homeowners wait until there's a visible problem—like a spark, smoke or something that won't turn on—before they call an electrician.

A fully licensed and insured electrician can inspect every outlet plus wiring, circuits and appliances and let you know what needs fixing or replacing. In some cases, the inspection might come just in time to save your family from a shock, an electrocution or a house fire.

Winter is prime time for electrical fires. Furnaces run nonstop; lights are on longer; the water heater works harder; and people tend to stay indoors, watching more TV, cooking at home more and giving electronics a workout.

As residents kick their homes' electrical systems into overtime, anything that's been waiting to go wrong probably will—potentially creating dangerous situations.

Make your family's safety your top New Year's resolution this year with a home inspection.



Using Batteries Safely

BATTERIES POWER SO MANY OF OUR ELECTRONICS TODAY, from remotes and toys to radios and flashlights. Houston County Electric Cooperative wants to remind members to keep safety considerations in mind when storing, using and disposing of batteries.

Always read and following manufacturers' instructions. Use the correct size and type of battery for each device, and be sure to insert batteries with the positive and negative terminals properly aligned.

It is important to store batteries in a dry, secure location that is kept at normal room temperature. Cells exposed to extreme heat can leak.

Batteries that are easy to access can be hazardous when they are within the reach of small children. Be sure to store them in a safe location. It is also important to check the covers of battery compartments to ensure that they are closed and functioning properly to prevent access by children.

Some batteries, such as button batteries, are quite small and could be mistaken for pills or candy. Hearing aid cells are particularly small. Do not place them anywhere near where medicine or food is stored.

The consumption of batteries by children is a serious safety concern. A swallowed battery could possibly get stuck or cause tissue burns or other damage to the esophagus or digestive tract. If someone is suspected to have swallowed a battery of any kind, immediately call the 24-hour National Battery Ingestion Hotline at (202) 625-3333.

Also, remember to promptly remove and safely dispose of dead batteries. Some dead batteries have been known to leak, so it is best to safely dispose of them right away.

Do not mix old and new batteries because doing so could possibly cause the batteries to leak or rupture. It's best to replace all the batteries in a device at the same time.

Rechargeable, lithium, lithium-ion and zinc-air batteries should be recycled. It is a good idea to get into a habit of putting old batteries in a plastic bag that can be sealed and delivered to a battery recycling center. To find a battery recycling location near you, visit call2recycle.org.

Properly dispose of old batteries and avoid mixing them with new ones in your devices.



RECIPE OF THE MONTH



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Grilled Cheese Grits

- 1 can (14.5 ounces) chicken broth
- 4 ounces processed cheese, cubed
- 2 ounces coarsely shredded Parmesan cheese
- 2 ounces shredded cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter, cubed
- ½ cup water
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh or pickled jalapeño peppers
- 3 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 1 cup quick-cooking grits
- Olive oil

1. Bring the broth, cheeses, butter and water to a boil in a medium saucepan. Stir in the garlic, jalapeños, bacon and grits. Reduce heat and cook 6–8 minutes, stirring often.
2. Pour cooked mixture into a lightly greased pie pan and allow to cool for an hour or more. Unmold and cut into wedges. Brush one side with oil and place greased-side down in a pan over medium heat. Sauté until underside becomes golden and crusty.
3. Brush top with oil and flip. Grill on second side until golden crust forms.

Find this and more delicious recipes online at
TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM