

# You're in Good Company With Co-ops

*Neighbors help neighbors to create a better world*



## MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER KATHI CALVERT

**LIFE IS A BALANCING ACT.** We take care of ourselves, but we also take care of each other. It does not matter what position in life you are in. You make a difference to someone, and it is that difference that builds our community. Our need for each other is at the heart of our cooperative service strategy. By doing well for ourselves, we do good for the entire community we serve.

When the market refuses to offer a good or service, or does so at too high a price, co-ops step in to fill the void. Coopera-

co-owners of your co-op. People coming together to meet a particular need is the phenomenon at the heart of every kind of co-op. Local credit unions offer financial services to people whom banks do not want to serve. In urban areas and college communities, housing co-ops offer people safe, reliable and affordable places to live.

Many agricultural co-ops started as a way to get their products to market, whether it was oranges (Sunkist), dairy (Land O'Lakes), grapes (Welch's), organic milk (Organic Valley) or



Houston County EC donated \$5,000 to the Trinity County Relay For Life of Houston County alongside a matching grant from CoBank in 2016.

tives identify members of the community who have the same self-interests and bring them together to make a cooperative decision.

Seventy-seven years ago, when Houston County Electric Cooperative got started, the folks in our community shared at least one area of self-interest: they needed electricity, which is why electric cooperatives were formed. Individuals acted in their own self-interest, but that led to the community and economic development of the rural areas where they lived. Today, rural electric co-ops serve more than 42 million people in 47 states.

It is good to know that your friends and neighbors are also

any of the hundreds of other food products that co-ops deliver to our tables every day.

Many people who own small businesses realize they, too, have a common self-interest: to stay in business. So they formed purchasing co-ops, including Ace Hardware and True Value, so they could compete with big-box stores.

Today, it is estimated that more than 40 percent of all residents in the U.S. are members of at least one co-op. World-wide, well over 1 billion people are counted as co-op members.

So every time you turn on (or off) the lights, it can serve as a reminder that as a co-op member, you are in good company with your neighbors—and with people all around the world.



An energy specialist can determine if your home is too tightly sealed.

# Can I Seal My House Too Tightly?

*How much insulation is enough—or too much?*

**ALTHOUGH THE REFRAIN** among energy-efficiency experts is “Seal and insulate, seal and insulate,” occasionally you hear stories about newer houses being too tightly insulated, with restricted flow of fresh air leading to poor indoor air quality, mold growth and other problems. So how do you know how much is too much?

Although it is possible to seal a house too tightly, it is very unlikely in most older homes. A certain amount of fresh air is needed for good indoor air quality, and there are specifications that set the minimum amount of fresh air needed for a house. But most homes built before 2000 have many spots through which air enters or exits the house—usually too many.

A quick way to determine whether you have enough insulation is to look across your attic. If the insulation is level with or below the joists, you probably need to add more. If you can’t see the joists because the insulation is above them, then you probably have enough, and adding more likely will not be cost-effective.

The recommended level for most attics is to insulate to R-38. R-value is a measure of the insulation’s ability to resist heat flow. The higher the R-value, the better the thermal performance. For more information, including recommendations for how much insulation you should have, visit [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov) or [energy.gov](http://energy.gov) for online insulation guides.

Even if you have plenty of insulation, your home might not be performing well due to cold air leaking through other areas. Make sure to look for signs of air leaks and seal them up as you find them. Some air leaks are easy to find because they are easy to feel, including those around windows and doors and through electrical outlets. Hidden air leaks in attics and basements and around chimneys are often more significant sources of energy loss. Consider addressing these big leaks first because they will have a greater effect on improving your comfort and reducing your utility bills.

If you are concerned about how tightly your home is sealed, hire an energy specialist to perform leakage tests using diagnostic tools and ensure that all combustion appliances are operating properly. If your home is too tight, the energy specialist might recommend that a fresh-air ventilation system be added to your HVAC system.

## Houston County Electric Cooperative

P.O. Box 52, Crockett, TX 75835

### GENERAL MANAGER

Kathi Calvert

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Dan Courmier, President
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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.

For staking and construction, press 8.

### FIND US ON THE WEB

**[houstoncountyelec.com](http://houstoncountyelec.com)**



**FIND US ON FACEBOOK**

# Lower Thermostat To Lower Bills

*Energy efficiency helps avoid high bills*

**TEXAS WINTERS ARE UNPREDICTABLE.** Cold weather often requires folks to use more electricity than normal to keep the house warm. Consequently, you might already have received a higher bill this winter—and you might be wondering how to avoid the next one.

As we endure the last of the Texas winter (we hope), you and your family can still adjust your energy behaviors to cut your electric bills.

To help avoid higher-than-normal energy bills, Houston County Electric Cooperative encourages you to use electricity efficiently. Setting the thermostat to 68 degrees when home—and lower when you're away—saves money. The U.S. Department of Energy reports that lowering the thermostat 10–15 degrees for eight hours a day can trim heating bills 5–15 percent.



ALENA OZEROVA | ISTOCK.COM

#### Other tips to reduce energy use:

- ▶ Turn off and unplug non-essential lights and appliances.
- ▶ Close shades and blinds at night to reduce heat loss through windows. Open them on sunny days to capture solar heat.
- ▶ If possible, avoid using inefficient and costly backup electric resistance heating and space heaters.

- ▶ Change furnace filters often.

#### Long-term home repairs and upgrades that save energy:

- ▶ Install and set programmable thermostats.
- ▶ Seal air leaks around doors, windows, plumbing, wiring and any other places where air can infiltrate.
- ▶ Ensure that exterior walls and attics contain the recommended amount and type of insulation.

At Houston County EC, we provide more ways for our members to monitor their usage and prevent high bills. We can review your account to make sure the bill is correct and accurate;

#### Bundle up this winter and save on heating bills.

examine your meter to determine whether it is working the way it should; conduct an audit of your house to make sure the electrical system is working correctly; and we can arrange a payment plan that will fit your budget.

One more important thing to remember: If you wish to take advantage of any of these services, please call the co-op at 1-800-657-2445 as soon as possible, before your bill is due. That way, we can work through your questions in a timely manner to avoid further inconvenience.

## RECIPE OF THE MONTH



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## Honey Cheese Bacon Chicken

4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup honey

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup Dijon or creole mustard

$\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon lemon pepper, or more to taste

4 slices bacon, cut in half

1 cup shredded mozzarella or provolone cheese

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Apply cooking spray to a metal baking dish. Pound chicken breast halves to an even thickness.
2. Mix together honey, mustard and lemon pepper in a small dish. Place the breast halves in baking dish and drizzle evenly with the honey-mustard mixture.
3. Bake chicken 25 minutes, then top each breast half with 2 bacon pieces and increase oven heat to 400. Continue baking about 7–8 minutes.
4. Top with cheese and bake another 3 minutes or until chicken juices run clear, bacon is crisp and cheese is bubbly. Serve with brown or white rice.

This recipe won the *Five Ingredients or Fewer* contest in September 2015. Submit your *Texas Gulf Shrimp* recipe to *Texas Co-op Power* by February 10 for a chance to win \$100 and be published. Visit [texascooppower.com/contests](http://texascooppower.com/contests).

Find this and more delicious recipes online at  
**TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM**

# HCEC Makes Donation to Local School



Houston County EC employees and the Trinity County Board of Directors visited Apple Springs Independent School District to present 11 refurbished iPad tablets to Cody Moree, ASISD superintendent, and Kevin Plotts, ASISD principal. Students will use the iPads in classrooms and other school programs.

## Power Line Safety Tips

**HERE'S A FACT YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW:** You don't have to touch a power line to be in danger; high-voltage electricity can jump to anyone who gets too close. Fortunately, there are many ways to stay safe around power lines, whether they're in the air or on the ground.

Look up before raising a ladder or pole to make sure that it will not come within 10 feet of any power lines. Use wooden or fiberglass ladders outdoors. Metal ladders conduct electricity.

Contact Houston County Electric Cooperative immediately to report downed power lines, which can carry an electric current strong enough to cause serious injury or even death. Electricity tends to move from a high-voltage zone to a low-voltage zone—and it could make that journey through your body.

You should assume that all downed power lines are live. You cannot tell just by looking at a power line whether it is energized. Move at least 10 feet away from it and any nearby object it is touching, such as a fence or a tree limb. The ground around power lines also might be energized.

The proper way to move away from a downed line is to shuf-

fle away with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times. This will minimize the potential for an electric shock.

If you see someone who is in direct or indirect contact with a downed line, do not touch the person—or you could become the next victim. Call 911 and your cooperative for help.

Do not attempt to move a downed power line or anything else in contact with it by using an object such as a broom or stick. Nonconductive materials, including wood or cloth, can conduct electricity if even slightly wet.

Be careful not to touch or step in water near a downed power line.

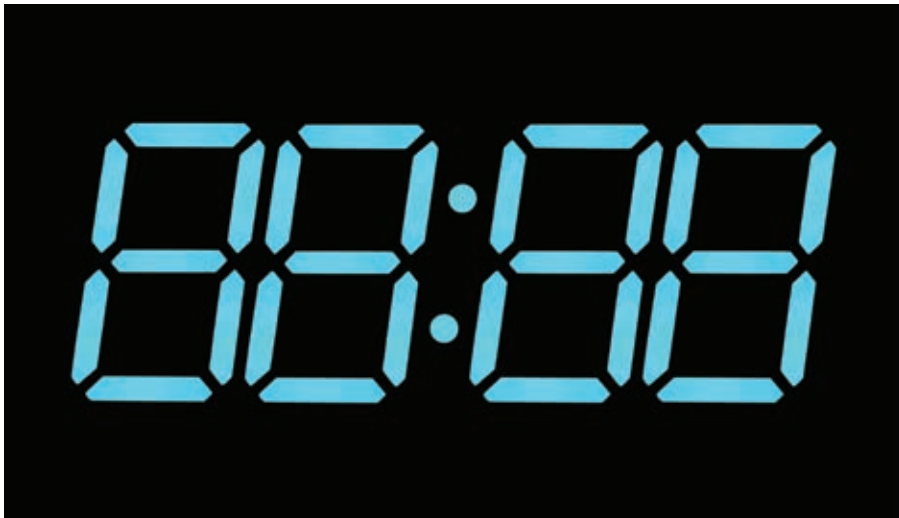
Do not drive over downed power lines. If your vehicle comes into contact with a downed power line while you are inside, stay in the vehicle. Honk your horn to summon help but warn others to stay away. If you must leave your vehicle because it is on fire, jump out with both feet together and avoid simultaneous contact with both the vehicle and the ground. Shuffle away from the vehicle.

# Don't Blink

**THE MANY ELECTRIC DEVICES** all around us today register power interruptions that went unnoticed years ago. Before digital clocks, some people never noticed power interruptions. Now these aggravating events seem to happen more often. In reality, they are not more frequent; we are just more aware of them.

Some power quality problems begin in the home or business. A spike (or transient surge) can occur in a building's wiring upon startup of electric motors, such as those on a refrigerator or air conditioner. Other problems might come from faulty wiring, loose connections, poor grounding or inadequate wire size. These conditions can cause partial power, momentary interruptions (blinks), dimming or too-bright lights.

Most times, having the power interrupted is better than the alternative of having it go out completely. Power interruptions are most often caused by exterior devices installed by Houston County Electric Cooperative to protect the electrical system. These devices are called reclosers.



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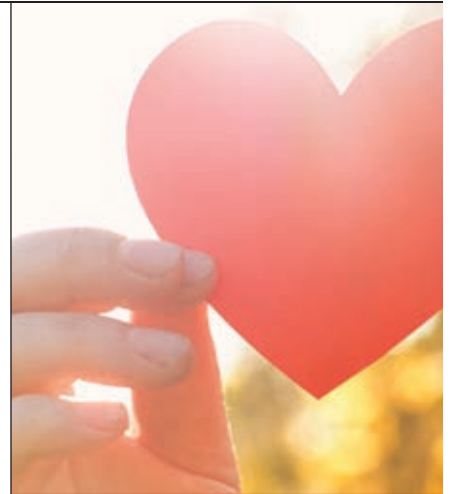
**Electric cooperatives work hard to reduce the number of blinks and outages at work and home.**

Reclosers essentially act like the circuit breakers in your home, with one major difference: They reset themselves after breaking the circuit. The intent is that after a tree touches the line—or some other problem causes the recloser to open—the device will reset itself, and power will once again flow down the line. If the problem has cleared the line, power will stay on.

If the problem still exists, the recloser will operate again. After trying three times, most reclosers are designed to stay open until the problem is fixed and the device is manually reset. The opening and closing of the recloser is almost instantaneous and is often not even noticed, except by electronic devices such as digital clocks.

The alternative to using a recloser is to use fuses on each line. Although greater use of fuses would result in fewer brief power interruptions, it also would create more extended outages, as a fuse can only operate once.

Houston County EC is continually evaluating our power lines to identify potential problems so that blinks and outages can be avoided. We will never be able to prevent all blinks, but please let us know if your home or business experiences an excessive number of power interruptions or other power problems, so that we can investigate the issue to better serve you.



WE LOVE OUR MEMBERS!

HAPPY  
VALENTINE'S DAY!

FROM HOUSTON COUNTY EC

Tuesday, February 14

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Between the years 1886 and 1916, the first electric fan, flash-light, vacuum cleaner, washing machine, radio, phonograph and movie camera all were invented.

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# Virtual Home Energy Audits

**IS YOUR HOME USING ENERGY EFFICIENTLY?** Unless it was built quite recently and satisfies stringent energy-efficiency standards, there are areas of your home where you can improve efficiency, save money and reduce your carbon footprint.

In a perfect world, your best option would be to hire a trained professional to conduct a thorough, in-home energy audit. This usually involves a detailed inspection of your home's insulation levels, HVAC system, lighting, appliances and landscaping. A professional energy auditor will typically conduct a blower door test to check pressurization and spot hard-to-find leaks to the exterior. In addition, a professional might use a duct blaster to identify leaks in your home's ductwork.

One drawback to the in-home energy audit is finding a time that works with your busy schedule. An energy audit can take several hours when done correctly, which means you might have to take time off from work, farm out the pets or get help with the kids and their after-school activities.

Luckily, there is an alternative: the online or "virtual" home energy audit. These online tools have come a long way over the past 10 years.

Today's online energy audits are user-friendly and take only a few minutes to complete. An online energy audit can assess your home's energy efficiency and provide helpful tips on how to reduce energy waste. The audits use sophisticated computer models that survey local housing types—factoring in local

weather data with the age, size, flooring and construction materials of the home.

**Here's where to look for online audits:**

▶ Your co-op or local utilities: They will include comparable weather and housing data, so the audit will be more precise.

▶ The Department of Energy website at [hes.lbl.gov](http://hes.lbl.gov).

**A word of caution:** Be careful when using online energy audit software provided by organizations other than utilities, government agencies or universities. Some companies might try to obtain information about you to sell their own products and services.

If you see phrases like, "Learn what your power company does not want you to know," or if the website looks like a marketing page, move on. Unless you are dealing with a local electric co-op or other trusted provider, do not provide any personal information besides your physical address (for data accuracy) or an email address (for receiving a full report).

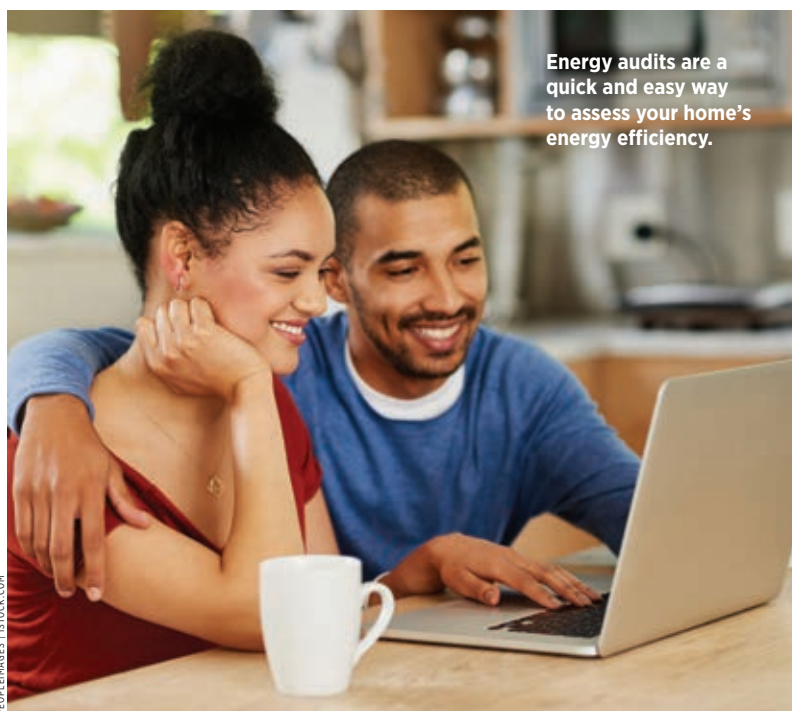
If an online energy audit doesn't interest you, fear not. The Department of Energy offers a do-it-yourself energy audit section on its website. Go to [energy.gov](http://energy.gov) and search for "do-it-yourself home energy audits."

The bottom line? Choose the energy audit that works for you, then implement as many of the recommendations as you can. Even taking small steps can add up to significant results, and you'll see the benefits on your utility bills for years.

## Your Online Energy Audit Checklist

Each home energy audit is a little different, and the information required varies. Below is a basic list of what you'll need. Be as accurate as possible.

- ▶ Your home ZIP code—for weather and housing data
- ▶ Average amount of your monthly electric bill
- ▶ Your electric rate
- ▶ Your average monthly fossil fuel bill(s)—oil, propane and gas
- ▶ Your fossil fuel rate(s)
- ▶ Age of your home and general characteristics (size, floors, exterior materials)
- ▶ Ages and number of appliances
- ▶ Type and age of heating and cooling system(s)
- ▶ How many incandescent, CFL and LED lights you have



Energy audits are a quick and easy way to assess your home's energy efficiency.