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Your Touchstone Energy® Partners

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What is a normal electric bill?

To figure out if your electric bill is "high," the first thing you need to do is to figure out what's considered a "normal" bill.

If your bill has spiked recently, look at your old bills and see how much your use has gone up over the previous year's use. If your KWH use has increased, it could be caused by a couple of reasons.

First, how many days are in the current month's calculations? One or two extra days can make a difference. Second, did the Purchased Power Adjustment (PPA) change? This is the amount our energy providers charge us for transmission of energy across the power grid. This amount fluctuates according to what the market says energy costs are to provide electricity to our members. This figure has been as low as .004 (four tenths of a cent), and as high as 1.9 cents. It currently is 1.7 cents per kilowatt. This figure is on top of your current kilowatt-hour charge and is a component of our established rates submitted and approved by the Public Service Commission of West Virginia. Moreover, this PPA adjustment is strictly a pass-through that is of no benefit to HREA's bottom line!

I'm sure you didn't find any real satisfaction in the above-mentioned paragraph. Consequently, I'll attempt to show you where a family can use energy. Likely you'll find there is no mystery regarding why you're using so much electricity. Your bill simply is higher because we enjoy our new time-saving devices.

MYTHS ABOUT SAVING ELECTRICITY

It takes more energy to turn on a light than to leave it on.

No. There's no power surge when you turn on a light. Turning a light off always saves electricity, even if it's for just a second, and it doesn't matter if the bulb is incandescent or fluorescent.

It takes more energy to turn on a computer than it does to leave it on.

No. There's no meaningful power surge when you turn on a computer. Turning the computer off always saves electricity. The power saver feature does help.

Is there any device that uses more energy when you turn it on than when it's already on?

Manager's Corner

By Gary Jackson, CEO/General Manager

No, not in practical terms. There is a small surge when you turn something on, but it is so small it can't easily be measured. It happens for only a fraction of a second and doesn't even cost a penny. Turning devices off always saves electricity and money.

It takes more energy to cool a house in which the AC has been off all day, than to keep the AC running at, say 85 degrees during the day.

No. Cooling a hot house down at the end of the day always takes less energy than leaving the AC running all day, even if it's running on a high setting. In a typical home, air conditioning uses more electricity than anything else. Running an air conditioner 12 hours a day for three weeks uses more electricity than leaving your refrigerator door open 24 hours a day for a whole year.

Last, legislation receiving the most media coverage relates to global climate change. Be assured that this issue will have a huge impact on future electric costs.

Which appliances use the most power?

DEVICE	CONSUMPTION	COST PER HOUR
Heat Pump or Central Air	15,000 watts	$1.50
Water Heater or Clothes Dryer	4,000 watts	.40
Water Pump	3,000 watts	.30
Hair Dryer	1,200 watts	.12
Electric Range Burner	1,000 watts	.10
Computer and Monitor	400 watts	.04
Light Bulb	60 watt	.006

St. Patrick's Day myths, symbols and legends

St. Patrick's Day is a tribute to Ireland's national hero, but did you know that St. Patrick wasn't even Irish? He was born to wealthy parents in Roman-ruled Britain in the late 4th Century. St. Patrick dedicated his life and braved all odds to share his faith with the people of Ireland.

Ireland's national emblem and the symbol of St. Patrick's Day is the shamrock. This humble three-leaf clover is what St. Patrick is said to have used to explain how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit could exist as three separate elements in one entity.

Ireland has no snakes. It is said that St. Patrick stood in a field of shamrocks with only a wooden staff in his hand and banished all the snakes from Ireland during his sermon.

Green is Ireland's national color. Known for its beautiful green landscape, Ireland often is called the Emerald Isle. Some say that "green" honors the farmers who burnt green leaves and spread the ash over their fields. Others say that "green" signifies the coming of spring after the harsh Irish winter. Whatever the reason, be sure to wear green on St. Patrick's Day, because if you don't, you'll get pinched!

A symbol of St. Patrick's Day is the shillelagh. Today, they are used as walking sticks, but long ago were used as weapons. Shillelaghs were clubs that used to be cut from the oak of the Shillelagh forest. Since oak is now scarce, Shillelaghs for St. Patrick's Day are cut from blackthorn.

Leprechaun translates into "small body." The leprechauns were a group of fairies never more than two feet tall. They were very unsociable and lived alone so they could guard their pots of gold said to be hidden at the end of a rainbow. For this reason, the rainbow also is a popular symbol of St. Patrick's Day.

Legend has it that a witch cast a spell on a stone in the Blarney Castle, and anyone who kisses it catches the "blarney bug." The gift of blarney is said to charm the socks off someone. The only way you can kiss the stone, which is set at the castle's tower between the castle wall and a parapet is to lie down, bend over backwards and slide downwards with two iron bars for support and of course a prayer to St. Patrick!

When St. Patrick went about converting the native Irish, who followed a nature-based religion, to Christianity, he made use of their own symbols. A popular example is the Celtic Cross. St. Patrick superimposed the image of the sun, an Irish symbol, on the Christian cross so that a new symbol was formed. Traditionally, boys and girls wore different types of crosses made by themselves, and one cross, made by the man of the house, was hung on the main wall in the house.

The number three is another popular symbol on St. Patrick's Day. You'll find the number three in — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; the third new life formed upon the union of two; the genie's three wishes; and not the least, in the three leaves of the shamrock.

Hunting down vampire electronics

by SCOTT GATES

Most homes these days never quite shut down for the night. Although lamps may be off, dark rooms typically are spotted with tiny red and green lights of appliances and the glow of digital clocks.

All of those little lights, clocks and seemingly "sleeping" appliances, however, are using more electricity than most would think. Sometimes called vampire electronics, these devices suck up 5 percent of all energy used in the United States and cost consumers more than $3 billion every year.

For the average homeowner, vampire electronics can add 20 percent to monthly electric bills, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. To trim this excess energy use, you need to know where these vampires reside and keep them in check.

Take a closer look at appliances around your home. Those that use remote controls, such as TVs, DVD players, ceiling fans and stereos, are suspect. Any digital displays, such as microwave and coffee machine clocks, are working against your electric bill. And many of those chargers around the house — those that keep cell phones, power tools and MP3 players at the ready — constantly draw power when plugged in.

Unplugging these vampires effectively drives a stake into their energy-consuming hearts. Power strips provide another way to thwart them. Simply plug appliances into a power strip, and switch it off when those appliances aren't being used.

In addition, unplug any battery-operated electronic device once charged. You wouldn't walk away from a flowing water hose, after all, and you certainly don't want to keep feeding those vampires.

Scott Gates writes on technology and energy efficiency for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

Want to fix a traditional Irish meal?

SODA BREAD: This bread is popular throughout Ireland.

4 cups plain flour
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. sugar
2 cups buttermilk or sour milk

Sift the dry ingredients into a large bowl. Scoop up handfuls and allow to drop back into the bowl to aerate the mixture. Add enough buttermilk to make a soft dough. Now work quickly as the buttermilk and soda already are reacting. Knead the dough lightly — too much handling will toughen it, while too little means it won't rise properly.

Form a round loaf about as thick as your fist. Place it on a lightly-floured baking sheet and cut a cross in the top with a floured-knife. Put at once to bake near the top of a preheated 450° oven for 30 to 45 minutes. When baked, the loaf will sound hollow when rapped on the bottom with your knuckles. Wrap immediately in a clean tea-towel to stop the crust from hardening too much.

CORNED BEEF AND CABBAGE: Corned beef is brisket, topside or silverside which has been pickled in brine. It is especially popular around Dublin. It is best to soak it overnight to remove the excess salt.

5 lb. joint of corned beef
1 large head of cabbage
Bay leaf
2 large onions
Cold water to cover
2 large carrots
Ground black pepper
4 potatoes

Quarter the cabbage and set aside. Peel and slice the other vegetables. Cover the meat with the water and bring to a boil. Skim the surface, add the vegetables (except the cabbage), the bay leaf and the pepper and simmer gently for 20 minutes. Add the cabbage and cook for another 30 minutes. Remove the bay leaf. Serve the meat surrounded by the vegetables with additional mashed potatoes. (serves four to six)

IRISH CHOCOLATE CAKE: The "Irishness" of this lovely chocolate cake is thanks not only to the wonderful liqueur used in the filling, but also to a certain, very Irish, ingredient in the cake mixture itself, which contributes to its moistness.

SPONGE:

6 oz. self-rising flour
1/2 tsp. salt
2 oz. dark chocolate
4 oz. butter
6 oz. caster sugar*
3 oz. cooked mashed potato
2 eggs, beaten
4 Tbsp. milk

FILLING:

4 oz. dark chocolate
4 fl. oz. double cream
2 oz. icing sugar
3 Tbsp. Irish cream liqueur

Preheat oven to 375° and grease and line two 8 inch cake pans. Sift flour and salt into a mixing bowl. Melt chocolate in a bowl placed over a saucepan of hot water. In a separate bowl, cream butter and sugar together until fluffy, then beat in the chocolate and mashed potato. Gradually beat in the eggs, adding a little flour with each addition. Fold in the rest of the flour and stir in the milk. Divide mixture between cake pans and bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until top is firm but springy to touch. Remove from oven and after a few minutes, turn out onto a cooling rack. While cake is cooling, make the filling. Melt the chocolate as before, stir in the other ingredients and mix well. Use the filling to sandwich the sponge layers together and coat the top and sides of the cake.

*To make caster sugar, grind regular granulated sugar in a food processor for a couple of minutes. This also produces sugar dust, so let it settle for a few minutes before opening the food processor.

Harrison Rural Electric will be **closed on Good Friday, March 21**. We will reopen Monday, March 24. For outages or other electrical emergencies, call our office number, and the answering service will dispatch a crew to address the problem. The employees of your Cooperative would like to extend best wishes to our members and their families on this holiest of holidays.

Annual Meeting fast approaching!

Make plans to attend the annual meeting of the membership next month on

Thursday, April 17,

at Liberty High School.

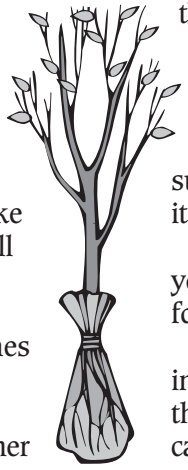
There will be more information in the annual meeting newsletter next month. Get involved with your Cooperative. The meeting is a great opportunity to visit with friends and neighbors and hear some great gospel music. It also is the perfect time to ask questions and express any concerns you may be having. Remember, you are not just a customer of Harrison Rural Electric, you are a member/owner of your electric Cooperative.

Hope to see you there!

How tall is that tree going to grow?

As spring planting begins to enter your mind, new trees may be part of your landscape plan.

Winter ice storms and summer thunderstorms show the effect trees can have on the flow of your electric service, which is why it's important to think about more than just the tree.



So while you make plans for what trees will enhance the look of your property, make sure you look up to see how those trees will affect the overhead utility lines.

Decorative trees generally don't grow extremely tall, such as a Bartlett pear reaches a mature height of about 20 feet.

But those big hardwood favorites that bathe a yard in shade during the hot summer months can get much bigger.

Maple trees will grow to between 60 and 80 feet when mature, oak trees can reach 75 to 80 feet and the mighty sycamore will reach upwards of 115 feet when fully grown.

A good rule of thumb to consider is to plant trees at least as far away from utility lines as the tree is expected to grow. (If you're planting a sugar maple that could grow to be 75 feet tall, plant it 75 feet away from power lines.)

When it comes to trees, your Cooperative needs your help in maintaining a constant flow of power for you and your neighbors. Plant responsibly.

• Also, if you have trees on your property that are in danger of coming in contact with power lines, let the Co-op know and our right-of-way clearing crews can take care of things before a problem occurs.

Generators effective if used wisely

by MIKE FEDERMAN

While owning an emergency generator comes in handy during an extended power outage, recent events have exposed the need for better safety awareness. Carbon monoxide (CO) deaths associated with the misuse of generators have risen sharply in the past decade, according to the National Fire Protection Association, which recorded an increase of nonfire CO-related deaths of 18 percent between 2003 and 2005.

To safely use generators, camp stoves and barbecue grills, operate them only in well-ventilated areas outdoors so emissions can't enter your home. Also, install a CO alarm that detects the presence of the odorless and colorless gas.

In addition, always turn off a generator when refueling it, and store gasoline, diesel fuel or propane outside of living areas. Plug appliances directly into a generator or use an extension cord. Do not try to power a home's wiring by plugging the generator into a wall outlet.

All-important transfer switch

A permanently installed standby generator for a home or business requires a transfer switch to isolate it from the power grid. The main breaker on an electric panel does not qualify as a transfer switch under the National Electrical Code.

Transfer switches are critical for two reasons:

They prevent the backflow of current across distribution lines that could electrocute lineworkers trying to restore power during an outage.

They protect the generator from damage when electric service has been restored.

An automatic transfer switch senses power interruptions. The switch delays activation for 10 to 20 seconds to determine whether power will resume. This prevents the generator from cycling on and off every time a power "blip" occurs. After power is restored, the transfer switch waits for sustained current flow before shutting off the generator.

Permanent installation of a standby generator should be done by a licensed electrician and must comply with the National Electrical Code as well as state and local codes.

Notify your local electric Co-op if you are using a generator. During an outage, if a line crew sees your lights are on, they might assume you have power and proceed to work elsewhere.

Power requirements

Before buying a generator, check the power requirements of each device you want to run. Wattages are marked on the back or bottom of appliances, or on nameplates. Note that some larger appliances, such as refrigerators, require three to four times more power to start than they use during normal operation.

Source: Ruralite Services