



WE NEWS

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co-op news, energy tips, photos from co-op events and more!

Storm Preparedness Key for Family Safety

The crippling, destructive April 2016 spring storm was one that Western Cooperative Electric members will probably never forget.

The storm, dubbed URSA by weather.com, pelted Western's member-consumers with more than a foot of snow and high winds, causing extensive damage in Sheridan and Gove counties. In its aftermath, URSA left 2,000 without power and damaged more than 600 poles and nearly 160 miles of line. Almost two years later, 100 miles of line still need to be rebuilt.

While no one can say with certainty if Mother Nature will bring such a severe storm any time soon, the long-range forecast for western Kansas by The 2019 Old Farmer's Almanac calls for very cold temperatures in early and late January and mid-February. The prediction for winter snowfall is above normal with the snowiest periods taking place in late January and late March.

Is your family ready for another significant winter weather event?

It is no secret that winter storms bringing extreme cold, freezing rain, snow, ice and high winds pose substantial



Western's linemen and equipment face extreme conditions during storm restoration and at times, assistance is necessary.

risks to those who ignore their dangers. For example, injuries from car accidents, hypothermia, frostbite, carbon monoxide poisoning and heart attacks from overexertion imperil individuals' well-being when they don't exercise caution during winter storms. Also, winter storms often affect the comfort and safety of many when these weather events knock out heat, power and communication services.

Unfortunately, not everyone pays attention to weather alerts. This is one reason why psychologists and meteorologists are working together to evaluate better warning systems so that more people take heed.

Director and senior research scientist at the Center for Advanced Public Safety, Dr. Laura Myers, who studied warnings and how people react to them, said people have a tendency not to want to change plans or their behavior for weather unless they are fairly sure the weather is going to impact them. She noted that people get desensitized to watches and warnings after so many do not produce any impacts for their specific areas.

Today's weather alerts could possibly change that behavior. Weather alerts are now providing more specific geolocations and more lead

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Western Welcomes Valerie Schneider to Co-op Staff



Valerie Schneider

Western Cooperative Electric welcomes **VALERIE SCHNEIDER** as Human Resources Manager. Schneider will provide administrative support on a wide variety of Human Relations programs such as benefits, recruiting, training and employee services. She will also provide customer service to employees about Human Resources issues.

Since being born and raised in the Ransom neighborhood, and introduced into the business world by helping her parents, she continues to see gratification in helping people. Her previous experience of being a human resource director has helped her gain invaluable experience while working with great mentors.

"We are extremely pleased to have Valerie join the Western family," said Tom Ruth, general manager. "Valerie brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the role."

Schneider's family includes husband, Trent; son, Blake; and daughter, Janae. She enjoys spending time with family, as well as reading, exercising, watching sporting events, and cooking. Her solid work ethic and strong family values are attributed to her parents.

"I strive to provide employees with a positive work culture and a safe, team-oriented work environment," Schneider said.

Western Cooperative Electric welcomes Valerie Schneider to the family and appreciates her efforts to better serve you, the consumer-members.

New Year Payment Resolution

Bringing in the new year can be a time to make a New Year's resolution. Resolve to simplify your bill paying process with Western Cooperative Electric.

To be eligible for the monthly prize of a \$25 voucher to a local business of your choice, sign up for automatic payment options, such as bank draft with checking/savings or recurring card (debit/credit) or enroll for e-business (ebiz) or go green by opting for paperless billing. With paperless billing, you may opt in to receive text or email notifications to get your information.

Ebiz allows you to see your monthly bill, view daily electric usage, along with historical data, store a payment method, and make payments. You can use ebiz to enroll yourself in automatic payments or contact us at 800-456-6720. No forms to complete, so signing up is fast, friendly and convenient.

Automatic payment guarantees on-time payments while maintaining an excellent payment history.

Already signed up for these payment options? Your name will also be included within the monthly drawings.

Thanks for considering these payment options. Enter today for a chance to win a prize in 2019!



Let Us Help You Mind Your eBiz-ness Register for eBiz

1. Go to www.westerncoop.com
2. On Western's homepage, click the link to eBiz
3. Enter the information requested (shown below)

Western Cooperative Electric now offers eBiz—a member-friendly application to access your account. eBiz offers the following account management tools:

- ▶ See your current billing and billing/payment history;
- ▶ View your daily meter readings from your meter;
- ▶ Pay your bill with a check or card (no processing fee);
- ▶ Pay one time or set up monthly payments;
- ▶ Use our online bill calculator;
- ▶ View charts and graphs of usage data;
- ▶ Compare months or years of usage;
- ▶ Make account changes;
- ▶ Sign up for email billing notifications;
- ▶ Request service from Western Cooperative; and
- ▶ Store payment options and go paperless.

To create an eBiz account, visit www.westerncoop.com and follow the directions at left.

| | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|--|
| User Name | <input type="text"/> | Required, at least 8 characters in length. |
| Password | <input type="text"/> | Required, at least 8 characters long, contain at least an uppercase letter, at least one number, and may not contain any blank spaces. |
| Re-enter password | <input type="text"/> | |
| Account number | <input type="text"/> | Required, this is the basic account number. |
| Phone | <input type="text"/> | This phone number must match the one on file with Western. The error "Did not validate" means you need to provide the co-op with your current contact information. |

When Winter Winds Howl, Power Lines Can Gallop

Severe weather with strong winds can cause damage to trees, buildings, and electrical equipment. While power lines can sway in high winds, add freezing rain or icy conditions and the result can be galloping power lines.

Galloping is the bouncing or bucking movement of overhead lines and can cause several problems, from temporary power interruptions to equipment damage, the collapse of power poles and downed lines.

Galloping lines often result from ice buildup on one side of the power line due to strong winds. The buildup of ice creates an airfoil, which changes the flow of air around the line, causing bouncing wires, or galloping power lines. There

isn't much Western's linemen can do until the wind dies down or the ice falls off. That's why some power lines have objects attached to the line. This helps reduce galloping of lines and prevent potential danger. If you see galloping power lines, keep your distance as ice can break off or power lines can sever. If you see a downed power line, stay away and report the location including damages.

Remember, a downed line can remain energized even if it is not sparking or arcing. Western offers free safety demonstrations involving downed power lines and other safety topics. For more information about demonstrations contact Western at 800-456-6720.

Insulating Your Attic is Like a Stocking Cap for Your Home

As you add a fuzzy hat, scarf and gloves to your wardrobe to help keep you warm this winter, remember to prepare your home for the colder temperatures as well. Proper home insulation is an important step in saving money on your energy bill and making you comfortable in your home as the temperatures dip into the single digits or below this winter.

If your home feels drafty and could use more insulation, always start at the top since the majority of heat loss in a home is through the roof. Start with the attic or ceiling and work your way down through the walls and then to the basement or crawl space.

If you start adding insulation at the lowest level (basement or crawl) and work your way up, upper floors could feel cool or drafty in the winter months since extra insulation below will cause the cool air to rise.

While addressing your home's insulation is one of the more expensive outlays you can make to save on your electric bill, it's the biggest bang for your energy buck, paying for itself in the long run.

Below are ways to help reduce energy costs this winter:

▶ If you don't already have one, consider installing a programmable (\$90 to \$150) or smart (\$200 to \$300) thermostat. Both are

programmable, but a smart thermostat allows you to monitor temperatures from your cell phone even if you're not home. The smart version includes other features, such as adaptive technology, which adjusts the temperature based on your heating and cooling history.

- ▶ Caulk windows and door frames that leak air. Also replace or update door seals if they are old or ineffective.
- ▶ Bundle up and turn down your thermostat. For every degree you turn it down, you can save up to 3 percent on your energy bill.
- ▶ If you do use a portable space heater, use it judiciously as well as safely. Using one for long lengths of time can cause your energy bill to spike since it draws additional electric power to run. If you use it continuously, it can add \$100 or more to your monthly energy bill. And space heaters touted as energy efficient aren't necessarily so; they may just cycle off more often.
- ▶ If you can, turn down your water heater a few degrees--120 degrees or less is recommended. Lower settings will save money and decrease hot water exposure to small children. Helping you reduce electric usage while saving money also saves money for Western in reduced power costs while possibly shaving peak demand costs.

DOWNED & DANGEROUS

35 ft.

Downed power lines can energize the ground up to 35 ft. away – so keep your distance.

Never drive over a downed line or through water that is touching the line.

Never try to move a downed power line, even if you think the line is deenergized or if you're using a non-conductive item – this will not prevent injury or death!

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If you see a downed line, notify the local authorities immediately.

SOURCE: ESFI.ORG

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Is your water heater tank warm to the touch? Consider insulating it to save 7 to 16 percent annually on water heating costs. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations.

Source: energy.gov

Storm Preparedness is Key Continued from page 16A ▶

time when possible, according to Myers. Warnings with potential impacts, including damage and destruction predictions, show people how storms can actually affect them, she said. While knowing that a severe weather event is headed your way is important, making advanced preparations and knowing what to do during a storm can make the difference in keeping your family safe.

Before the storm

Know your area's risk for winter storms. Extreme winter weather can leave communities without power or other services for long periods of time.

- ▶ Prepare your home to keep out the cold with insulation, caulking, and weather stripping. Learn how to keep pipes from freezing. Install and test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors with battery backups.
- ▶ Pay attention to weather reports and warnings of freezing weather and winter storms. Download a weather

app to your cell phone to receive alerts no matter where you are. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio can also provide emergency alerts.

- ▶ Gather supplies in case you need to stay home for several days without power. Keep in mind each person's specific needs, including medication. Do not forget the needs of pets. Have extra batteries for radios and flashlights.
- ▶ Create an emergency supply kit for your car. Include jumper cables, sand, a flashlight, warm clothes, blankets, bottled water, and non-perishable snacks. Keep the gas tank full.
- ▶ Learn the signs of, and basic treatments for, frostbite and hypothermia.

During the storm

- ▶ Stay off roads if at all possible. If trapped in a vehicle, stay inside until help arrives.
- ▶ Limit your time outside. If you need

to go outside, wear layers of warm clothing.

- ▶ To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, only use generators and grills outdoors.
- ▶ Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow to reduce the risk of a heart attack.
- ▶ Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia and begin treatment right away if either occurs.
- ▶ Check on neighbors. Older adults and young children are more at risk in extreme cold.

Western Cooperative Electric stands ready to respond to any storm, whenever it happens.

"The safety and comfort of our member-consumers are always on our minds. After all, they are our neighbors," said Dennis Deines, Western's manager of member services. "Our crews take pride in our ongoing commitment to delivering reliable electricity, no matter what the weather conditions are."

Cheap Electronic Chargers Could Spell Trouble for Users

The chargers that come with our phone, digital camera or other electronics seem to disappear as often as a sock mate sometimes.

As a solution, many people reach for the low-cost, generic plug-in USB chargers and charging cables found in the sea of impulse items that flank the check-out line at your favorite drug, convenience or big-box store. They're also popular items on numerous online shopping sites and cheaper than dishing out money to replace them with their original manufacturer's versions.

"It can save money and it's so convenient," you rationalize. Without much more thought, in the virtual shopping cart or on the checkout counter it goes.

Inexpensive charging components may be one area you don't want to cut corners on, however, for a variety of reasons. Amazon recalled 26,000 AmazonBasics portable lithium-ion battery chargers and power banks after the massive online retailer learned the units can overheat and ignite, causing fire and burn hazards. According to

the U.S. Consumer Safety Product Commission, the products were sold between December 2014 and July 2017.

Along with being a potential fire hazard, using cheaply made charging components and devices can also cause electrocution. Dangers aside, they may cost you more in the long run since they can cause damage to whatever is on the other end of the cable. That cheap charging cable could end up costing you a new cell phone.

To keep safe around electrical devices and charging gear, Safe Electricity recommends the following:

- ▶ Do not leave items that are charging unattended.
- ▶ Always keep charging items away from flammable objects, especially bedding, and do not take them to bed with you. Tell kids and teens to NEVER place any charging device under their pillow. The heat generated cannot dissipate and the charger will become hotter and hotter. This could lead to the pillow or bed catching fire.

- ▶ Do not touch charging electronic devices with wet hands or while standing in water.
- ▶ Make sure charging components are certified by a reputable third-party testing laboratory.
- ▶ Only buy product-approved chargers and cables (those made or certified by the manufacturer). Using cheaper devices can cause damage to the USB charge chip. Although it's tempting to save money, this can have a lasting impact on how quickly and effectively your device charges in the future. The bottom line is this: Don't buy charging equipment with prices that seem too good to be true or from companies you've never heard of. And even if you've heard of the company, be leery of fakes. In 2016, Apple sued a company that sold counterfeit wall chargers with Apple's name on them for less than \$10 each.

Go ahead with a chocolate candy bar or magazine impulse buy in the checkout line, but bypass the cheap USB chargers and charging cables.