

Stay safe this holiday season

For many, the holiday season means more celebrations with friends and family, travel, decorations, cooking and shopping.

Eastern Illini Electric Co-op wants you to stay safe during the holidays, so here are a few tips to consider as you gear up for the season.

We can't guarantee that the hustle and bustle of the season won't leave you with a few frayed nerves, but we can certainly help you avoid frayed wires.

Inspect your seasonal items

Many of us have treasured holiday mementos that we bring out of storage and proudly display every year. The holidays are also a time when we dust off specialized cooking gadgets that allow us to prepare our favorite seasonal treats. These items are often handed down through generations and might lack modern safety features.

Take a few moments to carefully inspect all your holiday items to ensure everything is in safe, working order. A few things to look out for include:

- Brittle insulation on wires
- Rodent damage to wires
- Frayed wires, especially at stress points
- Worn switches

- Corroded metal parts
- Broken legs, unstable bases and other tip-over hazards

Extension cords are temporary

When you asked your teacher for an extension on your term paper, it was a one-time thing, right? The same holds true for extension cords. They are designed for temporary use and should never be used as a permanent or long-term solution.

Never defeat safety devices

There are reasons why some devices have fuses, some plugs have three prongs instead of two and one prong is wider than the other on two-prong outlets. When those safety features get in the way of your grand holiday décor plans, you might be tempted to tamper with or defeat those features. Don't do it! If your plugs won't fit together, that means they're not designed to work together.

Look up and live

When working outside with a ladder, be mindful of the location of overhead power lines. Always carry your ladder so that it is parallel to the ground. Before placing your ladder in an upright position, look around to ensure you are a safe distance from any power lines.

Beware of power lines through trees

Over time, tree branches can grow around power lines running along the street and to your home. If those branches come in contact with power lines, they can become energized, too. If your holiday plans call for stringing lights through trees, this can create a safety hazard.

If you notice tree limbs that are too close to electric lines, or if you notice any other situation that you are concerned with, please contact us at 800-824-5102. Stay safe!



12 Days of Holiday Safety

It's easy to make safety a part of your holiday with these tips. Tackle one a day and you're well on your way to a safe New Year!

ESFi
Eastern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Day 1 What's that noise? Test your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Make sure everyone knows what to do if they hear them.

Day 2 What a shocker! Before use, inspect all electrical lights, decorations, and extension cords for damage.

Day 3 Two's company, three's a crowd. Do not overload outlets with too many decorations or devices.

Day 4 Is it working? Test your ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) and arc fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs) to make sure they're protecting you.

Day 5 Ouch! Prevent trips and falls by keeping cords safely along walls and out of doorways and high traffic areas.

Day 6 Kids eat the darndest things! Avoid putting lights, metal hooks, breakable ornaments, and other small decorations within reach of young children.

Day 7 Thirsty? Keep your Christmas tree stand full of water. A fresh, green tree poses less of a fire hazard than a dry tree.

Day 8 Make a wish! Blow out the candles before leaving a room or going to bed.

Day 9 Nice and warm. Keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from anything that can burn—decorations, trees, gifts, and curtains.

Day 10 Can't touch this! Consider installing tamper-resistant outlets/receptacles to prevent kids from inserting objects into the slots.

Day 11 Escape Route: Share your family fire escape plan with overnight guests.

Day 12 Hot stuff! Keep children away from cooking areas; use back burners and turn pot handles in away from little hands.

There's no greater gift you can give your family than a safe and happy holiday! Learn more at holidaysafety.org.

Cooking up holiday energy savings

Use these tips to take control of your kitchen, and energy bills.

For many of us, the best holidays involve home-cooked meals and wonderful aromas of turkey, stuffing and baked goods wafting throughout the house. It means a busy kitchen and a bustling house full of family and friends. If this rings true for you, despite the increased kitchen activity, you still have an opportunity to save energy during the holidays.

Cut carbs (carbon) painlessly

In addition to being the “heart of your home,” your kitchen could pump savings back into your wallet. According to the Department of Energy, cooking accounts for 4.5 percent of total energy use in U.S. homes. This number, combined with the energy use associated with refrigeration, dishwashing and hot water heating means that as much as 15 percent of the energy in the average American home is used in the kitchen. So, saving energy here can have a significant impact on your household budget.

For example, when preparing side dishes, baked goods, soups and such, consider using small appliances like a crock pot, toaster oven, microwave or warming plate instead of your conventional oven or stove top. These small appliances are a smart, energy-saving alternative, typically using about half the energy of a stove.

Seal in efficiency

When using your oven, don't peek! Opening the oven door can lower the temperature by as much as 25 degrees and causes your stove to work harder (consuming more energy) to return to the desired cooking temperature. If your recipe calls for baking the dish more than an hour, it is not necessary

to preheat the oven. If your oven is electric, you can likely turn the oven off for the last five to ten minutes of cooking and allow the residual heat to complete the job. Clean burners and reflectors increase efficiency and offer better heating, so don't neglect this small but important task.

Just as keeping the oven door closed seals in efficiency and enables the stove to operate more economically, the same rules apply to the refrigerator and freezer. Keep the doors closed as much as possible so cold air doesn't escape. However, leaving the door open for a longer period of time while you load groceries or remove items you need is more efficient than opening and closing it several times.

If you are entertaining a large group, you may be able to give your furnace a brief holiday. When your oven is working hard and you have a house full of guests, the heat from the stove and the guests will keep your house comfortable, enabling you to turn down the thermostat.

Clean up with energy savings

When it's time to clean up, extend fellowship to the kitchen, and wash and dry dirty dishes by hand. This uses less energy than a dishwasher. However, don't leave the water running continuously, or you will



Holiday cooking efficiency tip:

Every time you open the oven door to check that dish, the temperature inside decreases by up to 25 degrees! Hold off on peeking inside so that your oven doesn't have to work harder than necessary to heat holiday treats.

waste energy. If you do use the dishwasher and rinse dishes before loading them, use cold water. Run the dishwasher with full loads only, and if possible, use the energy-saving cycle.

By adapting these efficient practices in your kitchen, energy savings will be one more thing to be thankful for this holiday season.

Over \$1 million paid in capital credits

The retirement of capital credits is a tangible benefit of being a member/owner.

Last month, Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative began mailing capital credit checks to member/owners that received electricity in 1983 and the first part of 1984. The payments will total over \$1 million, and are part of an overall retirement of \$1,467,399.

Each year, Eastern Illini's Board of Directors carefully looks at our financial condition to determine how much, if any, capital credits can be retired.

Eastern Illini's President/CEO Bob Hunzinger noted, "The cooperative business model is special for many reasons, but one of the main ones is capital credits.

The financial stake that you, and all of our previous member/owners, have, really makes this your cooperative. We are fortunate that our financial condition allows us to return this portion of our members' equity investment."

What are capital credits?

Since we are a not-for-profit cooperative owned by you, whenever our revenues exceed our expenses, we refer to those profits as margins.

At the end of each year, any available margins are allocated back to you - into your capital credit account - in proportion to the amount of electricity you purchased that

year. When the allocated funds are returned to you as capital credits, we say that those capital credits have been retired.

The retirement of capital credits - so-called because member/owners provide capital to the cooperative for it to operate and expand - depends on the co-op's financial status. Eastern Illini holds on to the allocated capital credits to cover emergencies, such as a natural disaster, and other unexpected events, and to expand our electric system, all of which may require large-scale construction of poles and wires.

By utilizing the capital credit allocations, we can lessen or eliminate the need to raise rates or borrow money to pay for the infrastructure.

Hunzinger concluded, "Our board has set a target of getting to a 25-year payback cycle. That number is relevant because it is similar to our average infrastructure lifespan."

We need your help

There are many former member/owners of Eastern Illini for whom we don't have current addresses. We'd like to be able to get them their capital credit payments, so we've set up a database on our website to try to track them down.

Please visit www.eiec.coop and follow the link to the capital credit's page where you can search by name or download the complete list of former members who have unclaimed capital credits. You may even find some money you weren't expecting!

How Do Capital Credits Work?

Because Eastern Illini operates at cost, any excess revenues, called margins, are returned back to you in the form of capital credits.

5 We then notify you of how and when you'll receive your capital credits retirements.

5

1 Eastern Illini tracks how much electricity you buy and how much money you pay for it throughout the year.

1

2 At the end of the year, we complete our financial matters and determine whether there are excess revenues, called margins.

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3 We then allocate the margins to members as capital credits based upon their use of electricity during the year.

3

4 When the co-op's financial condition permits, your board of directors decides to retire, or pay back, the capital credits.

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Electric co-ops have retired
\$12 billion
to members since 1988.

Source: National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, Updated April 2015

Don't forget the Co-op Connections Card

Save money this holiday season by using your free Co-op Connections Card.

Eastern Illini's commitment to you goes beyond providing safe and reliable electricity.

We're always looking for ways to provide value to you, our member/owners, and our community.

And who doesn't like to save money? The Co-op Connections Program offers you a variety of ways to pocket a little extra change on trips to the pharmacy or hardware store, while on vacation and much more.

Coupons

Thanks to a partnership agreement with Coupons.com, Co-op Connections Card holders can save big on trips to the grocery store and shopping online.

All you have to do is visit www.eiec.coop and click on the Co-op Connections Card link. From there, just click on the "Coupons" link and let the savings begin!

Eastern Illini's customized site gives you access to hundreds of coupons that you can print to use for groceries, household and personal products and even pet care. For example, you can find coupons for favorites like Cheerios, Tyson's Chicken, Caribou Coffee and Keebler crackers.



You can even sign up for a virtual savings card that allows you to get larger coupons and daily deals that offer up to 90 percent savings on family fun, sports, restaurants and more.

There's something for you online shoppers, too. In addition to printable coupons, there is also a gallery of promotional codes from retailers such as Target, Best Buy and Macy's.

Pharmacy Savings

One of the longest running discounts with the Co-op Connections Card is the pharmacy savings program.

To date, Eastern Illini member/owners have saved over \$180,000 by showing their Co-op Connections Card when getting prescription drugs.

The Co-op Connections Card helps lower the cost of prescriptions by up to 85 percent, even if you have existing coverage. Simply show your card to your pharmacist and they will figure out how much you can save.

Other Discounts

The savings don't stop there. There are hundreds of local discounts available, as well as plenty of national offers. Visit our website at www.eiec.coop and click on the Co-op Connections link for a full list of offers.

To get a new Co-op Connections Card, simply contact us at 800-824-5102 or info@eiec.coop.

We'll be happy to send you a free replacement card today.

New Identity Protection Program Now Available

Touchstone Energy® is adding ID Sanctuary identity theft monitoring and resolution services to the Co-op Connections Card's list of benefits.

For \$5 a month for individual coverage or \$8 for a family, ID Sanctuary offers fraud and credit monitoring that scours billions of records and sources. If something changes, subscribers receive an alert.

And if your identity is stolen, the service also provides help in resolving the issue.

"We're excited to partner with a top-flight

company that will help safeguard our members at a price that any family can afford," said Scott Bialick, Touchstone Energy business development program manager.

"Our research shows that helping our members save money increases member engagement in the cooperative. The Co-op Connections Card is an ideal tool for serving members and partnering with local businesses," added Bialick.

Joel Ray, CEO of Dallas-based New Benefits which runs ID Sanctuary, said identity theft

is the nation's "fastest growing crime" and that "consumers need to be more diligent in how they protect themselves."

"It is critical for consumers to safeguard their private information," Ray said.

New Benefits is no stranger to Co-op Connections. The company earlier partnered with Touchstone Energy on the card's legendary prescription drug benefit, which to date has saved co-op members some \$90 million. For more information on this program, visit www.connections.coop or call us at 800-824-5102.

Youth to Washington \$1,000 Scholarships

High school seniors are encouraged to apply for Eastern Illini's "Youth to Washington" \$1,000 Scholarships.

In 2016, Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative will award \$1,000 scholarships to two high school seniors whose parents are members of the co-op.

In addition to the scholarship, the two winners will each receive a week-long all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., June 10-17, where they will join other high school students for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour.



- For complete rules and to apply, visit www.eiec.coop.
- For more information, call us at 800-824-5102.
- The application deadline is January 31, 2016.
- For details on the trip, visit the Illinois Youth to Washington Facebook page.

