

# Rural Life



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Monday — Thursday

**MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS**

Third Wednesday of each month, 10 a.m.  
801 West Third Street  
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Touchstone Energy®

## Electric Co-op Leaders Take Consumer Concerns to D.C.

**C**oncerned about what energy legislation before Congress might do to electric rates, nearly 100 Colorado electric co-op leaders recently visited with the state's senators and representatives in Washington, D.C.

Southeast Colorado Power Association Board President Mark Grasmick, Secretary/Treasurer Bill Grasmick and Chief Operating Officer Jack Wolfe joined 3,000 other co-op leaders on Capitol Hill May 5 and 6. They were there to tell elected officials that Congress will be held accountable for ensuring that affordable and reliable electricity is not forgotten in climate change legislation.

Prior to visiting with legislators, co-op leaders heard from National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO Glenn English, who told co-op managers, directors and staffers that their message to Congress was straightforward.

"You can either side with Wall Street and the speculators, or you can side with Main Street, your constituents and your electric cooperative," English said. Politicians will pay the price if they fail to make sure that the costs of climate change legislation are affordable to ratepayers.

"If Congress doesn't fully appreciate or understand the ramifications of the actions and the votes they cast, we could find ourselves back to those days when certain segments of our population could not afford electric power on a regular basis," English said.

He reminded those attending that they carry the message of the 42 million electric co-op members across the country who are counting on them to explain what rising electric rates will mean to local communities and their residents.

The timing of this visit was important because a climate change bill was in the process of being marked up. Included in that proposed bill was a plan that could



**U.S. Rep. John Salazar (D-Dist. 3) talks to electric co-op representatives about issues facing Congress.**

enable Wall Street speculators and large corporations to corner the market on emissions credits, which represent tradable federal permits to emit carbon dioxide.

President Barack Obama's budget outline proposes auctioning those allowances, but in an era of rampant financial speculation, English said that's the last thing the country needs.

"If you think the speculators handled the economy well last fall, just wait till they get a hold of your electric bills," he said.

Providing allowances free of charge to utilities will blunt at least some of the impact on electric bills, co-op leaders noted during visits with legislators.

Co-op representatives also stressed that they are willing to work with Congress to craft some kind of climate change bill and avert the possibility of heavy-handed regulation of greenhouse gas emissions by the Environmental Protection Agency. The co-ops support putting together a climate change package that will serve the country well while also meeting the needs of electric co-op members.

# Internet Helps Create Energy-Aware Kids

BY MEGAN MCKOY

Getting children excited about energy efficiency may seem hard — for some parents, it's enough of a challenge to get them to do chores. But several websites have been designed with young energy savers in mind.

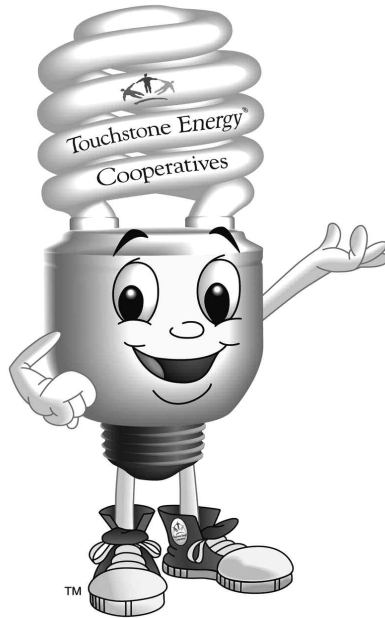
Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives, the brand "ID" of the nation's not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric cooperatives, offers Touchstone Energy Kids Zone ([www.touchstoneenergykids.com](http://www.touchstoneenergykids.com)) featuring a spunky energy efficiency mascot, CFL Charlie. The site is designed to teach children in kindergarten through fifth grade how to be Super Energy Savers in their homes. The Kids Zone includes interactive games, videos and surprises.

"The website is all about engagement," explains Kristine Jackson, Touchstone Energy Cooperatives senior representative for business development. "This is a way for parents to interact with children so the family can focus on energy efficiency together and develop energy-efficient habits that will last a lifetime. Through fun activities, students and their parents learn about renewable energy, electrical safety and energy savings."

For example, LIGHTS OUT!, an online energy-saving game in the Kids Zone, challenges kids to speed through a virtual house, replacing traditional incandescent lightbulbs with energy-efficient compact fluorescent lightbulbs and turning off lights and appliances as fast as possible. The less energy a player uses by the time everything's off, the better his or her score.

"Playing the LIGHTS OUT! game and taking kids through a house with an energy efficiency checklist, which parents can find in the Kids Zone, are great ways to work together to get good habits started," recommends Jackson.

Mascots asking kids to help their parents save energy are popular. The U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy has employed Disney's Tinker Bell character to encourage youngsters to use CFLs and



CFL Charlie is an energy-efficient mascot.

energy-saving smart power strips, as well as close doors and turn off computers and gaming systems when not in use.

"The magical thing about using energy wisely is that anyone can do it," touts the campaign in a video featuring Tinker Bell and her friends at [www.energy.gov/tink](http://www.energy.gov/tink).

The Alliance to Save Energy suggests "superpowers" may help combat low energy efficiency. Project Super Powers at [www.projectsUPERPOWERS.com](http://www.projectsUPERPOWERS.com) highlights videos of superheroes trying to use their abilities to save energy at home, often with embarrassing results. Children are encouraged to help by suggesting fictional superpowers that might successfully reduce energy use. The website encourages researchers (children) to find a better way to be energy efficient.

Energy Star's website for youth, [www.energystar.gov/kids](http://www.energystar.gov/kids), provides interactive ways to learn how to make small changes with a big impact in places such as a child's bedroom. The site gives guidance on what items use power even when they're not on (for example, cell phone chargers and certain televisions) and basic things like air leaks that kids can look for and help their parents fix.

Teachers searching for ways to help students focus on energy efficiency have several resources available. Some co-ops provide schools with CFL Charlie Super Energy Saver kits.

"Each kit accommodates a class of 30 students and includes a checklist that children can use to help guide their parents on an 'energy efficiency expedition,'" adds Jackson. "In the exercise, kids walk through the house with their mom and dad to make sure the refrigerator door is closed and discuss switching out incandescent bulbs with CFLs, turning off all lights after leaving a room and shutting off computers when not in use."

Finished checklists signed by children and parents are submitted to teachers for a certificate declaring the student "an official Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Super Energy Saver." Certificates carry the image and signature of CFL Charlie.

"The kits also contain classroom activities such as connect-the-dots and word search games," Jackson concludes. "Handing out these materials provides a great way to influence household energy efficiency."

EERE also offers lesson plans, science projects and more for kindergarten through 12th grade students at [www.eere.energy.gov/education](http://www.eere.energy.gov/education). For example, elementary and middle school students can make a "Draft-O-Meter" from a pencil and plastic wrap to check for air leaks in their home. High school science and math students can use the lesson plan "Watt Does It Cost to Use It?" to learn the energy price tag for different electric household items.

No matter what website you point kids to, the message remains clear. Energy efficiency starts at home, and everyone in the family has an important role to play.

*Megan McKoy writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Virginia-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.*



## JACK'S CONSERVATION CORNER

## Lower Water Heating Temperature for Higher Energy Savings

**Y**ou can reduce your water heating costs by simply lowering the thermostat setting on your water heater. For each 10-degree reduction in water temperature, you can save between 3 and 5 percent in energy costs.

Although some manufacturers set water heater thermostats at 140 degrees, most households usually only require 120 degrees. Water heated at 140 degrees also poses a safety hazard — scalding. However, if you have a dishwasher without a booster heater, it may require a water temperature within a range of 130 degrees to 140 degrees for optimum cleaning.

Reducing your water temperature to 120 degrees also slows mineral buildup and corrosion in your water heater and pipes. This helps your water heater last longer and operate at its maximum efficiency.

Consult your water heater owner's manual for instructions on how to operate the thermostat. You can find the thermostat dial for a gas water heater near the bottom of the tank on the gas valve. Electric water heaters, on the other hand, may have thermostats positioned behind screw-on plates or panels. As a safety precaution, shut off the electricity to the water heater before removing or opening the panels. Keep in mind that an electric water heater may have two thermostats, one each for the upper and lower heating elements.

Mark the beginning temperature and the adjusted temperature on the thermostat dial for future reference. After turning it down, check the water temperature with a thermometer at the tap farthest from the water heater. Thermostat dials are often inaccurate. Several adjustments may be necessary before you get the right temperature. (WIN\*Elizabeth O'Neill\*, Lamar, account #1502270000)

If you plan to be away from home for at least three days, turn the thermostat down to the lowest setting or completely turn off the water heater. To turn off an electric water heater, switch off the circuit breaker to it. For a gas water heater, make sure you know how to safely relight the pilot light before turning it off.

If you have an electric water heater, you can save an additional 5 to 12 percent of energy by installing a timer that turns it off at night when you don't use hot water.

You can install a timer yourself. They can cost \$60 or more, but they can pay for themselves in about a year. Timers are most cost effective if you don't want to install a heat trap and insulate your water heater tank and pipes. Timers aren't as cost effective or useful on gas water heaters because of their pilot lights.



## Be Lightning Savvy, Even Indoors

**W**e tend to think of lightning being a danger only when we're outside in a storm. However, lightning can cause injuries indoors as well. Safe Electricity offers the following tips to help you stay safe indoors during storms:

- Don't plug in or unplug anything electrical during the storm.
- Don't use corded telephones — phone use is the number one cause of indoor lightning injuries in the United States. Lightning can travel long distances in both phone and electrical wires, particularly in rural areas.
- Avoid contact with water, pipes, washers or dryers. They not only have contacts with the plumbing and electrical systems, but also contain an electrical path to the outside through the dryer vent.
- Avoid contact with concrete walls, which may contain metal reinforcing bars.

By following these tips, you can lessen your risk of being injured by lightning — even when you're indoors.

### YOU COULD BE A WINNER

**I**f you find your name in this issue as follows (Win\* your name, account number), please contact Paige Horn at Southeast Colorado Power, 719-384-2551 or 800-332-8634, to receive a credit on your next power bill. Last month's winner was Bruno Lucero, account #1203370000.

**Energy Tip: Cut things like vegetables into smaller and evenly sized pieces to speed the cooking process.**

## Water and Electricity Don't Mix

**Y**ou may not be thinking about electrocution risks when heavy rains and flooding hit, but it should be at the top of the list. Be alert to electrical equipment that could be energized and in contact with water, creating a serious danger of electrocution.

Safety measures to keep in mind include:

- Never step into a flooded basement or other room if water may be in contact with electrical outlets, appliances or cords.
- Never attempt to turn off power at the breaker box if you must stand in water to do so. If you can't reach your breaker box safely, call your electric utility to shut off power at the meter.
- Never use electric appliances or touch electric wires, switches or fuses when you're wet or when you're standing in water.
- Keep electric tools and equipment at least 10 feet away from wet surfaces. Do not use electric yard tools when it's raining or the ground is wet.
- If an electrical appliance has been in contact with water, have a professional check it out before it is used. It may need to be repaired or replaced.

Make sure outdoor outlets and outlets in wet areas of the home — such as baths, kitchen and laundry rooms — are equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters. These devices can cut off power quickly if there is a problem.



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## Attic Fans vs. Whole-House Fans

**Q** What is the difference between attic fans and whole-house fans? Are there advantages and disadvantages to each, and in what circumstances are each recommended?

**A** There is quite a difference involving attic fans and whole-house fans, in both form and function. Whole-house fans are much larger in size and are placed somewhere in a central location in the house's ceiling. These fans are an efficient way to cool a home, moving a decent amount of air through the house and up to the attic area. They can be run at all times during warmer months but are most efficient when outside temperatures and humidity levels are not extreme enough to warrant using an air conditioner. This is because a whole-house fan can only cool the interior of a house to the outside temperature and cannot dehumidify the inside. Another possible drawback to operating this fan is that it can also draw in outside dust and pollen.

Attic (or roof) fans are usually much smaller in size and are usually placed on the interior roofline of a house. These fans are intended to circulate heated air from the attic space to the outside but can create negative pressures in a home. The pressure can remove conditioned air from the house through ceiling leaks and bypasses; pull pollutants such as mold, radon and sewer gases inside the house; and finally, the pressure can back draft fireplaces, water heaters and fuel-burning appliances. Roof fans are generally not recommended for most house designs.

## ELECTRIC GRILLING SAFETY TIPS

**S**ummer means outdoor grilling and backyard barbecues. Follow these safety precautions when operating an electric grill.

- Never immerse cords, plugs or heating elements in water or other liquid.
- Visually inspect cord, plug and all connections for damage and wear before operation. Replace or repair prior to operation.
- Before plugging or unplugging an electric grill, turn control knob(s) to the off position.
- Unplug an electric grill from the outlet when not in use and before cleaning.
- Electrical cords should always be secured during operation to protect against product damage or personal injury.
- To ensure protection against risk of shock, the electric grill should be connected to a ground fault circuit interrupter outlet in accordance with local codes.
- Do not use an electric grill in the rain.
- Do not use an electric grill near combustible or flammable materials.
- Always read the grill's instruction manual before use.

## ENERGY TIP

**R**eplace old light switches with occupancy sensors whenever possible. These turn the lights on when someone enters the area and then off again after a set time with no movement in the room. Install them in hallways, laundry rooms, basements, garages or any place where a light may be left on accidentally while the room is unoccupied or when hands-free operation is a factor. They are especially useful in homes with seniors or disabled people who might get disoriented or have trouble seeing at night.