

Decrease High Winter Bills Before They Begin



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER AND CEO JERRY D. WILLIAMS

LAST WINTER BROUGHT UNPLEASANT

weather extremes to Texas. In our area of the state temperatures dropped more than 20 degrees below normal. Several days in January the temperature was below 20 degrees. There were a lot of days last winter when the temperature did not get over the mid 40 mark. It is just natural for a heater to run a lot longer when it's 45 degrees outside than when it is 55 degrees. Every home in this area was forced to run their heating system longer and harder than usual—and nearly everyone saw unwelcome higher bills as a result.

At Lamar Electric Cooperative, we recognize that high bills cause worries. Every one of us at your co-op pays an electric bill, too, so we personally understand your need to keep the household budget balanced while keeping your family warm.

We operate your cooperative based on the guidance of the Seven Cooperative Principles, which includes Concern for Community. We work hard to fulfill that commitment by providing safe and reliable energy for your homes and businesses.

We are committed to helping you find reasonable solutions for your power dilemmas. The co-op offers several programs to help members manage their bills. There's almost always more than one remedy for a situation, and we can help you weigh all the available options.

The most important way to prevent a higher-than-expected energy bill is to look for ways to decrease the amount of energy used. One thing we can't change, no matter how hard we try, is that colder weather means most folks use more electricity to keep the house warm.

There are a few simple things that can help you prepare and manage your electric usage. If you have a heat pump, make sure the thermostat is not set to "emergency heat" "Auxiliary Heat" or "E Heat." Last winter many of our members were very surprised when this problem was discovered.

One very kind elderly lady was astonished when I showed her how to change her thermostat from "E Heat" to "Heat." The outside heat pump unit immediately came on and prompted her to say, "Well, now I know why the outside unit has not been running all winter."

We found a lot of folks did not know if they had a Heat

Pump or Resistance Heat. They just knew the heat was electric. There is a world of difference between using a Heat Pump correctly and heating with Resistance Heat. A Heat Pump is simply an air conditioning unit that runs backward in the winter. If your outside AC/Fan Unit runs when the heat is on, you have a heat pump. This is a very efficient way to heat the house, because you are not creating the heat with a flame or some red hot wires. The Heat Pump gets its name because it simply takes the available heat out of the air outside your home and moves it (pumps it) inside your home. When the outside temperature gets very far below freezing (below 32 degrees), like in the 20s, there is not very much heat available in the outside air. For this reason, most installers will add some "Auxiliary" or "Emergency" resistance heat strips that come on to heat the house when it gets very cold. If you want to heat the house up quick, most thermostats have a setting to allow you to manually turn this Auxiliary heat on. We have found that a lot of folks accidentally set their thermostat to this Auxiliary heat setting. Other than 2-3 days each year, you should never use Auxiliary or Emergency Heat.

Many have asked me how an air conditioner running backward can get heat out of the outside air when it is 45 degrees outside. The answer is rather simple. If the outside air did not contain any heat energy, then it would be zero degrees instead of 45 degrees. That means there are 45 degrees of heat present in the outside air. Of course when it is 60 degrees outside, the heat pump has an easier job and does not have to run as long or as hard.

If you are heating with electricity and you don't have a heat pump; you are heating using "Resistance Heat". That means there are wires inside your central heating unit that get red hot, similar to an electric oven, with a fan blowing air around the hot wires to send the heat through the duct works. This is currently one of the most expensive ways to heat a house. (The most expensive is using those portable resistance heaters that sit around the house.) It is also one of the least expensive heating units to install. Many manufactured or mobile homes have electric resistance heat installed because the upfront cost was less. If you are in this situation, you should consider changing

to an electric heat pump or installing a flueless gas heater on the wall. Yes, I know propane or natural gas is not cheap either, but it may be a better solution than electric resistance heat.

Make sure your air conditioner coils inside the house are clean. The squirrel cage fan located in the inside unit should also be cleaned. Most AC repairmen will clean the inside and outside coils, clean the inside fan and check the Freon for less than \$200. Check their tuneup price. It may be a very good investment that pays off with lower electric bills. We have been amazed at how plugged up the inside AC coils are in a lot of houses. These coils collect lint, just like your ceiling fan. The difference is you can't see the AC coils to easily clean them. Many folks change their AC filters regularly, but don't realize the prior tenant may have not changed a single filter.

You may be wondering why keeping the AC coils has anything to do with high heating bills. The heated air has to go through the AC coils inside your house, the same as your cool air in the summer. If you have a heat pump or electric resistance heat, the warm air still has to pass through the AC coils inside your closet.

Check the insulation in your attic. If you don't have at least 18 inches of fiberglass or cellulose (at least R30), you need to add insulation. You can pay to have insulation blown in (or do it yourself) or you can pay a higher heating bill. Adding 12 inches of fiberglass to your existing insulation will typically reduce your electric bill enough to get your money back in about a year.

You can manage your energy use by sealing any gaps that create drafts in your home and bundle up with sweaters, socks and slippers while in the house. Keep an eye on the thermostat to conserve energy, and set it as low as comfortably possible. Keep shades or curtains and blinds closed at night to reduce significant temperature changes inside the house. Always turn off lights you don't need, and avoid using those expensive electric space heaters (resistance heat) if possible. They use more energy than you might expect. Our goal is to help you reduce your electric usage as much as possible and use only what you can afford.

We'll work with you every way we can to help manage higher winter bills. We can review your account to make sure the bill is correct and accurate. In most cases we can download your electric usage on an hour by hour basis to help you spot exactly when the high usage is occurring. We can also send an employee to your home to help identify your biggest energy users and sources of inefficiency.

If needed and if you meet eligibility requirements, we can arrange a payment plan that will fit your budget. We also offer an average monthly payment plan, which allows you to pay exactly the same amount each month all year. If you have problems, please call us so we can try to work something out before your account is disconnected.



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This section of Texas Co-op Power is produced by LEC each month to provide you with information about current events, safety, special programs and other activities of the cooperative. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact the local office.



MERRY CHRISTMAS

Lamar EC wishes you and yours a blessed and joyful Christmas season.

Our offices will be closed Thursday and Friday, December 24-25, and Friday, January 1, to allow our employees to celebrate the holidays with their families.

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Space Heater Safety

PORTABLE ELECTRIC SPACE HEATERS CAN BE a convenient source of supplemental heat for your home in cold weather, but they also increase the risk of fire and electric shock if they're not used properly. Half of all home heating fires occur in December, January and February, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

Heating equipment is the second leading cause of home fires in the United States. More than 65,000 home fires are attributed to heating equipment each year. These fires result in hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries and millions of dollars in property damage.

Fire and electrical hazards can be caused by space heaters without adequate safety features, space heaters placed near combustibles or space heaters that are improperly plugged in. Safety should always be a top consideration when using space heaters. Here are some tips for keeping your home safe and warm when it's cold outside:

- ▶ Make sure your space heater has a label showing that it has been tested by a recognized testing laboratory.
- ▶ Before using any space heater, read the manufacturer's instructions and warning labels carefully.
- ▶ Inspect heaters for cracked or broken plugs or loose connections before each use. If anything is frayed, worn or damaged, do not use the heater.
- ▶ Never leave a space heater unattended. Turn it off when you're leaving a room or going to sleep, and don't let pets or children play too close to a space heater.



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Space heaters can be dangerous when placed near combustibles or improperly plugged in.

- ▶ Space heaters are meant only to provide supplemental heat and should never be used to warm bedding, cook food, dry clothing or thaw pipes.
- ▶ Proper placement of space heaters is critical. Heaters must be kept at least 3 feet away from anything that can burn, including paper, clothing and rugs.
- ▶ Locate space heaters out of high-traffic areas and doorways, where they may pose a tripping hazard.
- ▶ Plug space heaters directly into wall outlets. Do not use an extension cord or power strip, which could overheat and result in a fire. Do not plug any other electrical devices into the same outlet as the heater.
- ▶ Place space heaters on hard, level, flat surfaces. Never place heaters on cabinets, tables, furniture or carpet, which can overheat and start a fire.
- ▶ Always unplug and safely store the heater when it is not in use.
- ▶ Space heaters can increase your electric consumption an astonishing amount, so use them sparingly, or not at all.



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Drop High Winter Bills

IF YOUR BANK ACCOUNT IS STILL feeling the bite of last winter's electric bills, now is the time to take steps that can make a difference this winter.

- 1. Seal gaps and cracks.** Use caulk or weatherstripping to close up holes around doors, windows, outlets and trim, where heated air can escape.
- 2. Open the drapes.** In the daytime, the sun's rays will help heat your home for free. Let them shine in all day, then cover windows once the sun goes down.
- 3. Wrap up in layers.** It costs a lot less to pull on a sweater or wrap up in a blanket than it does to move the thermostat up even a degree. Keep blankets on the sofa, and wear socks or slippers indoors.
- 4. Unblock heating vents.** Move furniture and other items away from vents so they can do a good job of evenly distributing warm air throughout the house.
- 5. Turn on ceiling fans.** Flip the switch to make blades spin clockwise so they push heated air back down into the room.
- 6. Turn off exhaust fans.** Kitchen and bathroom fans clear the air of odors and too much humidity—but once the air clears, turn them off. The longer an exhaust fan runs, the more heated air it sends outdoors.
- 7. Lower the temperature at bedtime.** Throw an extra blanket on your bed and turn the thermostat down several degrees before you turn in. You could save up to 10 percent on your heating bill if you let your house cool off a bit for eight hours.

LEDs for the Holidays

“L-E-D! L-E-D! L-E-D!” (Imagine this being chanted the way “U-S-A” is done at the Olympics.) Although light-emitting diodes won’t necessarily anchor a relay to victory, they are most certainly the current champions when it comes to energy-efficient lighting, and a perfect choice for holiday decorating.

Fifty years ago, we enjoyed decorating with large, painted incandescent bulbs. They were glorious—and hot, posing a real danger when used on a dry tree.

Fast-forward a couple of decades, when the energy-conservation movement created a demand for more efficient options. Enter miniature incandescent light strings. These still are widely used today and use dramatically less power than their predecessors.

As is often true in our technological age, manufacturers didn’t stop looking for even more efficient alternatives. This led to the introduction of LED lights. The first incarnations generated less-than-appealing garish blues, greens and reds but quickly softened into a more eye-pleasing spectrum.

Today, LEDs are the undisputed champs of holiday lighting. There is no reason to let concerns over cost of operation limit your decorating genius. You could wrap your home in LED light strings, become visible to the International Space Station and still have a pleasantly manageable power bill at the end of it all. But you would have a credit card purchase bill that is sky-high.




LEDs are also showing up in other forms and places. They are available in clear tubes that you can wrap around objects for extra interest. Many yard figures are constructed with these as the main lighted element.

How about wearing some holiday LED bling? Yes, the tacky (but ever so popular) holiday tie with tiny lights has been around for years. But combine the advances in LEDs with conductive paints and microcontrollers, and you can create some truly memorable fashions for the holidays.

You have worked hard all year to reduce your energy consumption to save money and slim down your carbon footprint. Now reward yourself with a splendid holiday display that will be the envy of all who see it—while you still conserve electricity.

HOLIDAY LIGHTING COMPARISON

Holiday lighting options have come a long way over the past few decades. The chart below shows three types of lighting options, including wattage and operating cost comparisons.

TYPE OF LAMP		WATTS PER LAMP	WATTS PER 50 LAMPS	SEASONAL OPERATING COST*
C9 INCANDESCENT		7	350	\$13.33
MINI INCANDESCENT		0.425	21.25	\$0.81
LED		0.069	3.45	\$0.13

*Based on 40 days of operation, eight hours per day, \$0.119 per kilowatt-hour (Department of Energy average). In addition, the LED will last as much as 40 times longer than the incandescent lamps. Source: energy.gov



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Renewal Required for Ag/Timber Sales Tax Exemption

IF YOU ARE CLAIMING A SALES TAX exemption on electricity used in the production of agricultural or timber products, you must renew your exemption by December 31 through the Office of the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. Otherwise, the co-op will be required to charge sales tax beginning in January. In addition, you will need to provide a new tax exemption certificate to Lamar Electric Cooperative by January 1.

How To Renew Exemption Certificates

There are several options for renewing your exemption certificate: online, by phone or by mail. Online renewal is the fastest, with the applicant receiving a confirmation number immediately. Those applying by phone will receive a confirmation letter by mail in five to seven days. Processing time for renewing by mail could take several weeks.

Those seeking a renewal can visit comptroller.texas.gov/taxinfo/agriculture/get_ready_texas.html for more information. The site also features a list of eligibility requirements.

For more information, contact the comptroller’s office at comptroller.texas.gov/taxhelp or call 1-800-252-5555.