

**WESTERN  
COOPERATIVE  
ELECTRIC**

## WESTERN COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC NEWS

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## May is Electrical Safety Month

We use electricity every day. This invisible force has become so commonplace that it can be all too easy to overlook possible electrical hazards, even in the safety of our own homes. May is Electrical Safety Month, and a good time to put the most important safety tool you have—your brain—to work.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration warns that electrical current levels as low as 3 milliamperes can result in injury. In a 2009 report on electrocutions associated with consumer products, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimated an average of 70 fatalities per year (from 2007 to 2009). The most common product categories associated with these electrocutions were small appliances, large appliances, and power tools.

Knowing what to be on the lookout for and knowing the safe steps to take can make all the difference in preventing accidents. Western offers the following home safety tips to help arm you with the knowledge to stay safe and help others stay safe.

- ▶ Always read and understand the operator's manual before using an appliance or tool.
- ▶ Make sure recognized safety laboratories, like UL, ETL, or CSA have certified your electrical appliance,

tools and cords you plan on using.

- ▶ Never use a product with a damaged electrical cord.
- ▶ Never use extension cords on a permanent basis
- ▶ Only use extension cords properly rated for the devices you plan to plug into it.
- ▶ For the safety of children in your home, install tamper-resistant outlets or protective coverings.
- ▶ If your outlets are warm to the touch, immediately shut them off at the circuit breaker, and contact a qualified electrician to make repairs.
- ▶ Install ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCIs) in areas that may be wet or damp. GFCIs help protect against electrical shock. Use the test and reset button monthly to ensure they are working properly.
- ▶ Never use power tools outdoors if it is raining or the ground is wet.
- ▶ If an appliance repeatedly blows a fuse, trips a circuit breaker or has given you an electrical shock, immediately unplug it and have it repaired or replaced.

To help identify hazards and assist homeowners in safeguarding themselves against any of these electrical hazards, Western offers safety demonstrations. For more information, contact Western's office at 800-456-6720 or 785-743-5561.

# New Technology Helps You Mind Your eBiz-ness

Knowledge is key to being a savvy consumer, especially when it comes to managing electricity bills. Now there are ways to monitor your energy usage and take steps to use the electricity that energizes your home or business more efficiently.

Western has just completed the installation of an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system. With AMI, a meter reader no longer travels to your home to record how much electricity your family or business has used. Instead, AMI sends continuous digital data from your meter to Western. This data includes the number of kW hours used each hour, day, and month. AMI even alerts Western when members experience excessive blinks or outages, which give Western staff a “head’s up” to get your service back to normal.

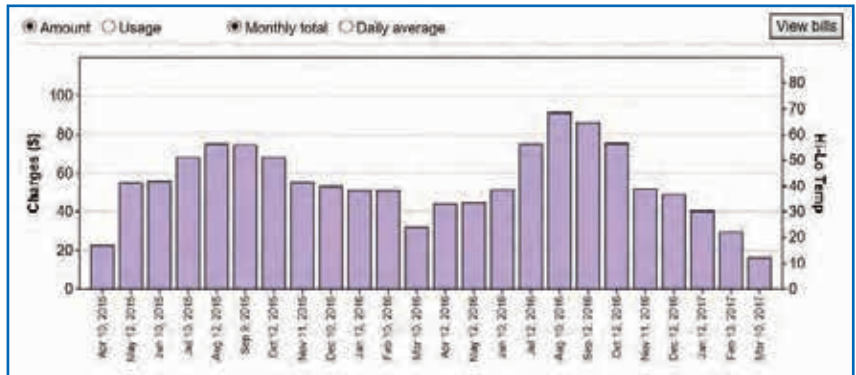
## So how does AMI improve service for Western’s members?

With the old analog meters, you could go out to your meter and read the dials to see how much electricity you were using each month. It is not likely that many members kept tabs on their electricity using this method. With AMI, apps on a smart phone or on other electronic devices or programs online can provide you with data about your electric usage with a few clicks. This data can help you make smart money-saving decisions about the way you use electricity.

## Which energy-usage apps are readily available for Western members?

Western now offers eBiz, a member-friendly online application. It provides you with a wealth of options:

- ▶ View your current billing and payment history;
- ▶ View up-to-date daily readings from your meter;
- ▶ View historical charts and graphs of your electric usage;
- ▶ Use the online bill calculator;
- ▶ Make account changes;



eBiz, a member friendly, online application, works in conjunction with Western’s Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system to bring Western’s members various kinds of data about their electricity use. This chart depicts historical electricity costs in relation to hi-lo temperatures.

- ▶ Pay your bill with a check or card (no processing fee);
- ▶ Make a one-time payment or set up a monthly payment;
- ▶ Sign up for email billing notifications;
- ▶ Request service from Western; and
- ▶ Store payment options and go paperless.

To access eBiz, go to the westerncoop.com homepage. Click on the eBiz link and enter the requested information, including user name, password, account number and phone number.

Western also has a mobile app that provides convenient access to each member’s account. Search for “Western Coop Mobile App” in the App Store or Google Play. After the app has downloaded, sign up for the service, which includes bill payment, views of current charges and usage, special notifications, and outage information and updates.

“Information is vital to good decision making when it comes to energy use and efficiency,” said Dennis Deines, Western’s manager of member services and compliance. “eBiz and the mobile app are easy to use and provide information that can put each of our members in the driver’s seat of how to control a household’s or business’s electricity use.”

If you have questions about eBiz any other question related to your electricity use and service, please contact Western at 785-743-5561.

May 2017						
S	M	T	W	U	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

## Mark Your Calendars for May 10

Mark your calendar for the Western Cooperative Electric’s Annual Meeting on Wednesday, May 10, 2017. The meeting will be held at the cooperative office in WaKeeney, I-70 Exit 128 and Highway 283, 635 S. 13th St. Registration will begin at 11 a.m., lunch will be served at noon and the meeting will be held at 1 p.m.

**We hope to see you there!**

## Power Strips vs. Surge Protectors BY TOM TATE



Tom Tate

As the proliferation of electronics impacts our daily lives, we realize there simply are not enough outlets in our homes. This is particularly

true for older homes. As a result, we end up with a number of “outlet expanders,” commonly known as power strips.

Power strips are generic and fulfill a very simple function. They are inexpensive, and the quality, I suspect, is on par with the price.

Keeping this in mind, let's look at factors to consider when purchasing a power strip or a surge protector—the power strip's more talented cousin.

### Purchasing a Power Strip

- ▶ Look for power strips with a built-in circuit breaker. If you connect too many electronics and devices, the strip will kick out the circuit breaker rather than causing the breaker in your electric panel to trip.
- ▶ Pay attention to the orientation of the outlets. The typical design is along the length of the strip, facing the bottom or end of the strip. I recommend power strips with the outlets perpendicular to the length of the strip.
- ▶ Get a smart strip. These are becoming more common and less expensive. With smart strips, one outlet serves as a master, receiving power all the time. The other outlets don't receive power until the master device is turned on (ideal for home entertainment setups).

If you are connecting expensive electronics, you may

want to consider a surge protector. Here, price is even more important because a cheap surge protector can be worse than none at all for two reasons. One, they use cheap, small surge-fighting components. Two, these components can fail and the strip still will provide power, all without any indication that its protective side is gone.

Like power strips, there are some key factors to consider when buying a surge protector.

- ▶ Significant joule (jewel) rating. This is a measure of how much energy it can withstand.
- ▶ Cable and internet connection protection. You may want to consider this for your entertainment and computing needs as surges can enter via any wired connection. Be sure the protector is designed to handle a digital television. Otherwise, it can cause pixilation if it's only designed for analog signals.
- ▶ Indicator light that shows if protection has burned out.
- ▶ The same outlet orientation as previously mentioned.
- ▶ Power conditioning feature (for PCs, this is a nice-to-have feature but not a necessity).
- ▶ Smart capability (mentioned above).

Power strips and surge protectors are worth the investment when you follow these simple suggestions. Don't get “burned” by purchasing cheap, inefficient strips and protectors. Pun intended.

**A surge protector can keep your expensive electronics safe. Look for protectors that offer cable and internet connection protection, a significant joule (jewel) rating and a “smart” component.**

## Generator Safety Tips

Never connect a standby generator into your home's electrical system. There are only two safe ways to connect a standby generator to your equipment.



### Stationary Generator

An approved generator transfer switch, which keeps your house circuits separate from the electric cooperative, should be installed by a professional.

### Portable Generator

Plug appliances directly into the outlet provided on the generator.

Set up and run your generator in a well-ventilated area outside the home. Make sure it's out and away from your garage, doors, windows and vents. The carbon monoxide generated is deadly.

Use a heavy-duty extension cord to connect electric appliances to the outlet on the generator.

Start the generator first before connecting appliances.

## Holiday Office Closings

In observance of Memorial Day, our office will be closed on Monday, May 29, 2017.

## Mother's Day—May 14



Get to Know Your Western  
Cooperative Electric Staff

## Reg Flagler

Material/ Work Order clerk



Reg Flagler

11 years this August.

### WHERE ARE YOU FROM ORIGINALLY?

I was born and raised in Trego County, WaKeeney.

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?

Fishing, shooting and spending time with my family.

### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE VACATION?

In 1996, we took our last “family” vacation before our oldest son went off to college. We went to Florida, camped out in a big three-room tent. It was not only a blast but a vacation to remember.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BOOK OR MOVIE AND WHY?

I'm a Star Trek fan. That type of movie has always fascinated me.

### IF YOU COULD BE AN ANIMAL, WHAT WOULD YOU BE AND WHY?

I always thought it would be cool to be like an eagle and just soar high above everything.

### WHAT SPORT OR TEAM IS YOUR FAVORITE?

K-State, Chiefs and Royals.

### WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU IN YOUR LIFE AND WHY?

My mother. After my Dad passed away when I was young, she had to raise myself and three of my siblings on her own. I'd like to think she did a pretty good job.

### TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

I've been married to my wonderful wife, Karen, for 40 years. We have 5 children—Michael, Justin, Amanda, Ryan and Paul — and four grandchildren.

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED AT WESTERN?

# Keep a Grip on Safety

Most people associate balloons with special occasions or celebrations. However, without proper precautions, a simple party supply can cause power outages and even explosions. Metallic balloons, if accidentally or purposely released, can cause big problems if they make contact with overhead power lines or substation equipment. Here are some tips on the proper handling and disposal of these balloons.

The metalized nylon in these balloons makes them good conductors of electricity. If these balloons come into contact with electrical equipment, they can cause power outages, fires and injuries.

An electric utility recently reported a power outage after metallic balloons made contact with a power line. The accident took place during a high school homecoming parade. A handful of balloons that were accidentally released during the parade caused the transformer to explode and the pole to fall to the ground. Power was lost to almost 3,000 consumers in the nearby area for several hours.

Another electrical outage was reported when a single metallic balloon became entangled in overhead power lines. It was reported that more than 6,000 utility consumers lost power as a result, but utility crews restored power in less than an hour. Luckily, in both cases, no one was injured, but such accidents are avoidable with attention



**Metallic (mylar) balloons are good conductors of electricity, making them a safety hazard if they come into contact with electrical equipment.**

to balloon safety.

In order to prevent risks when celebrating outdoors, tie down your balloons. It is also a good idea to use a weight to keep them secured.

Never tie a metallic ribbon on your balloon, and never tie a metallic balloon to a child's arm. These situations both can pose electrical hazards.

If a metallic balloon gets caught in overhead wires or substation equipment, do not try to retrieve it. Call 911 or your electric utility.

After celebrations have ended, make sure that these balloons are disposed of properly. Puncture a hole in your balloon and deflate it so it cannot float away after disposal. Consider creatively reusing metallic balloons as gift wrap, scrapbooking, or a craft project.

## National Electrical Safety Month

# PLUG INTO SAFETY

