

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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FLINT HILLS RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

NEWS

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This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer

FROM THE MANAGER

Energy Market Under Constant Change



Chuck Goeckel

The energy industry is undergoing rapid change, and technology is paving the way for innovation in the way energy is used, produced, stored and shared. Consumers

are interested in more green energy alternatives while smart homes and apps make managing energy use and paying your electric bill more convenient than ever.

The changing energy market has created more options for consumers and, unfortunately, more options for utility scams and misleading information surrounding solar installations in particular. That's because of two factors.

Utility scams are common because of the vast number of utilities that exist, and consumers are understandably anxious with the threat of disruption to their electric, heating or water service, especially now in these uncharted times. Second, new products and services in the energy industry provide an opening for scammers and pop-up companies to provide misleading information or inferior products and services.

Avoid Phone Scams

A common phone scam typically begins with a phone number that appears to be

from a valid utility company. The scammer will claim you have a past due account and threaten to disconnect service or take legal action. The scammer will typically demand that you use a prepaid debit card or money order, often within a very short, urgent time frame to pay the "past due" amount.

Scammers are taking advantage of the current pandemic by developing new ways to scam co-op members. Kentucky electric cooperatives recently reported scams in which the scammers contact co-ops members telling them they've overpaid their account and will receive a refund. The co-op member is then asked for their bank account information so the "overpayment" can be returned.

You can combat these scams by being aware of the status of your account. Never give your banking or personal information over the phone to someone you did not initiate a call with. If you have a question or concern about your energy bill, call us directly at 620-767-5144. Do not use the return phone number given by the scammer.

Avoid Solar Scams

Another scam we see from time to time is connected to rooftop solar. Homeowners with rooftop solar may receive a sales call offering an accessory, upgrade or extended warranty to

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LOVE THE OUTDOORS? BE SAFE OUT THERE.



Two-thirds of lightning fatalities are associated with outdoor recreational activities.



Do not use generators in enclosed areas. The same goes for grills, camping stoves, or other small appliances that produce carbon monoxide.



Pay attention to weather forecasts before you go canoeing or boating. Get off the open water as soon as you hear thunder.



Going for a hike? If you hear thunder or see lightning, do not seek shelter under a tree.



Look up for power lines while fishing or sailing. Fishing is the most common outdoor activity associated with lightning-related deaths.



Tent camping? Plan ahead and seek shelter in a hard-top vehicle or four-sided building during a storm or at the first sight of lightning.



Energy Market Change Constant

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their solar array. The calls could be from crooks claiming to represent a solar company, promising to replace faulty or broken parts or improve efficiency. Again, if you are not expecting the call, don't be fooled. These calls offering misleading information are likely a scam. Call the company that installed the solar array if you think there may be a problem. Other than occasional cleaning, rooftop solar (if installed correctly) is virtually maintenance-free.

Use Trusted Sources

If you're considering solar for your home, make sure you are working with a reputable company. Because this is still an emerging industry with evolving technology, there has been a proliferation of pop-up companies in the market to make a quick buck. Representatives of rooftop solar companies may have more sales experience than knowledge of the energy industry, and their

primary goal could be making a sale and moving on to the next prospect.

Flint Hills REC can offer a candid assessment to determine whether rooftop solar is right for you. After all, Flint Hills REC has a different "bottom line" that is not directly tied to the sale of a product or service. We take a more holistic, objective view of how to achieve energy and cost savings for our members, and that may or may not include rooftop solar.

In this ever-changing environment, it's important to remember you have a trusted energy adviser — your local electric cooperative. We are a community-focused organization that works to efficiently deliver affordable, reliable and safe energy to our members. We're just one call or click away, so please reach out with any questions about your electric service or bills — we're here to help.

Reduce the Dangers of Farming and Ranching

- ▶ Check and maintain equipment, especially electric cables and hydraulic hoses that have cracks or show other signs of wear.
- ▶ Always have someone nearby when entering grain bins
- ▶ Check all buildings and grounds for fire hazards and hazardous materials.
- ▶ Assess how any chemicals are stored and make sure children and animals can't access them.
- ▶ Make a list of chemicals for firefighters in case a fire breaks out on your farm or ranch.
- ▶ Don't skimp on safety: wear eye and ear protection, gloves, and face masks and respirators when appropriate.
- ▶ Shield all PTO-powered machinery



and keep others away.

- ▶ Outfit tractors and trucks with fire extinguishers.
- ▶ Never exit a tractor or truck without placing it in park or engaging the emergency brakes.
- ▶ Discuss safety concerns with children and explain safe operating procedures. You can never start too young, and remember they watch what you do.

General safety tips source: Hobby Farms

Peak Alert Savings Rebate Program

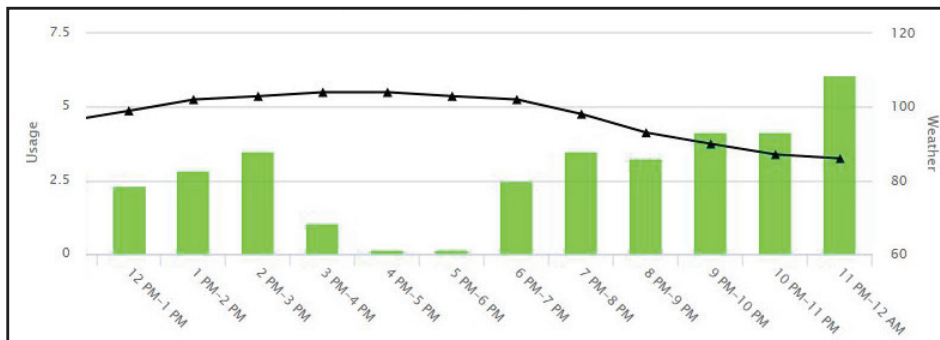
How would you like to see a credit on your October electric bill?

Every year, Flint Hills Rural Electric Cooperative asks our members to help us save energy during the summer peak load hour, which occurs one hour during the months of July or August. That one hour costs the co-op approximately \$115 per kWh — that would be approximately the equivalent of two weeks of electricity for the average home in just one hour. This is why we created the Peak Alert Savings Rebate Program.

Help us save on electricity demand, and we will pass that savings on to those who qualify. This is a voluntary program, and it will not cost you a thing to sign up. It's a win-win for everyone. Last summer, 468 members participated in this Peak Alert Savings Rebate Program, and Flint Hills returned over \$30,060 in rebates to the qualifying members' accounts.

The Peak Alert Savings Program is in effect July through August, Monday through Friday from 3-6 p.m., excluding July 4. This program is engaged on peak load days, which typically occur when the temperature is forecast to be 95 degrees or higher.

Flint Hills REC offers a free notification service to let you know what days are considered peak load days. The notification



The SmartHub graph above shows a consumer-member's hourly usage on a peak alert day, which qualified them for a \$200 credit per the Peak Alert Rebate Program.

will assist you in determining when the peak may occur. On these days, we will place a notice on our website, and send an email or text message to you. To receive these notifications, select this option through SmartHub or the SmartHub app. The credit will be based on the actual peak hour regardless of whether a notification is sent.

Once you sign up, you are eligible to receive an energy credit by making a qualifying reduction of energy usage during our summer peak load hour. These reductions could be as simple as moving everyday household chores to a different time of the day. For example, run major appliances, (e.g., dishwasher, oven, washer and dryer) in the morning or later in the evening. Try turning your thermostat up during the peak alert hours. You can do this manually or by using a programmable thermostat. The more you lower your usage during the peak load hour, the bigger the credit you could be eligible for.

To sign up for the Peak Alert Savings Program, please call our office or email us at mail@flintheillsrec.com. This program cannot be combined with any other load management offer. If you have questions about the program, you can visit our website at www.flintheillsrec.com or call our office at 620-767-5144.

Peak Alert Savings Program

Join the **Peak Savings Alert Program** to save on your bill when electricity demand is high. Receive an energy credit when you reduce electricity usage during peak load.

The sign-up deadline to save this summer is **JUNE 30, 2020**.

Smart Thermostat Options

A Comparison of the Market's Smartest and Most Popular

Heating and cooling costs account for around half of a user's energy bill according to the U.S. Department of Energy. So when it comes to reducing energy use and cutting home energy costs, the most impact can be made by programming the thermostat. The right thermostat settings could yield energy savings of 8-15%, and new technology is making it easier than ever to achieve those settings.

Smart thermostats are Wi-Fi enabled and may be controlled remotely through a tablet, smartphone or voice control. Some models use multiple sensors to monitor temperatures in various parts of the home for more balanced heating or cooling, track user temperature preferences and use the data to optimize your heating and cooling schedule, and some are designed for complex multi-stage systems that will control heating, cooling, dehumidifier and ventilation systems.

If you're interested in controlling your thermostat with your voice or an app, or in being hands-off and letting it learn your habits, you should consider a smart thermostat. To narrow your choices, factor in smart features, price and attributes that matter most to you, such as color, size or style, and make sure the chosen product supports your HVAC system.

The Nest 3rd Generation Learning Thermostat and Ecobee4 are the most popular and sophisticated devices in this category. Both devices are usually priced around \$250, but consumers can easily recoup their money in energy cost savings.

There are many similarities between the two thermostats.

Both can be adjusted via computer, tablet, smartphone, Google Assistant or Amazon Alexa device (the Ecobee4 even has a built-in Alexa-enabled speaker). And both thermostats can interact with other smart devices and utilize geofencing — using your phone's GPS to determine if you're home — to automatically adjust the temperature. Nest's geofencing works with multiple phones, while Ecobee supports just one phone. Ecobee makes up for this with its more sophisticated sensors.

The Nest and Ecobee offer remote sensors for purchase that allow the thermostat to take readings from any room throughout your home and adjust the temperature accordingly. This can be an advantage if your thermostat is located near a draft or in direct sunlight. The Ecobee's sensors go one step further with occupancy sensing, which notices if there is movement in the house, in order to override geofencing if the primary phone user leaves the house and someone is still there.

While many of the features are similar, there are a few that are notably different and can help you determine which is right for you.

Nest, powered by a rechargeable battery, is a learning thermostat and automatically learns your schedule. When you begin using Nest, it makes a few assumptions and creates a baseline for its schedule. As you adjust the temperature up or down, Nest records it, and after a week, learns your schedule and the temperature settings you prefer. From then, it continues to learn and respond to your adjustments. Nest also records 10 days of energy use data that shows you a visual of the times your system turned on and off during those 10 days. Nest also sends a monthly email report that includes a summary of your energy use compared to previous months and other Nest users.

Ecobee must be hardwire installed, utilizes a touchscreen and can analyze HVAC data for 18 months. All temperature and motion data from the thermostat and sensors is recorded, and can be accessed online by the owner to help you monitor total energy use, how the weather influences your use, and how your home efficiency compares to other users in your area.

The two thermostats also can connect with various energy devices in your home. Ecobee recognizes dehumidifiers and ventilators, and Nest recognizes heat pumps and auxiliary heat.

For those looking for a smart thermostat with fewer bells and whistles, the Honeywell Lyric T5+ is one of the market's most popular, priced around \$135. While it can't sense your presence or learn your schedule, it does have the geofencing feature and can interact with other smart home devices, such as turning on lights when you arrive or leave home.

Whichever fits your lifestyle and preferences, a smart thermostat is a good investment that can help you save energy and money in a more convenient way than ever.

Surge Protection Program



The "TESCO" surge protector is installed at the consumer-member's meter. This is a whole house surge protection system that protects all electrical items in the house from a lightning surge. This device will stop surge from lightning that has struck our poles or lines from entering your home.

Consumer-Member Benefits

This unit protects all electrical devices up to \$5,000 per item, but not to exceed \$50,000. For a claim to be made, the TESCO device must have tripped due to the surge. All claims will be submitted to TESCO before your homeowner's insurance, not after.

Cost for Protection

The unit costs \$6.95 per month with a two-year commitment.

Installation

Consumer-members do not need to be home when equipment is installed. Just contact us by phone or email to get started with your whole house lightning surge protection.