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# Bluestem NEWS

## Attaching Signs to Utility Poles is Unsafe—And It's Illegal

Although seemingly innocent enough, putting signs or other items on utility poles creates serious safety hazards.



**Staples, nails, and tacks used to hang signs pose dangers to Bluestem Electric's linemen.**

Staples, nails, and tacks used to hang signs—as well as the signs themselves—pose dangers to Bluestem Electric's linemen who must climb poles when either restoring power following storms or while performing routine maintenance to ensure system reliability.

Posters or other objects (birdhouses, balloons, flags, and even basketball goals) can create dangerous obstacles. Also, the nails and tacks left behind from signs can snag utility workers' boots or puncture their insulating rubber gloves and safety clothing making linemen vulnerable to slipping or even electrocution.

In addition to being hazardous, tampering with utility poles can be costly. Posting signs or attaching other objects to utility poles is illegal. Bluestem Electric encourages co-op consumers to contact local zoning officers to inquire about where signage can be posted legally.

## Notice to the Members: Board Meeting to Consider Changes to the Cogeneration and Small Power Production Rate Schedule

The Board of Trustees of the Bluestem Electric Cooperative, Inc., will meet on Monday, September 21, 2009, at 7:30 p.m. at the cooperative's headquarters, 614 E. U.S. Highway 24, Wamego, to discuss and vote upon a proposal to make certain changes to the current Cogeneration and Small Power Production rate schedule.

The proposal is to update the purchase rate for energy supplied to the utility by a customer's renewable generator. This purchase rate applies to residential customers having generators with a

capacity of 25 kW or less and commercial customers having generators with a capacity of 200 kW or less. As required by law, the purchase rate for these parallel connected renewable generators shall not be less than 150 percent of the utility's monthly system average cost of purchased energy.

This meeting is open to the membership. If you are unable to attend and still have questions, you may call either Bluestem Electric Cooperative office during business hours at 785-632-3111 in Clay Center or 785-456-2212 in Wamego.

## Bluestem Selects 2009 Nominating Committee

Each year the Board of Trustees of the Cooperative shall appoint a nominating committee(s) whose function is to nominate one or more candidates for Trustee positions with expiring terms.

The Bluestem Board of Trustees has appointed the following members to serve on the respective nominating committees:

### DISTRICTS 1 & 2

*(to meet in Clay Center on Oct. 6)*

#### District 1

Gene Henderson—Palmer  
Larry Scheele—Linn  
Rodney Stewart—Washington

#### District 2

Carl Fengel—Oak Hill  
Dudley Nelson—Waterville

### DISTRICTS 3 & 4

*(to meet in Wamego on Oct. 5)*

#### District 3

Dennis Braddock—Olsburg  
James Eichman—Westmoreland  
Janice Goehring—Westmoreland  
Douglas Smith—Soldier

#### District 4

Wayne Thowe—Alma  
Scott Berroth—Alma

### TRUSTEE POSITIONS

#### EXPIRING IN 2009

District 1 & 2, Position—At-Large  
Robert Ohlde—Linn  
District 3, Position—2  
Dean Blanka—Wamego  
District 3 & 4, Position—At-Large  
Delbert Eichman—St. George

## Co-op Information & Safety Tips

- ▶ **Your meter is read** on the first day of each month and your bill is mailed to you around the 10th. The bill which you receive is for the past month's usage and is due on or before the 25th of the month.
- ▶ **Rebates are available** to members for water heaters and electric heat pumps. Call your local Bluestem office for more information about these programs.
- ▶ **Need a yard light?** We sell, lease, install and repair high-pressure sodium and halogen lights for our members. Please call the office for more details.
- ▶ **Kansas Country Living** magazine is mailed to all members monthly. The center pages of the magazine are our newsletter and used to inform members of meetings, information on safety, home improvements and upcoming events at the co-op.
- ▶ **When planting trees** look-up and don't plant them near or under your electric lines. By doing this simple step, you will prevent future problems. Remember, trees in or around electric lines cause outages.
- ▶ **Call Kansas-One-Call** at (811) before you dig. This can save you time, problems and costly repair work.
- ▶ **Before you build** on your property, call the office to find out about regulations.
- ▶ **Cutting the meter seal is illegal** and dangerous. If you need to work on your electric service, call the office before cutting or removing the meter seal.
- ▶ **Feel free** to call or stop by either Bluestem office any time to discuss any concerns or for information regarding your bill or service.

## Outage Calls Could Cost You

### The Scenario

You come home from a long day at work, flip the light switch and nothing happens. You check to see if the light in the refrigerator is on when you open the door. Nothing comes on! So, you go to the phone and call Bluestem Electric to report you are out of power.

You might be asked if you have checked all your breakers, if your neighbors have electricity, if you have checked the main breaker or disconnect at the meter. You tell the cooperative how long you've been without power and give us your updated contact information.

After you report the outage, a lineman comes to investigate. Then later in the month, you receive an invoice from Bluestem Electric. You ask yourself, how could I possibly be billed for maintaining the electric line?

### Why Did You Receive a Bill?

Remember all those questions you were asked when you called to report your outage? If we haven't had other calls from your area, we are trying to determine if the problem is on "our" side of the meter or "your" side of the meter. Bluestem Electric's property stops at the meter. Anything beyond the meter is the responsibility of the property owner.

Our linemen are not always equipped to fix issues on your side of the meter. If our linemen arrive and find that the problem is on your side of the meter, you could be billed for the actual cost of labor and travel whether or not we were able to make the necessary repairs. You may still



Determining if an outage is on the member's or the cooperative's side of the meter is critical when reporting an outage.

need to contact an electrician.

You will also be charged for any repairs necessary to our property caused by a vehicle or other equipment. If someone damages cooperative property, the responsible party will be billed for the repairs.

### The Reason

Bluestem Electric is not asking our members to go without electricity when an outage occurs. We want to restore your power as soon as possible, so it is important that we determine the source of the problem before we send our crews.

We strive to provide the most reliable electric service to our members while maintaining costs. We want you to be aware of our operational policies up front.

If you have any questions, please contact our office at 785-632-3111 in Clay Center or in Wamego at 785-456-2212.

**Bluestem Electric's property stops at the meter. Anything beyond the meter is the responsibility of the property owner.**

# Do-It-Yourself Home Energy Audits

One of the first steps to making your home more efficient involves understanding how it uses energy. Just as a doctor has to do a thorough examination of a patient before writing a prescription, your home will need a good inspection before most inefficiencies can be identified and corrected.

For a complete do-it-yourself energy audit guide visit Bluestem's website and print this guide from the services page on [www.bluestemelectric.com](http://www.bluestemelectric.com).

You can easily conduct a basic home energy audit with a simple but diligent walk-through. When auditing your home, keep a checklist of areas you have inspected and problems you find. A full list can be found under Home Energy Checkup at the Alliance to Save Energy's site at [www.ase.org](http://www.ase.org). Most trouble spots can be found in a few key areas.

## Locating Air Leaks

First, make a list of obvious air leaks and drafts. The potential energy savings from reducing drafts in a home may range from five to 30 percent per year, and result in a more comfortable home. Check for indoor air leaks, such as gaps along a baseboard or edge of the flooring and at junctures of walls and ceiling.

Inspect windows and doors for air leaks. If you can rattle them, movement means possible air leaks. If you can see daylight around a door or window frame, then the door or window has a leak; you can usually seal these through caulking or weather stripping.

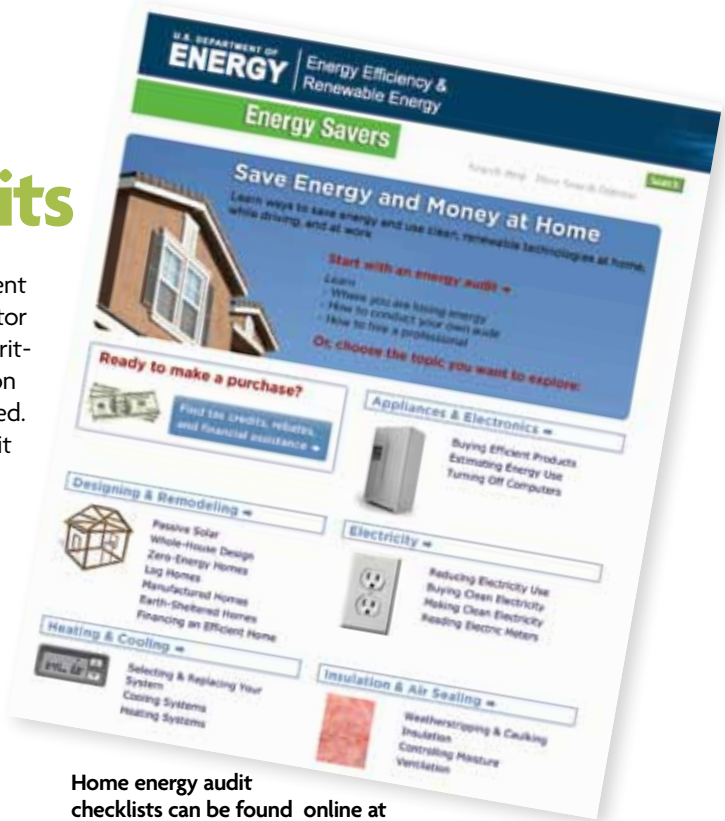
On the outside, inspect all areas where two different building materials meet, including all exterior corners, siding and chimney junctures, and areas where the foundation and the bottom of exterior brick or siding join. You should plug and caulk any holes or penetrations for faucets, pipes, electric outlets, and wiring.

Also, look for cracks and holes in the mortar, foundation, and siding, and seal them with the appropriate material. Check the exterior caulking around doors and windows, and see whether exterior storm doors and primary doors seal tightly.

When sealing any home, be aware of indoor air pollution and appliance "backdrafts." Backdrafting occurs when various appliances that burn fuels and exhaust fans in the home compete for air. An exhaust fan may pull combustion gases back into the living space. This can obviously create a very dangerous and unhealthy situation.

## Insulation

Heat loss through the ceiling and walls in your home



Home energy audit checklists can be found online at [www.energysavers.gov](http://www.energysavers.gov).

could be very large if insulation levels are less than the recommended minimum. When your house was built, the builder likely installed the amount of insulation recommended (if any) at that time.

Given today's energy prices (and future prices that will probably be higher), your insulation might be inadequate, especially if you have an older home. Online energy audits will provide more details on checking insulation levels in the attic, walls, and basement.

## Heating/Cooling Equipment

Inspect heating and cooling equipment annually, or as recommended by the manufacturer. If you have a forced-air furnace, check filters and replace them as needed.

Generally, you should change them about once every month or two, especially during periods of high use. Have a professional check and clean your equipment once a year.

## Lighting

On average, lighting accounts for about 10 percent of a home's electric bill. Examine the wattage size of the lightbulbs in your house.

You may have 100-watt (or larger) bulbs where 60 or 75 watts would do. You should also consider compact fluorescent lightbulbs for areas where lights are left on for hours at a time.

More information on both do-it-yourself and professional energy audits can be found at [www.energysavers.gov](http://www.energysavers.gov).

# Tips for Tenants and Renters

Today, whether you rent or own, almost everyone is searching for ways to reduce their energy costs. Although the landlord or management company is ultimately responsible for a building's energy efficiency and safety, there are many simple safety and energy conservation measures that anyone can take.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, more than 33 million properties are occupied by renters in the US. Bluestem Electric encourages tenants to take simple steps to make their housing both safe and efficient.

In today's world of growing technology usage, power for electronics is an increasingly larger portion of the electric bill. These include computers, audio equipment, televisions, DVD players and VCRs. Consider plugging all your entertainment equipment into a power strip which, when switched off, will eliminate any standby draw from these devices. This also has the added benefit of protecting your equipment from possible power surges.

For computers, keep them in "sleep" mode when not in use or turn off completely. Contrary to popular beliefs, turning a computer on and off is not harmful. Depending on how you use these electronics, they could add up to about 20 percent of your energy bill.

Using new lighting technologies can reduce lighting energy use in homes by 50 to 75 percent. Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are the most common energy efficient bulbs on the market. They only use about one-

## Energy Conservation Tips

- ▶ Set refrigerator temperature to 36-39°F (2-3°C).
- ▶ Set freezer to 0-5°F (-18 to -15°C).
- ▶ Turn off water while shaving and brushing teeth.
- ▶ Do not preheat your oven except for baking.
- ▶ Cover pots/pans when cooking.
- ▶ In the summer, open windows and use a fan for air circulation instead of air conditioning.
- ▶ In the winter, turn down the thermostat 10 degrees at night and keep curtains open on the sunny side of your apartment during the day.
- ▶ Maximize day lighting.

quarter of the electricity compared to standard incandescent bulbs. During daylight hours, take advantage of natural light instead of artificial light. You will feel better and you will save money too. You can also save money by installing timers to reduce the amount of time your lights are on.

Leaky or dripping hot water faucets can waste as much as 48



**There are many things that tenants and landlords can do to reduce energy costs in rental properties.**

gallons of hot water a week! Have them fixed quickly. You can also reduce hot water use by asking your landlord to install a low-flow showerhead if your current one uses more than three gallons per minute.

When living on your own, you are ultimately responsible for your own safety. It's important to know and follow electricity safety measures.

Never use extension cords as permanent wiring. They should only be used with portable appliances and plugged directly into an approved receptacle, power tap or multi-plug adapter. Remember that all extension cords need to be in good condition without splices, deterioration or damage. Use three-pronged extension cords and outlets for appliances with three-pronged plugs.

Older wiring in apartments and homes may not be able to handle the increased electrical demand of modern day appliances and electronics. If use of an appliance frequently causes power to trip off, or if its power cord or the outlet feels hot, the appliance should be disconnected immediately. Make sure that this condition is reported to your landlord as soon as possible so that it may be properly repaired.

Keep these simple safety tips in mind—they will be a benefit to you and your landlord:

- ▶ Pull electrical plugs out of the wall socket only by the plug and never by the cord.
- ▶ Make sure cords are in good condition, that they are not frayed or cracked.
- ▶ If an outlet has loose-fitting plugs, contact the landlord/superintendent to have it replaced. Outlets with bad contact can overheat leading to fires.
- ▶ Have broken wall plates replaced.
- ▶ Never cut the third prong (safety/ground connection) off of electric plugs. That third prong is to protect you if the outlets are properly grounded.
- ▶ Use light bulbs with the correct wattage for lamps. If no indication is on the product, do not use a bulb with more than 60 watts.