



NorVal News

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54091 US Hwy 2 W, Glasgow
P.O. Box 951, Glasgow, MT 59230
facebook.com/norvalelectric
406-228-9351
www.norval.coop

NorVal Electric Cooperative Directors

- District 1 **Kevin Nelson 724-3202**
District 2 **Sam Gundermann 724-3405**
District 3 **Rick Molvig Vice Pres 367-5328**
District 4 **Chris Christensen 364-2367**
District 5 **Rick Stahl 367-5232**
District 6 **Ron Reddig President 392-5257**
District 7 **Rocky Kittleson S/T 367-5366**

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Nick's Notes

By **Nick Dulaney,**
Line Superintendent

Well, the year went fast and we are kicking off our 2023 work plan. We are reviewing potential jobs for the coming year and are working to obtain all of the necessary right of ways and permits that are required for the installation of new power lines. With the supply chain issues we have been experiencing, we are still seeing long lead times on some of our material items. I would strongly recommend that you call ahead to get added to our construction schedule if you have a project in mind for 2023. Until then, our crews continue to work on tree trimming and line retirements. We will also be starting our annual line patrol to help identify issues on the lines that can cause outages so that we can fix them before any outages occur. If you happen to see things in your area that need attention, please contact our office to provide details.



New Ways to Use Electricity

If you listen carefully, you can hear a quiet transformation happening. Electric appliances and equipment are becoming more popular than ever among consumers.

Advancements in technology and battery power coupled with decreasing costs are winning over consumers looking for comparable utility and versatility. A bonus is that use of electric equipment is quieter and better for the environment.

Inside the home, consumers and homebuilders alike are turning to electric appliances to increase energy efficiency and savings. Whether a traditional electric stove or an induction stove top, both are significantly more efficient than a gas oven. That's because conventional residential cooking tops typically use gas or resistance heating elements to transfer energy with efficiencies of approximately 32% and 75% respectively (according to ENERGY STAR®). Electric induction stoves, which cook food without any flame, will reduce indoor air pollution and can bring water to a boil about twice as fast as a gas stove. Robotic vacuums are also gaining in popularity. Fortune Business Insights attributes the growth and popularity of robotic vacuums like Roomba to a larger market trend of smart home technology and automation (think Alexa directing a Roomba to vacuum).

More tools and equipment with small gas-powered motors are being replaced with electric ones that include plug-in batteries. In the past few years, technology in battery storage has advanced significantly. Hand-held tools with plug-in batteries can hold a charge longer and offer the user the same versatility and similar functionality as gas-powered tools. For DIYers and those in the building trades, national brands such as Makita, Ryobi and Milwaukee offer electric versions of their most popular products like drills, saws, sanders and other tools. In addition to standard offerings, consumers can now purchase a wider array of specialty tools that plug-in, such as power inverters, air inflators and battery chargers.

Keith Dennis, an energy industry expert and president of the Beneficial Electrification League, notes that, "A few years back, the list of new electric product categories that were making their way to the market was limited--electric scooters, lawn mowers, leaf blowers, and vehicles."

Today, the number of electric products available is exploding.

"There are electric bikes, school buses, pressure washers, utility terrain vehicles, backhoes--even airplanes and boats," says Dennis. "With the expansion of batteries and advancements in technology, we are seeing almost anything that burns gasoline or diesel as having an electric replacement available on the market." A case in point is the increased use of electric-powered tools and equipment, with more national brands offering a wider selection including lawn mowers, leaf blowers, string trimmers and snow blowers. The quality of zero- or low-emissions lawn equipment is also improving.

Electric equipment also requires less maintenance, and often the biggest task is keeping them charged. In addition, electric equipment is quieter, so if you want to listen to music or your favorite podcast while performing outdoor work, you can; something that wouldn't be possible with gas-powered equipment. On the horizon, autonomous lawn mowers (similar to robotic vacuum cleaners) will be seen dotting outdoor spaces.

Another benefit of using electric appliances or equipment is that by virtue of being plugged into the grid, the environmental performance of electric devices improves over time. In essence, electricity is becoming cleaner through increases in renewable energy generation, so equipment that uses electricity will have a diminishing environmental impact over time. Quite a hat trick--improving efficiency, quality of life and helping the environment. 

Energy savings for every season

While saving money through greater energy efficiency may be a year-round objective for many consumers, the way to achieve this goal will vary by season. There are a number of factors that impact energy efficiency, including weather, the age and condition of the home and desired comfort levels. During fall and winter months, when the outdoor temperature is chilly, consumers desire a warm home and seek to keep the cold air out. Conversely, in the spring and summer, the focus is on keeping the hot air from infiltrating cool abodes.

Fall and winter: keeping heat in

To maintain a warm indoor environment in chillier weather, there are simple steps you can take to increase energy efficiency. Fall is a great time to examine seals on doors and windows to check for air leaks. Caulk and weatherstrip as needed to seal in warm air and energy savings. Similarly, examine outlets for air leaks, and where necessary, install gaskets around the outlet to prevent drafts. During the day, open curtains or drapes on south-facing windows to enable sunlight to heat your home naturally. Close curtains or drapes at night for an added layer of window insulation.

As the temperature drops lower with the onset of winter, schedule a service appointment for your heating system to ensure it is operating at an optimal level. Low-cost or no-cost steps for energy savings include taping or affixing heavy, clear plastic to the inside of your window frames to create an additional barrier against cold air. Ensure that the plastic is tightly sealed to the frame to help reduce infiltration. Use a programmable thermostat to set the temperature as low as is comfortable when you are home (ideally around 68 degrees). When you are asleep or away, turn the temperature down 10-15 degrees for eight hours. According to the Department of Energy, this small adjustment can help you save approximately 10 percent a year on heating and cooling costs.

Spring and summer: keeping your cool

During warmer months, energy savings and efficiency will require different measures, many of which are inexpensive. If you live in a climate that is cool, open your windows in the evening and turn off your cooling system while sleeping. In the morning, shut the windows and blinds to hold in the cool air. Where practical, plant trees and shrubs that provide shade in warm months and sunlight in winter. In addition to the aesthetic value, well placed trees can take heat gain from the sun and provide needed shade by creating a canopy for the house.

In extremely hot weather, your cooling system works harder to close the gap between the high outdoor temperature and the cool indoor thermostat setting. To lessen the difference in temperature between the two, and to lower cooling costs, set the thermostat as high as you can while maintaining your comfort level. Moreover, using a ceiling fan in conjunction with your air conditioning can allow you to increase the thermostat setting to approximately four degrees with no reduction in comfort levels.

During the hottest months, it's all the more critical to replace any remaining incandescent bulbs with LEDs. The waste heat from the old bulbs impacts energy use and creates wasteful and unwanted heat. Employ a programmable thermostat to adjust the settings a few degrees higher when no one is home or your family is sleeping.

To learn more about additional energy-saving tips and programs, contact NorVal Electric at 406-228-9351 or visit our website at www.norval.coop.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Did you know insulating your electric water heater can reduce standby heat loss by 25% to 45%? This could save you 7% to 16% on annual water heating costs. Insulating your electric water heater is an easy, inexpensive project that can improve energy efficiency and save you money each month. The Dept. of Energy rates this project as medium difficulty, meaning most homeowners can tackle this project on their own. You can purchase pre-cut jackets or blankets for about \$20 at most home improvement stores. Visit energy.gov for project tips and additional considerations.

Source: energy.gov



Happy
New Year

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