

Electricity is Still a Good Value

In today's world, you won't find many items that cost less than \$5. You can purchase a gallon of milk, a gallon of gas, or a Big Mac® meal from McDonald's. But did you know that an average day's worth of electricity costs less than \$5?

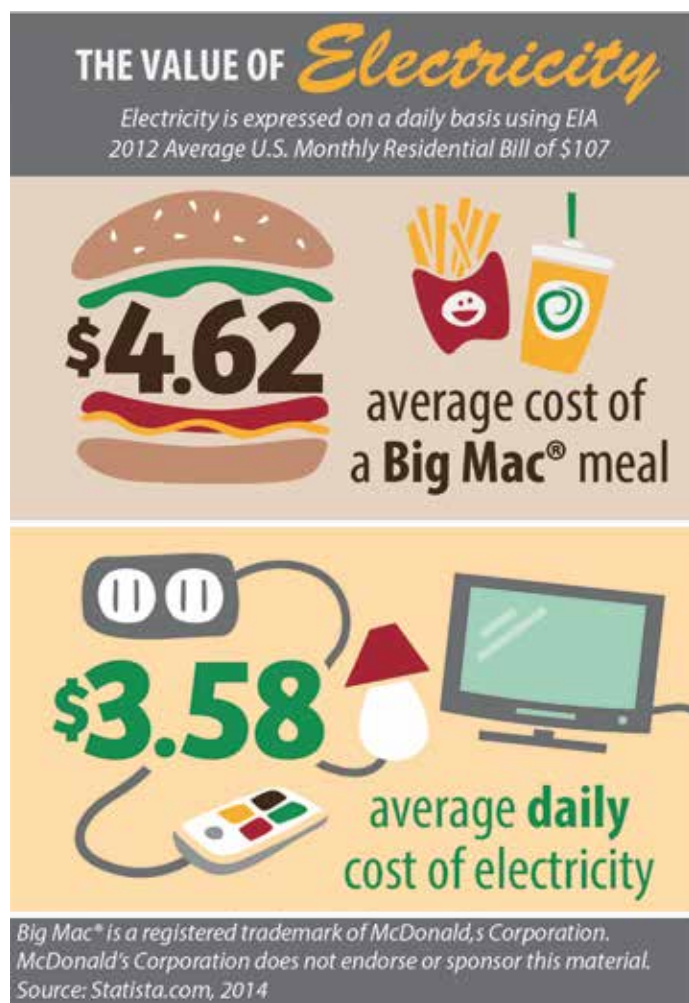
Even in the country's shifting energy climate, electricity remains a good value. In fact, electricity has the lowest cost per day of any of the items listed above. And not all of those items are necessary for daily life.

Think about your daily necessities (electricity and gasoline, to name a couple), and then think about the cost of the special treats people often allow themselves to purchase on a weekly basis (maybe even on a daily basis). The cost of a Big Mac® meal isn't often questioned even though it costs over \$1 more to buy a Big Mac®

meal than it does to purchase a day's worth of power. And yet, people become upset if their electric bills rise.

It makes sense; the world has become increasingly reliant upon electricity. Electricity has gone from a luxury commodity to a necessity and an expectation. It is expected the lights will come on when the switch is flipped, and that the power will stay on during the best

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and worst conditions. How else would food stay fresh and homes cool in the summer or warm in the winter? It is easy to cut a Big Mac® out of your spending routine here and there to save a few dollars. But electricity cannot simply be cut out of budgets if times get tough, or if someone decides to scale back on spending in order to save.

Perhaps that is why it is so upsetting when electric bills increase, even if only in small increments. It is nearly impossible to think about what lives would be like if there were no electricity. If at times it doesn't seem that electricity is affordable, remember—even as the demand for electricity grows—cost increases for electricity still remain low, especially when compared to other consumer goods such as medical care, education, gasoline, and, yes, even Big Macs®. Electricity is still a great bargain. And also remember this: Oconto Electric Cooperative is committed to making sure that you and your family always have safe, reliable, and affordable electric service in your home.

So the next time you crave a Big Mac®, remember your electric bill, and think about what a great deal you're getting for your dollar!—Meghaan Evans ■

Meghaan Evans writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

Electric Bills Increase in Cold Weather

Another colder-than-normal winter is predicted for much of the country this year. Frigid temperatures can cause heating systems to work overtime, and since heating and cooling can make up nearly half of your electric bill, you may experience sticker shock (621400) when you open that bill. Instead of waiting until after a potentially high bill is in your mailbox, be proactive. There are things you can do now to help ensure you are managing your energy use and spending less.

These simple steps can help you manage your energy use:

- Wrap exposed pipes and water heaters that are in unconditioned spaces.
- Make sure to change your air filter once a month.
- Keep drapes closed at night, and keep those that don't get direct sunlight closed during the day, too.
- Keep the fireplace damper closed when it is not in use. Keeping it open can bring cold air into the room.
- Caulk around the fireplace hearth, and caulk or weather strip around doors and windows.
- Monitor your daily consumption by creating an online account using SmartHub. To create your account, go to www.ocontoelectric.com, click on the SmartHub icon, and follow the instructions. You can view monthly, daily, and hourly usage as recent as 48 hours ago by clicking on the My Usage tab.
- Dress for the weather, even if you are inside. Wearing proper clothing like long sleeves and pants, or wrapping up in a cozy blanket will help combat the temptation of bumping up the thermostat.
- The weather makes a big impact on electric bills, accounting for nearly half of your bill.
- Even those with the most efficient HVAC systems will see more use in extreme weather. For example, even if you set your thermostat to our recommended 68 degrees in the winter, when it is 19 degrees outside, your system has to work hard to make up that 49-degree difference.
- There is less daylight so lights are on longer.
- It is more uncomfortable being outside so people are inside more watching TV, playing video games, watching movies.

Additional tips:

- Call Oconto Electric Cooperative and see what kinds of options might be right for you. The cooperative has several load management options that, when used correctly, can help you save money on your electric bill.—April Lollar ■

So, when temperatures fall this winter and you hear your weather forecaster talking about below-zero temperatures, take the steps above to help manage your use. Using these tips can certainly help you manage your energy use, but your bill may still be higher than normal in winter months. Why?

April Lollar writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service organization for the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.



Space Heater Safety



As temperatures drop this winter, many will look for supplemental heating sources for their homes. Space heaters may be a good alternative for those who want to warm one area of their home without turning up the thermostat on the central heating system. However, space heaters are also responsible for 32 percent of house fires, according to the National Fire Protection Association. If you are planning to use a space heater in your home this winter, review these tips to keep you, your family, and your property safe.

Materials – What are the components of your space heater made of? Parts like metal grating can be hot to the touch and may burn anyone who gets too close. Make sure you purchase a heater that is cool to the touch and has guards over the coils just in case little fingers get too close.

Placement – While it can be tempting to place a small heater on

a shelf so it is not in the way of pets and children, it is safest to leave the heater on a level floor on a nonflammable surface. Keeping the space heater on the floor can keep it from falling over, preventing fire hazards. Also, remember that space heaters and bathrooms are not a good combination, unless the heater is designed for bathroom use. Moisture can damage the heater.

The most important rule about space heater placement is the three-foot rule. Whether you are using the heater in the bedroom, living room, or kitchen, space heaters should always be kept three feet away from flammable materials and out of the way of children and pets.

Special Features – Does your space heater have an auto shutoff function if tipped over? Auto shutoff can be a lifesaver. If you currently own a space heater without auto shutoff, consider purchasing a heater

with this important safety feature.

Cords – You should never use an extension cord when plugging in a space heater as it can cause overheating. The space heater should be plugged directly into a wall outlet, and it should be the only thing plugged in to the wall outlet. Also make sure cords aren't in a high-traffic area so they are not a tripping hazard.

Use – Never leave a heater unattended while in use. If you are leaving your home or going to bed, make sure to unplug the heater.

Following these tips and making sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions can keep you safe this winter.—April Lollar ■

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Important Dates to Remember

January 2	Scholarship applications will be available
January 5	District 1 meeting at Beaver Town Hall
January 6	District 7 meeting at Oconto Falls Elementary School
February 28	Deadline for scholarship applications
March 16–17	Co-ops YES! Youth Leadership Conference (Information coming in February issue)
April 11	Oconto Electric Cooperative's 78th Annual Meeting

STATEMENT OF NONDISCRIMINATION

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Hidden Account Numbers

Oconto Electric Cooperative hides two account numbers in the local pages of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* each month. If you spot your account number, call our office before you receive the next issue, and OEC will give you a \$15 credit on your electric bill or a \$25 credit if you have a load management receiver. The December account numbers belonged to Karen Kubiscik, Abrams, and Donald Keyser, Pound.





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Byron C. Nolde - CEO

7479 REA Road

PO Box 168

Oconto Falls WI 54154

(800) 472-8410

(920) 846-2816

www.ocontoelectric.com