



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



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Grow Your Energy Savings This Summer



Matt Sleep
CEO

One of my favorite things about summer is the opportunity for fresh, homegrown food, whether it's shopping at the local farmers' market or sharing the abundance of garden tomatoes with a neighbor. It's amazing how just a few seeds, some fertilizer, and water can turn into a bounty.

When I think about energy efficiency, I think about that bounty of food, and how a few simple actions can result in the rewards of energy savings.

You don't need to be a farmer or botanist to know that plants need water—just like you don't have to be a lineworker or engineer to know that adjusting the thermostat or turning off lights can reduce your monthly electric bill. If you read this publication regularly and follow us on our social pages, you know there are several things you can do at home to save electricity and money.

Summer months bring some of the highest energy bills of the year. But why? Cooling your home accounts for a large portion of your monthly energy use, and the hotter it gets, the harder (and longer) your air conditioner has to work to keep you cool.

There are several ways you can manage energy use at home this summer. Here's five:

1. RAISE YOUR THERMOSTAT. Minimize the temperature difference between indoors and outdoors to maximize savings.

2. INSTALL WINDOW COVERINGS: Use blinds or curtains to block out sunlight and reduce indoor heat gain.

3. SEAL LEAKS: Caulk and weatherstripping can plug air leaks around windows and doors, enhancing efficiency.

4. UTILIZE CEILING FANS: Opt for ceiling fans for additional cooling but remember to turn

them off when leaving the room.

5. ADJUST WATER HEATER THERMOSTAT: Lower your water heater thermostat to 120 degrees Fahrenheit to reduce standby heat loss.

But I'd also like to share a few ways we're here to help you save—not only during the dog days of summer but throughout the year.

One of the great things about being part of Butte Electric is that we're locally owned by you, our members. So instead of making profits, we can focus on helping our community. That's why we've developed incentives and programs to help you keep your money in your wallet.

Save money with these easy incentives:

1. REBATES. Explore our rebate programs for incentives on efficient equipment purchases, from heat pumps to water heaters.

2. FREE ENERGY AUDITS: Our energy advisors offer complimentary energy audits to identify efficiency opportunities in your home.

3. USAGE TRACKING: Monitor your energy consumption through SmartHub and receive alerts for usage spikes, allowing you to make real-time adjustments.

4. FLEXIBLE PAYMENT OPTIONS: Discover budget billing or prepay billing options to manage seasonal fluctuations in energy costs.

Most people don't know everything about electricity, and that's why we're here to help you. There are no investors making profits here. Just knowledgeable people with local jobs, working for our neighbors to ensure there is electricity available when you need it. Contact us, and we can work with you to find more ways to save energy—and money.

COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS

BUTTE ELECTRIC

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National Electrical Safety Month

Laine Mitchell

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Every year in May, we come together to observe National Electrical Safety Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness about electrical hazards and promoting safety measures to prevent accidents. As our reliance on electricity grows, so does the importance of understanding and respecting its potential dangers. This month serves as a reminder to prioritize electrical safety in our homes, workplaces, and communities.

Electrical hazards pose significant risks, ranging from shocks and burns to fires and even fatalities. Many of these accidents are preventable with proper precautions and education. National Electrical Safety Month offers an opportunity to educate individuals of all ages about the importance of electrical safety practices.

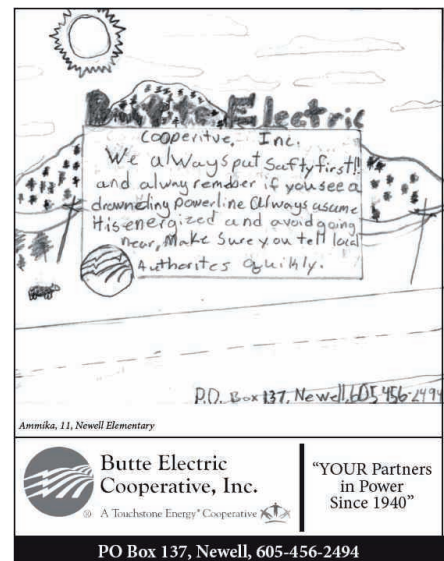
One of the primary focuses during this month is promoting safe behavior around electricity. This includes emphasizing the importance of never overloading outlets, using extension cords properly, and keeping electrical appliances away from water sources. Simple actions like unplugging appliances when not in use and using ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) in areas prone to moisture can significantly reduce the risk of electrical accidents.

For families and educators, National Electrical Safety Month provides an opportunity to teach children about electrical safety. Teaching kids to respect electricity from a young age and instilling basic safety practices, such as never sticking objects into outlets or playing near electrical equipment, can help prevent accidents and injuries.

Community engagement plays a vital role in raising awareness about electrical safety. By following us on Facebook, you

might witness our active involvement in classrooms, where we educate young minds about the inherent hazards of electricity. Over time, we've been approached by numerous adults who vividly recall these impactful safety demonstrations, including the memorable encounters with Neon Leon.

As we observe National Electrical Safety Month, let us reaffirm our commitment to prioritizing safety in all aspects of our lives. By promoting awareness, implementing preventive measures, and educating ourselves and others, we can work together to reduce the risks associated with electricity and create safer environments for everyone.



Butte Electric participated in the recent "Ads by Kids" section in the Black Hills Pioneer. Thank you to Ammika from Newell Elementary for her outstanding work!

Your Safety Matters

Prevent home electrical fires

Eight out of 10 fire-related deaths occur at home – the place that embodies comfort and security. That's why it's important to take steps to keep everyone safe.

Faulty or deteriorating electrical cords are a top cause of fires at home. Cords that become frayed or cracked can send sparks to flammable surfaces. Check your cords to ensure that they are in good shape, and replace any that are worn.

In addition, make sure you are not overloading circuits. If you've been in your home for more than 10 years, have your circuit breaker box inspected by a licensed electrician to tighten loose connections and check for overloaded circuits.



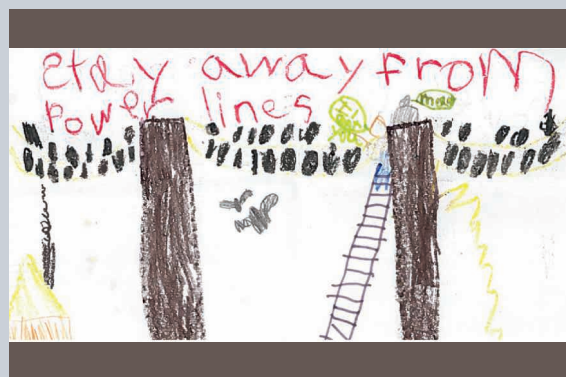
Homes with copper wiring need to be inspected every 20 years, and homes with aluminum wiring should be inspected every five years.

Check all Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlets several times each year by pushing the test/reset button to be sure they are working properly.

If breakers are continually tripping or if fuses are blowing frequently, that's a sign of potential trouble. The cause could be old wiring unable to handle the load demand of today's modern appliances. If needed, ask a licensed electrician to install additional circuits for safety.

Use surge protectors and power bars to help prevent overloading an electrical outlet, plugging no more than three cords into the strip.

May is National Electrical Safety Month. We urge you to take the time and steps needed to lower the risks of electrical fires. Keep your family safe.



Stay Away from Power Lines

Weston Koistinen, Age 6

Weston Koistinen warns readers to be safe by staying away from power lines. Weston's parents are Dion and Stephanie Koistinen, members of H-D Electric Cooperative.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

SUMMER CASSEROLES

BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

1 5 oz. package croutons,
any flavor
2 cup sharp Cheddar cheese,
shredded
1 lb. sausage, fried and
drained
9 eggs
1 can evaporated milk
1 tbsp. mustard

Method

Spray 9x13 pan with vegetable oil. Arrange croutons on bottom. Sprinkle cheese over croutons and put sausage over cheese. Combine eggs, milk and mustard. Beat to blend and pour into pan. Bake covered at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Janet Ochsner
Box Elder, S.D.

CHICKEN CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

1 package Chicken Stove Top
Stuffing mix
3 cups cooked cut up
chicken
1 can cream of mushroom
soup
2/3 cup milk
1 can cream of chicken soup
2 eggs, beaten
2 cups chicken broth

Method

Grease a 9x13 pan and put 1/2 of the stuffing mix in the pan. Cover with chicken. Combine soups and milk and spoon over chicken. Spread other 1/2 of stuffing over the top. Pour 2 cups of chicken broth over all and spread with beaten eggs. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Gail Lee
Brookings, S.D.

TACO CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

1 1/2 lbs. ground beef
1 package taco seasoning
mix
1 can (16 oz.) pinto beans,
drained and rinsed
1 can (15 oz.) tomato sauce
1 can (11 oz.) whole kernel
corn, drained
1 cup shredded Cheddar
cheese
1 cup coarsely crushed
tortilla chips

Method

Preheat oven to 400°F. Brown meat in large skillet on medium-high heat. Drain fat. Stir in seasoning mix, beans, tomato sauce and corn. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer 5 minutes. Spoon into 2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese and tortilla chips. Bake 5 to 10 minutes or until cheese is melted. Serve with assorted toppings, if desired.

McCormick

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Why Solar is Not Free



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: I often hear claims you'll never pay an electric bill again if you go solar. Is that true?

A: The ability to generate your own renewable energy at home is an amazing thing. It's pretty cool that the technology is accessible to home and property owners across the country. The concept of free energy from the sun is appealing, but solar power isn't actually free. There are costs associated with capturing that energy for use in your home.

Installing a residential solar system doesn't equate to \$0 energy bills. Prices for the solar system and installation vary, but adding solar typically comes with a five-figure price tag. Solar systems only provide power when the sun is shining. You still rely on your electric utility for power at night and when the skies are cloudy. Most electric utility rate structures include a set monthly service fee. Unless you plan to disconnect from local electric service completely, you will still have a monthly electric bill.

Solar might be a good investment for you, or it might not. Several factors impact how well the investment pencils out, including where you live, home orientation and shading, electric bill rate structure and cost, available incentives and tax credits, your budget and credit rating.

If you are considering solar on your home, I suggest taking these three steps:

First, make your home as energy efficient as possible. It wouldn't make sense to put a new motor on a boat with holes in it, so why would you put a solar system on an energy-wasting home? Invest in reducing wasted energy before investing in creating new energy. The efficiency updates I recommend before installing solar include insulating and air sealing your home and upgrading to efficient appliances – especially the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

If your HVAC system is older than 10 years or malfunctioning, make sure replacing it is in the budget. Remember, energy efficiency upgrades might have a better return on investment than installing solar.

A more efficient home means a smaller – and lower-cost – solar energy system. Solar systems are typically designed to produce the amount of energy a home uses in a year, so if you complete energy efficiency improvements before installing a solar system, make sure the solar contractor accounts for those energy savings.

Second, check with your electric utility about the requirements to install solar and how it will impact your bill. If you decide to install solar panels, working with your utility will be essential, as you will need to take important steps, such as signing an interconnection agreement to ensure the system is properly connected to the electric grid.

Third, get at least three quotes to compare each contractor's recommended system design, equipment and cost. It's a significant investment, so you want to know your options.

There are several ways to pay for a solar system and installation. It can be bought outright with cash or financed by a loan. This allows you to own the system immediately or at the end of the loan term. State and federal tax incentives can help offset the costs.

There is also the option to install a solar system through a lease or power purchase agreement. In this structure, a third party – usually the solar installer – owns the system. They install the system on your property and then sell you the energy produced at a predetermined rate. They are responsible for maintaining the system and own it at the end of the agreement term.

Loans, leases and power purchase agreements can impact the sale of a home. Although a solar system may increase the value of your home, some buyers – or their lenders – are not interested in taking on leases or power purchase agreements.

Investing in solar is one way to support the transition to renewable energy. Before you make the leap, improve your home's energy efficiency and empower yourself by thoroughly weighing the costs and benefits.

Wish Upon a Crawdad

Curtis Condon's children's literature illuminates electric cooperative history

Frank Turner

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What happens when you blend the rich history of electric cooperatives with the picturesque landscapes of rural America and the magic of fiction storytelling? Curtis W. Condon, a former writer and editor for electric cooperative magazines, finds the answer in his vibrant children's novel, "Wish Upon a Crawdad." This coming-of-age story combines these unlikely elements through the eyes of the main character, 12-year-old Ruby Mae Ryan, during the late Great Depression years in rural Oregon.

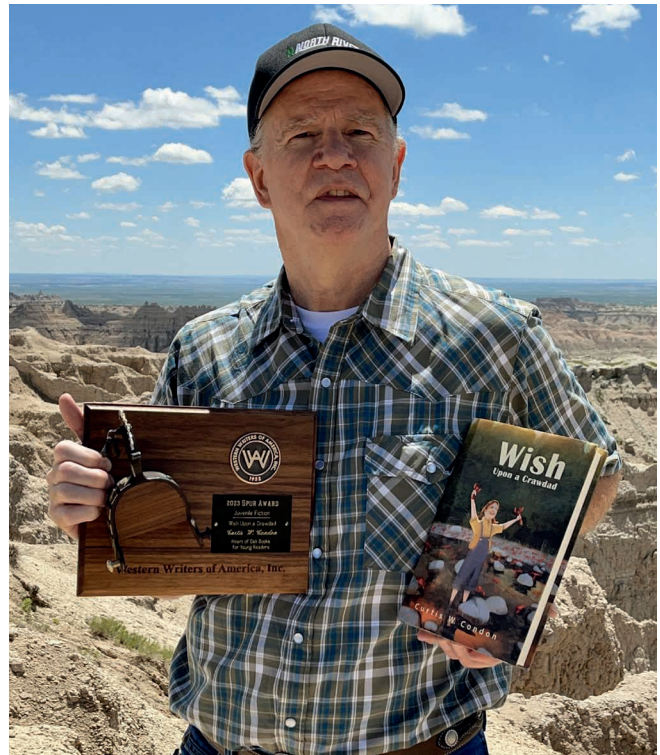
The book, highlighting Ruby's outdoor adventures, explores personal growth while giving testimony to rural electrification in American history. Before writing children's literature, Condon spent more than 27 years in the electric co-op industry as an editor and writer for Ruralite, a magazine for electric cooperatives and their members in the Northwest. His time there, conducting interviews and writing, familiarized Condon with the history of rural electrification in the U.S.

"I fell in love with the concept of the electric co-op. Electric co-ops have such a fantastic history and a wonderful story to tell, and I wanted to tell that in this book," said Condon.

This history began with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's determination to lead America out of the Great Depression. Deciding that electrification would play a central role in the process, the president established the Rural Electrification Administration through an executive order in the face of strong dismay from private utility companies. The president's order set the stage for the current network of member-owned electric cooperatives we recognize today, which bring electricity to rural homes that would otherwise be powerless.

However, "Wish Upon a Crawdad" doesn't tell the story of presidents and executive orders. Instead, the book focuses on the very real impact rural electrification had on Ruby, her family, and her community.

"It's about a girl who grows up without electricity until she is 12 years old, and she likes to wish upon crawdads the way that people wish upon stars," Condon explained. "One of the wishes is to get electricity, and that dream comes true because her mom



Curtis W. Condon, author of "Wish Upon a Crawdad," accepts the 2023 Western Writers of America Spur Award, an award presented to Condon in Rapid City, S.D.

and dad get together with their neighbors and create an electric co-op."

Condon's own upbringing in Oregon inspires the book's setting, filled with his memories of crawdad-filled pools, temperate forests and rural dirt roads. While set in the 1940s, many of Ruby's experiences reflect those of Condon's own family.

"My grandmother remembered when electricity was first introduced to her community. She considered electricity to be one of the greatest wonders of the world," said Condon.

Together, Condon's childhood and passion for electric cooperative history set the stage for "Wish Upon a Crawdad," his first children's book, fulfilling a dream he had held onto for years.

"Since I was twelve years old, I knew I wanted to be a children's book writer. It took me 30 years of doing a different kind of writing, but I finally got there," said Condon.

Fulfilling a childhood dream, Condon's book was published in 2022, and his passions and life history began connecting with readers. Although the target audience of the book is children ages 9 to 12, Condon said readers of all ages are enjoying Ruby's story.

Since publication, "Wish Upon a Crawdad" has won the 2023 Western Writers of America Spur Award, an award presented to Condon in Rapid City, S.D. Other awards include the 2023 Will Rogers Medallion Award, the 2023 First Horizon Award, and the 2023 Eric Hoffer Book Award. The book has a presence in libraries across 37 states, including South Dakota.



Patsy Besson helps package fresh cuts of meat at the Wall Meat Processing plant.
Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

Wall Meats Revives Local Meatcutting in South Dakota Through New Underwood Expansion

Shannon Marvel

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A local meat processing plant is expanding its footprint in Pennington County in a way that will put more locally produced protein on dinner tables and bolster the local meat processing workforce throughout South Dakota.

The man behind this plan is local business owner Ken Charfauros, who owns Wall Meat Processing, which has locations in Wall and Rapid City.

Charfauros is currently raising funds through a capital drive campaign to finance the construction of a 30,000 square foot meat processing facility in New Underwood. The new facility will help train the next generation of meat processors through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech in Rapid City.

"We are at \$2.8 million in our drive. We also have the \$3.3 million USDA Rural Development grant, which is a meat and poultry expansion plan grant. We are about \$200,000 short of our goal," Charfauros said.

He added that the New Underwood processing plant will also use funding from the Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program (MPILP), which according to the USDA's website "provides grant funding to intermediary lenders who finance – or plan to finance – the start-up, expansion, or operation of slaughter, or other processing of meat and poultry. The objective of the MPILP is to strengthen the financing capacity for independent meat processors, and to create a more resilient, diverse, and secure U.S. food supply chain."

Charfauros said he's still meeting with potential investors and has a financial team focused on creating relationships with local ag producers.

"After we get our capital drive, the plan itself will be about \$21 million," he added. "And then we start the project. The groundbreaking is going to happen in about a year and the facility will begin operations six months after that."

Charfauros said he expects to purchase the property to site the new plant this spring.

Returning to a Passion

Wall Meats Processing opened for business 57 years ago, but

Charfauros took ownership over the facility in 2017. His passion for meat cutting began when he was a teenager while working for a local meat plant in Delaware.

“It was my high school job and I loved it. After I graduated high school, I felt that my country needed me, so I joined the Air Force and did 30 years. But I always missed that part of my life,” Charfauros recalled.

“A guy that taught me how to cut was like my second dad, and I always wanted to come back to it. My son had just graduated from South Dakota State University, and I had retired from the Air Force. That’s when we decided to buy a plant.”

His son manages the store in Rapid City while Ken’s three nephews help run the family’s businesses in Wall, which include Wall Meats and the Red Rock restaurant.

Supporting Local Producers

Building the new facility has been a challenging venture that’s been years in the making.

“We started building this plan about four years ago, then COVID hit and got in our way. Then, we were lucky enough to get those grant awards last year, and ever since we have been working diligently to get the format right,” Charfauros said.

“I have drawings. I have an equipment list all put together — everything is ready to go except for this capital drive that we are undergoing.”

Charfauros said he has been meeting with both potential and locked-in investors daily over the last year to produce the required financing.

“We have met with over 600 people with 99 percent of those people being producers, because this is all for them. This plant offers them premium pricing above the market rates,” Charfauros said.

While the cattle market is high now, Charfauros remains realistic that the market can change for the worse.

While he hopes the market remains high enough for producers to survive, his partnership with producers will serve as

added security. That means the partnership must be tightknit.

He knows he cannot do it alone.

Reviving a Dying Art

“Meat cutting is a dying art, and we teach meat processing at our store in Rapid City to bring that art back. We’re trying to fight for that industry as it is,” he said.

Three meat processing students are currently being taught at the Rapid City facility through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech, which recently began offering the two-year program.

Pam Stillman-Rokusek, director of communications and marketing at Western Dakota Tech, said three students are currently enrolled in the Meat Processing program. Of those three, two will graduate in May.

But the college is still working on more outreach.

“Enrollment has been a bit low in the program, so the plan is for a hiatus this fall. They’ll revamp the curriculum. Then, we will certainly do additional outreach. We have done advertising, gone to the schools. We have reached out to 4-H

groups and done some traveling, but we need to turn it up a notch to produce more students in the program. That is our goal,” Stillman-Rokusek said.

Despite the Meat Processing program being put on hiatus, the school will still ensure that the remaining student completes the program while actively working on developing the program and outreach methods.

“There’s such a high need for meat processors and we’re looking at different ways to fill that gap. It’s something we’re committed to doing,” she added.

The goal is to enroll at least five students in the following school years when the program restarts.

The learning center that will be built within the New Underwood facility will also teach producers, in addition to students, the art of meat cutting.

“We are trying to bring that industry back to what it should be—regionally processed protein,” Charfauros said.

“That means we must build the environment to spark that passion. In anything you do, you need to learn how to do it the right way.”



Wall Meat Processing plant, established in 1957. Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel



Power Up Your Lawn Care with Electric Equipment

Laine Mitchell

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The landscape of lawn and garden care is evolving, and electric equipment is at the forefront of this change. While electric lawn tools aren't new, advancements in technology and more options mean prices have become more competitive, making electric

equipment an accessible option for many consumers.

Benefits of Electric Equipment

Electric lawnmowers have come a long way since the days of extension cords tethering you to an outlet. Battery-powered mowers offer the same freedom of movement as gas-powered models but with reduced noise and maintenance.

Battery life was once a major drawback to making the switch

to electric lawn tools. But today's growing demand for electric equipment has resulted in major advancements for lithium-ion batteries, making them more reliable, cost-effective, and efficient. For most consumers, electric lawn tools can get the job done just as well as gas-powered models.

Many electric mowers offer push-button starts, and because they are lighter, they are easier to maneuver around tight turns. Improved batteries provide longer run times to tackle larger spaces. Like

their gas-powered counterparts, electric mowers are available in push, self-propelled/walk-behind, and riding models. And there's no need to refill gas cans or change oil and air filters, resulting in less hassle and maintenance.

Like mowers, electric blowers, string trimmers, and chainsaws have fewer moving parts, require minimal maintenance, and are quieter. Because electric tools are generally lighter in weight, they're also more ergonomic and easier to maneuver. This feature is especially handy for projects that require tools like chainsaws for precise work.

Choose Electric Equipment to Meet Your Needs

Electric lawn tools have some limitations, so the size and terrain of your outdoor space are important considerations when purchasing new equipment. When comparing gas-powered and electric mowers, consider the torque rating—this is the driving force behind a blade's rotation. On average, electric lawnmowers generate less torque than gas mowers. If you have a challenging outdoor space that includes overgrown brush, tall grass, or hills and dips, torque is a key factor when considering new lawn tools.

Choosing the right type and size mower is particularly important for spaces larger than half an acre. If you have a large property, consider purchasing an extra battery to

Over
50%
reduction in
maintenance costs
when compared to
gas-powered
tools.

1 hour
of leaf blower use =
pollutants of driving
1,100
miles in a car.

ensure uninterrupted workflow.

Many manufacturers offer interchangeable batteries and chargers, providing flexibility and convenience. Choosing a single brand can ensure charging compatibility across your lawn tools and streamline charging.

While both gas and electric lawn tools can get the job done, electric equipment generally requires less maintenance, is less expensive to operate, and is kinder to the environment.

As the lawn and garden care industry continues to evolve, electric equipment emerges as a leading force driving this transformation. Due to technological advancements and competitive pricing, electric lawn tools are gaining traction in the market, with both established and new brands offering a variety of options for consumers.

Whether you prioritize maneuverability, noise reduction, or environmental consciousness, electric tools offer a compelling alternative to traditional gas-powered models. Whether tackling small yards or expansive properties, choosing electric equipment aligns with both practicality and sustainability, promising a greener future for lawn care enthusiasts everywhere.

Energy Efficiency

TIP OF THE MONTH

Looking for an easy way to manage home energy use? Smart plugs are inexpensive and offer convenient solutions for scheduling and controlling your favorite electronic devices.

With smart plugs, you can easily manage your coffee maker, lighting, home office equipment, video game consoles and more. Smart plugs can help you manage devices through a smart phone app, your home assistant or voice control. By conveniently powering off or scheduling devices, you can save energy (and money!).

Source: energystar.gov





CYBERSECURITY ON THE GRID

Frank Turner

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Imagine sitting at your desk on a typical Monday morning. You have logged into your computer with coffee in hand, ready to tackle the day. But as you begin, your computer displays an ominous message: “Your files have been encrypted. Pay a ransom to regain access.” It’s not just your computer; your co-workers have received the same message. Overnight, the entire office has fallen victim

to a ransomware attack that has locked away critical data. Your office computers will remain unusable until a payment is made.

This scenario, among others, has become a primary concern for workplaces everywhere, including electric cooperatives. As a result, local co-ops are taking action in the cybersecurity space to prevent bad actors from disrupting the critical goal of delivering power that is safe, affordable and reliable to their members. Electric co-ops are focused

on enhancing cybersecurity resilience and readiness to defend against potential cyber threats.

Co-ops are routinely monitoring and managing cyber risks, working with federal and local law enforcement agencies and the North American Electric Reliability Corp. to protect critical infrastructure. By working as a network, co-ops are enhancing grid resilience, ensuring reliable electricity for their members.

According to an FBI Internet Crime Report, the U.S. reported more than \$12.5 billion in annual losses in 2023 due to cyberattacks like the one described. A significant number of these attacks target the elderly and vulnerable. When breaking down the losses by age group, individuals aged

20 to 29 accounted for \$360.7 million of the total losses, while those 60 and older incurred losses of \$3.4 billion in 2023 alone.

And it's not just about the money. These attacks also have the potential to undermine the stability of entire systems, including the electrical grid. This year, directors of the FBI, NSA, and CISA testified before Congress about Chinese Communist Party hacking groups that had gained access to the electric grid and other critical infrastructure to "wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to American citizens and communities."

"Many cyberattacks are conducted by criminals trying to steal money or collect a ransom," explains Chief Security and Compliance Officer Daniel Graham of Basin Electric Power Cooperative. "Nation-states

target electric utilities for different reasons. Some nation-states want to steal intellectual property. Others want to be able to disrupt our electric grid."

So how is it done? To execute their schemes, bad actors employ a long list of complex strategies and techniques, such as phishing, data breaches and malware to adversely impact their targets. Business email compromise, one of the most common techniques, occurs when an impostor poses as a legitimate business contact, seeking to steal sensitive information such as credit card numbers, bank account information or login credentials.

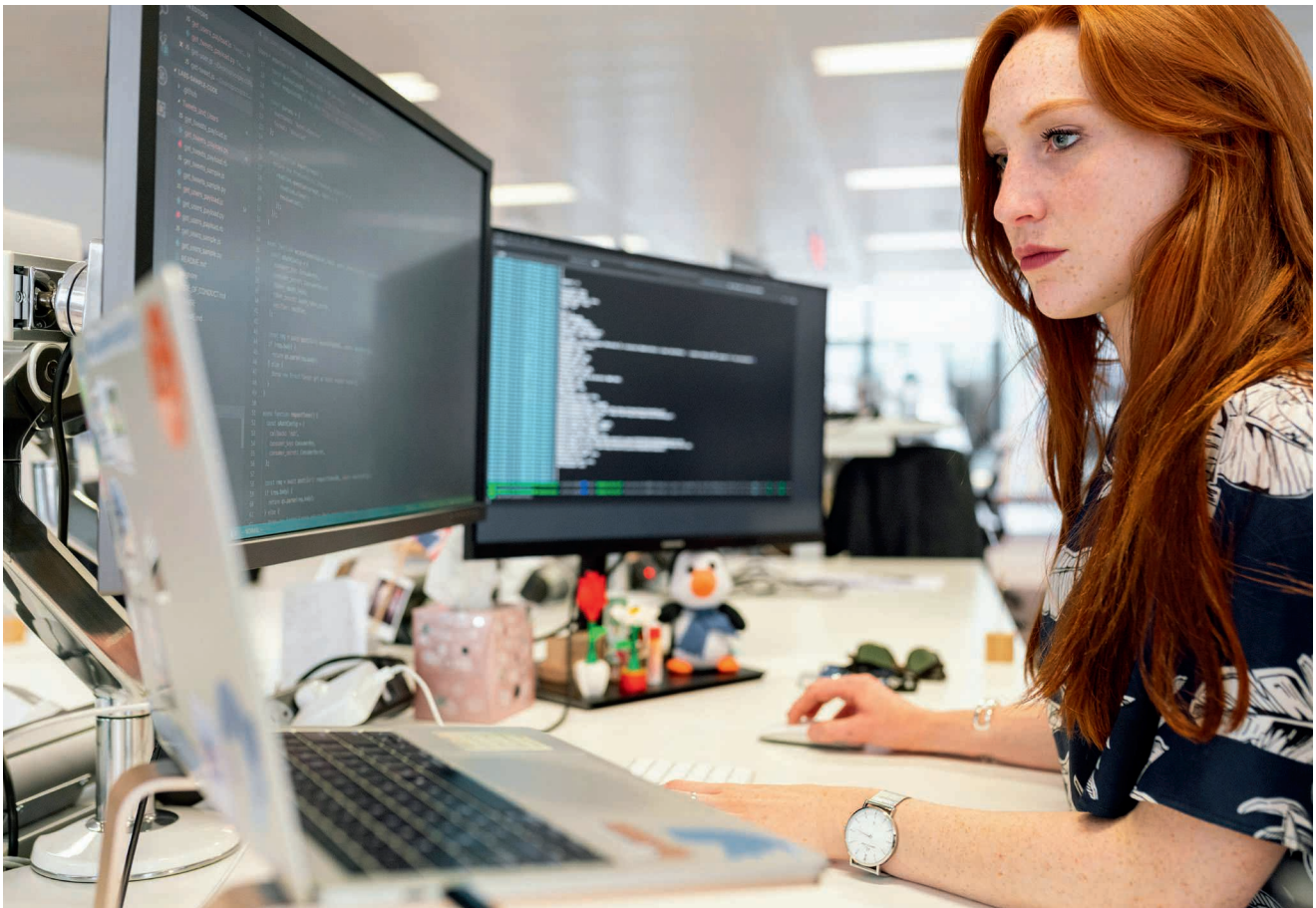
Luckily, co-ops are implementing a variety of tools, policies and training to help mitigate attacks and secure the grid. Programs like NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals Program help co-ops build fundamental cybersecurity

measures, such as employee training, developing cyber incident response plans, and regular self-assessment. These strategies help co-ops reduce the risk of a successful cyberattack in the ongoing battle against cybercrime.

"Additionally, co-ops can conduct cybersecurity exercises to determine the effectiveness of current defenses and practice responses," Graham says.

Despite these efforts, the threat of a successful cyberattack persists, making vigilance an essential component of effective cybersecurity.

"If you see something suspicious, report it to your cooperative," explains Graham. "Electric co-ops are an essential part of our country's critical infrastructure. We can best protect our electric grid by working with each other."



Living Prepared

South Dakota's survivalist community live in bunkers

Jocelyn Johnson

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It's a semi-underground community of survivalists acting as humanity's last chance.

These survivalists, otherwise known as preppers, have prepared for security and safety within what's touted as the world's largest survival community – in southwest South Dakota.

Vivos xPoint, owned by real-estate mogul Robert Vicino, is located south of the Black Hills, near Edgemont, S.D. It was formally established as the U.S. Army's Black Hills Ordnance Depot – a military base created to store

ammunition and bombs. The base's history began in 1942, just after the United States entered World War II.

Once humming with approximately 6,000 workers and their families, the military base was eventually retired in 1967, leading to its eventual abandonment. The army sold the property to the town of Edgemont, S.D., which in turn, sold it to local cattle ranchers.

"This land was used by landowners to graze cattle, until one of these ranchers sent me an email asking if I would be interested in the bunkers," Vicino said. "It took me about a minute, and I said yes. So, in 2016, I acquired the southern

Vivos xPoint owns 575 bunkers. Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint

portion of the base. That portion is about three-fourths the size of Manhattan.

We take people up on a local hill that's about 300-400 feet higher than the rest of the site. From there, you can almost see all the quarters of the property. At a distance, the bunkers are like specs...you can't really tell what you're looking at. That's how big this thing is."

Vicino owns just under 6,000 acres of land where these bunkers sit. Originally, the army built 800 bunkers, but Vivos xPoint owns 575. Today, approximately 200 of these bunkers are being leased for 99 years with an up-front payment of \$55,000. Additionally, the ground lease is \$1,200 per year and utility payments are \$108 per month.

Mark Bowman, a retired tenant at Vivos xPoint, moved from Chicago with his wife to live in one of the bunkers



Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson



Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint

seven years ago. Keeping busy by doing odd jobs and helping others get settled, Bowman commented that people from various backgrounds lease these bunkers. Some visit on occasion and some live in them full time.

“Eventually, we plan to have a health club, meeting hall and store out here too,” Bowman said. “It’s a work in progress.”

Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. It’s relatable to a narrow Quonset fixed underground, measuring 80 feet long and 26 feet wide with 12-foot ceilings. Vivos xPoint boasts 575 bunkers in total. Tenants can access floor plans and choose to have a Vivos xPoint contractor customize their bunker. Currently, there is a one-year backlog for customization services provided by a company contractor.

“It’s cavernous on the inside,” Vicino said. “We can build out a five-bedroom interior with a living room, two bathrooms, laundry room...everything you will need. When we build it, it’s effectively a submarine. The power we get from the local electric cooperative is to run our well pump that pumps water 4,300 feet underground up to a cistern on a hill. From there, it’s distributed to

the bunkers via gravity.”

Vicino noted that one of the most important features to these bunkers is the location. It’s centrally located within the United States and remote – making it an unlikely target in war. The off-grid area is also located at high altitude in a non-seismic area, relatively safe from natural disasters.

“Sometimes, I get asked why would anyone want one of these,” Vicino

commented. “And I say, ‘well, have you ever watched the news?’ Look what’s going on in this country.”

“All of the bunkers have NBC filtration, which is nuclear, biological and chemical filtration,” Vicino explained. “The air that comes in is scrubbed, so it’s breathable on the inside. We’re even adding CO2 scrubbers, which scrub the air you breath out if you had to shut off the air to the outside. You can do that for a week maybe.”

This isn’t a project that Vicino took lightly or stumbled upon in his business ventures. He emphasized it was years in the making.

“When I was 27 years old, I had a vision or an inspiration in my head. I could hear the words of a woman talking to me in total silence. The only thing I could attribute it to was the Holy Spirit. What she said to me was, ‘Robert, you need to build bunkers deep underground to help thousands of people survive what’s coming our way.’ The message was very loud and quick, and so I tucked it away for 30 years, thinking about it occasionally....Then, I got the feeling I didn’t have any more time. It’s either now or never.”



Mark Bowman, right, shows an empty bunker to Calvin Romey, left. Bowman has been a tenant in a neighboring bunker for seven years with his wife. Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson



MAY 11, 2024
Cinco de Mayo Fiesta
 Falls Park
 Sioux Falls, SD

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

MAY 10
Mother's Day Tea
 1 p.m.
 Spearfish Senior Center
 Spearfish, SD

MAY 11
Opening Day
 1880 Train
 Hill City, SD

MAY 11-12
Best of Hill City
 Main Street
 Hill City, SD

MAY 12
Hill City Senior Sunday Breakfast
 8 a.m.
 Hill City Center
 Hill City, SD

MAY 12
Mother's Day Special
 1880 Train
 Hill City, SD

MAY 17
"Heart of the Hills" musical
 2 p.m.
 Spearfish Senior Center
 Spearfish, SD

MAY 18
Booth Day
 10 a.m.
 D.C. Booth Fish Hatchery
 Spearfish, SD

MAY 18
Fundrasing Breakfast
 7:30 a.m.
 Spearfish Senior Center
 Hill City, SD

MAY 18
Grand Re-Opening & New Artist Reception
 3 p.m.
 ArtForms Gallery
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 1
Spring Volksmarch
 Crazy Horse Memorial

JUNE 7-9
Gumbo Ridge Wagon Trail Ride
 Murdo, SD

JUNE 8
Mt. Rushmore Rodeo
 Palmer Gulch Resort
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 8
Sportsman's Bash
 2 p.m.
 Weston County Senior Center
 Newcastle, WY
 605-440-1842

JUNE 13
1880 Train Old West Shootout
 5 p.m.
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 14-15
Fine Arts In the Hills Show & Sale
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 15
The Big Mick
 The Mickelson Trail
 605-673-5154

JUNE 15-16
Friends of the Library Book Sale
 Hill City Public Library
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 21-22
Scavenger's Journey
 Yard sales, farmer's markets & specialty shops
 Wall, SD to Wagner, SD
www.scavengersjourney.com

JULY 13
Spearfish Canyon Half Marathon & 5k Walk/Run
 Spearfish, SD

AUG. 17
Black Hills Super 6 Mountain Bike Race; Big Hill Trails
 Spearfish, SD

AUG. 17
Hot Rods for the Hatchery Car Show on D.C.Booth Fish Hatchery grounds
 9 a.m.- 12 p.m.
 D.C. Booth Fish Hatchery
 Spearfish, SD

Note: Please make sure to call ahead to verify the event is still being held.