

NEBRASKA

Magazine

NREA.org

December 2022



HOLIDAY EFFICIENCY SAVINGS

Inside:

• **Improve Home Safety • Appliances That Use the Most Energy • Decorate Safely For the Holidays • Winterization Tips**

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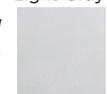
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*Telling the story of
Rural Nebraska*

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A Great Blue Heron at Schramm SRA. Cover photograph by Michael Bazant



Wayne Price

Local People Working for Local Good

When it comes to Nebraska's rural electric utilities, the community comes first. That's just the way we operate.

Public power strengthens our communities by doing what we do best: providing a safe and reliable supply of electricity at an affordable cost. The board of directors and staff at your local public power district or electric cooperative supports policies and projects that are good for the communities they serve because what's good for the community is good for the rural electric utility.

We have strong community roots. Public power in Nebraska has been in business for 80 years—we're not going anywhere. Our business was founded here by members just like you, and we are not going to pull up stakes to pursue greener pastures elsewhere.

We pay our employees fair wages because that in turn helps strengthen the economy when they spend that money here. And by providing good-paying jobs, we keep our towns healthy because employees and their families don't have to move away to make a decent living. The more people we retain here paying taxes and contributing to their communities, the more vibrant they will be.

The benefits our communities reap from Nebraska's public power presence aren't only financial. We open doors for our young people with scholarship programs, NREA Youth Energy Leadership Camp, and the annual Rural Electric Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C. We teach children safety through programs in schools and online. We help members identify ways to save money by performing home and business energy audits.

We also strengthen Nebraska communities by supporting local charities. We help members and neighbors in need by sponsoring such things as blood and food drives and the Operation Round Up program.

Your PPD or electric co-op was formed locally, and it's still managed by your friends and neighbors. The employees go out of their way to serve by coaching youth sports teams, volunteering on school committees, participating in church activities, and even serving in various elected offices. Many are rural electric utility members like you, and like you, they want to make their communities stronger.

Take a minute to call your local electric utility and tell them "thank you" for working to keep Nebraska's electric rates affordable and the power on.

Beneficial Electrification and Doing Your Part

As you peruse through your daily reading, specifically reading that concerns the use of electricity in our society, you will see more and more mentioned about beneficial electrification (BE). Well, that sounds like a benign term that may even be “beneficial.” Beneficial electrification as defined by the organization called the Beneficial Electrification League (BEL), is as follows:

“Beneficial Electrification includes the application of electricity to end-users where doing so satisfies at least one of the following conditions, without adversely affecting the others:

- Saves consumers money over time;
- Benefits the environment and reduces greenhouse gas emissions;
- Improves product quality or consumer quality of life;
- Fosters a more robust and resilient grid” (1)



Doyle Hazen

All of the points of this definition, at face value, seems very straight forward. If these are followed, I am in agreement with making changes to the way we conduct business and in our personal lives to accommodate switching from a carbon based to an electrified way of doing any given task. I think that the BEL is honestly trying to promote the electrification of many tasks and processes in our daily lives. However, as with any good thing, we must be vigilant that all points are followed and are not ignored.

As a consumer, it is your responsibility to advocate for what is good for you and your family. This good intention, that beneficial electrification brings, can be manipulated and used as cover for the promotion of seemingly “beneficial” projects. Some projects may not tick all of the boxes that are required for any given project to be considered beneficial electrification. It is not to say all of the conditions have to be met for all projects, it says at least one condition should be met while not conflicting with the other conditions.

The heavy subsidization and legislative policies that accelerate the implementation of electric vehicles (EV) is an example of an electrification of transportation. I do not think EVs are bad, but perhaps it is not for all people in all places. Remember all of the criteria that beneficial electrification must meet:

- Save consumers money over time. Nope, not currently or in the life of any of the vehicles on the road today at least not on a per mile basis. Although many studies show a savings, I have not seen numbers that include the replacement of the battery in the life of the vehicle. They will often bring up the replacement, but not put it in their calculations. I have not seen examples with an overall per mile cost.
- Benefits the environment and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Maybe, over the life of the vehicle. Quick fact: The manufacture of one EV battery requires the removal of 500,000 pounds of earth to produce the needed rare earth minerals to produce ONE battery.
- Improves product quality or consumer quality of life. Yes, reduces overall maintenance costs, but currently service for these types of vehicles is limited.
- Fosters a more robust and resilient grid. It could, if the storage capacity is used in outages or in times of short supply. On the other hand, the increased need for electricity to charge EVs is adding to demand on an already taxed electrical system.

You see I am not trying to cause friction to the momentum of the betterment of the planet. By using our resources wisely and taking advantage of technology, we can improve our position in climate change. However, we must temper our decisions so that we meet criteria that will truly be beneficial.

Doyle Hazen is the General Manager of North Central Public Power District, headquartered in Creighton, Neb. The views in this editorial are not necessarily the views of North Central PPD or the Nebraska Rural Electric Association.

(1) Beneficial Electrification League. (n.d.) Home Page. Beneficial Electrification League. Retrieved October 19, 2022, from Promoting Beneficial Electrification - Beneficial Electrification League (be-league.org)

Holiday Efficiency Savings

by Cory Fuehrer, NPPD Energy Efficiency Program Manager

The cost of decking the halls, devouring delectable holiday treats, imbibing fine spirits and celebrating with family and friends over the holidays can really add up. Here are a few efficiency ideas to lighten their impact on your finances, schedules and the environment.

Decorating

If you haven't already, switch to LED Christmas lights. LED Christmas lights last longer and only use about 10% of the electricity when compared to traditional, incandescent bulbs that produce the same amount of light. Pre-lit, fiber optic trees and decorations also use LEDs with the added benefit of being shatterproof, shock-resistant, and cool to the touch.

Use a timer for all holiday lights. Set it to automatically turn your holiday lights on and off at the appropriate times – typically on at dusk and off at bedtime. To safely control exterior lights around your home, use a weatherproof outdoor timer.

Consider decorations with few or no lights. Reflective ornaments, candles, ribbons and garland make the most of low-lighting conditions. They can be used throughout the house to decorate staircases, entryways, mantels or wherever else you want to add some holiday cheer.

When operating holiday lights, turn off room lights. This enhances the holiday mood while providing sufficient lighting for most activities. Note that fireplaces also provide warm, ambient light. Just remember to close the flue when the fireplace is cold and not in use to ensure heat isn't escaping up the chimney.

Heating

When you have guests, turn down the thermostat and take advantage of the body heat they generate. Waiting

until guests are too warm and then opening a window to cool down is very inefficient, especially if you forget to close the window afterward. If you are baking, turn the oven off when finished and leave the door open to circulate extra heat into the room.

For those who may feel a little chilled, add another layer of clothing or grab a blanket rather than turning the thermostat up. Considering this is the only time of the year you can get away with wearing your favorite ugly Christmas sweater or Santa hat, why not take advantage of the opportunity?

Cooking

While creating your culinary delights, keep the lid on pots and pans and the oven door closed. Food will cook faster and require less energy while cooking. Use a timer to prevent overcooking and the oven light to check on your food's progress. Remember, it takes about the same amount of energy to heat an oven full of food as it does a nearly empty one. When possible, bake several dishes at the same time.

For smaller cooking tasks, use kitchen appliances like the microwave or toaster oven. Save the oven for larger and longer cooking projects like roasting a turkey or ham. Rather than grabbing a pot for tasks like melting chocolate, making cocoa or warming up leftovers, use the microwave to reduce energy usage by 50% or more.

Shopping

Give the gift of energy efficiency. When considering household appliances and electronics, look for the EnergyStar label. EnergyStar-certified products use up to 60% less electricity than non-certified products. Visit www.energystar.gov for a list of qualified ideas to ensure your gift will save energy for years to come.

Shop locally. Not only will it save time and energy by not making an extended shopping trip, but it also helps support small businesses in your area. Are you more of an online shopper? Check out <https://buynebraska.com>, <https://grownebraska.org> and <https://fromne.com> for a huge selection of great gifts from retailers right here in Nebraska.



*Replacing an old refrigerator with a newer model is likely your best option for energy savings.
Photograph by General Electric Appliances*

Keep Your Holidays

MERRY & BRIGHT



Don't add stress to your holiday season. Knowing how to properly use and hang lights could prevent injury or fire.



Make sure your home's electrical system can handle the load.



Unplug lights or decorations before changing a bulb or other parts.



Do not use cords or plugs that are damaged, frayed or cracked.



Only use lights certified by a reputable testing lab.



In addition, consider LED lights when replacing old light strands. LEDs use 80 to 90% less energy than incandescent bulbs.

Look For Threats Posed By Holiday Lighting

The days are counting down until family and friends arrive for holiday celebrations. You may have a number of items left on your “to do” list before the decorating is complete and you are ready to entertain guests, but be sure to keep safety at the top of that list at all times.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, every year during the two months surrounding the holiday season, more than 14,000 people are treated in hospital emergency rooms due to injuries related to holiday decorating.

Many homes will be decorated with trees and electric lights. Overloaded electrical outlets and faulty wires are the most common cause of fires.

Make sure that you:

- Use only holiday lights that have been safety tested and have the UL label.
- Check each light strand for broken sockets, frayed cords, or faulty plugs; and always be sure to unplug the lights when replacing a bulb.
- Don't string together more than three standard-size sets of lights or you could risk overheating the circuit.
- Match plugs with outlets. Don't force a three-pronged plug into a two-pronged outlet or extension cord, or remove the third prong.
- Always unplug lights before going to bed or leaving your home.
- Make sure extension cords are in good condition and are UL-approved cords rated to carry the electrical load you will connect to them.

Source: *SafeElectricity.org*

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ELECTRIFY AND SAVE

ENERGY-EFFICIENCY HELPS FARMERS AND RANCHERS SAVE

Through time-of-use rate incentives and irrigation motor rebates, our Nebraska members are helping their agriculture customers save thousands on operating costs. Mike Blomenkamp has lived in Wheat Belt Public Power District's service territory since 1989 and grows corn, alfalfa and oats, among other crops. When he modernized his operations to increase energy efficiency, he saved about \$1,000 by using Tri-State and Wheat Belt rebates for new irrigation motors and approximately \$25,000 by operating during non-peak hours.

To learn more about rebates and incentives for electrification programs or a reduced cost on-farm energy assessment, contact your local electric utility. Visit us at www.tristate.coop/BE



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If that old smoke detector, discolored, stained with paint, or years of household grime, could send you a message silently, it might say “please replace me.” Those lifesaving warning devices designed to alert us to smoke and fire were never meant to last forever.

“The National Fire Protection Association and Underwriters Laboratories suggest replacing smoke detectors every 10 years,” said Nicolette Nye, a public affairs specialist with the

Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Both organizations cite sensor degradation rates of 3% per year for their replacement recommendations.

“After 10 years, there would be potential of a 30% failure rate,” said Nye, who also cited a CPSC recommendation that consumers look for smoke alarms rated or certified by Underwriters Laboratories designated by the symbol “UL” or the Electrical Testing Laboratories, marked with the “ETL” logo.

Both smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are designed with a timeframe or useful lifespan of 10 years, said Shawn Mahoney, a National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) technical services engineer.

“Once they start to reach their end of life, consumers may notice alarm signals—typically a chirping sound that is either a low battery or an indication of the device’s end of life, meaning that it’s time the unit was replaced,” said Mahoney.

The NFPA not only recommends that batteries be replaced once a year but also urges you to test the unit once a month as an added precaution against failure. Chirping, prompted by a drained battery will typically stop within seven days and when that happens, the unit stops functioning.

“If you’re just waiting to hear the sound and not testing regularly, there’s a possibility that you’re going to



The National Fire Protection Association recommends that a working smoke detector be installed in every bedroom, on every level of a home, and in hallways outside of sleeping areas.

Photograph by Scott Van Osdol

miss that, especially if you have battery-only systems,” Mahoney said.

According to the CPSC, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors represent good investments in your family’s safety, said Nye, emphasizing that both types of devices should be replaced after 10 years. “Consumers who have working smoke alarms in their homes die in fires at about half the rate of those who do not have alarms. Install working carbon monoxide detectors on every level of the

home and outside of sleeping areas. CO detectors are designed to sound the alert before carbon monoxide reaches life-threatening levels.”

Design improvements are another great reason to consider the replacement of older units. Ionization smoke alarms made their debut in the consumer market in 1970. Photoelectric smoke detectors were first patented in 1972, and the first 10-year lithium battery-powered smoke alarms hit the market in 1995. Since then, units using the best features of all three technologies have become popular.

Many states have upgraded building codes to require hardwired smoke alarms with battery backup power, and carbon monoxide detectors in all new residential construction.

As fire codes have evolved to require smoke alarms near cooking appliances, manufacturers have improved the technology, said NFPA’s Mahoney. “They can distinguish between an actual fire event in the home and cooking fumes, reducing the incidence of nuisance alarms.”

Features for residential alarms and detectors are also available to enhance the safety of the hearing impaired, said CPSC’s Nye, adding that those include bed shakers and strobe lights offering another level of alert to fire or carbon monoxide danger.

Clark Receives NREA Top Safety Honor

Mick Clark, Foreman at Custer Public Power District, has been selected as the recipient of the 2022 Jack McEnerney Award by the Nebraska Rural Electric Association's Job Training & Safety Committee. This award is given to a superintendent, foreman, or lineman employed by one of the 34 rural electric member systems of the Nebraska Rural Electric Association for their work and the betterment of linemen through job training and safety.



Mick Clark, left, receives the 2022 Jack McEnerney Award from Larry Oetken, NREA JT&S Coordinator.

The Jack McEnerney Award is a floating-type plaque and is presented annually at the Job Training & Safety Conference. The final selection of the contestants is conducted by the Job Training & Safety Committee and NREA Job Training & Safety Coordinator Larry Oetken.

Clark started working at Custer Public Power District in 1988 as an Area Serviceman Helper in Stapleton, Neb., and later transferred to Sargent, Neb., where he was also an Area Serviceman Helper. During his 34 years at Custer PPD, he has worked on the construction crew for several years as a Journeyman, Lead Lineman, and currently as Foreman.

Clark got all of his linework experience on the job and was the first employee at Custer PPD to complete the Merchants Program. He likes to share his knowledge and keep everyone safe by helping with high-voltage demonstrations for the public. He also has helped the Nebraska Rural Electric Association with Rubber Gloving and Underground School by being an instructor at various stations.

Rick Nelson, Custer PPD general manager, nominated Clark for the award because of his leadership and efforts to share his safety knowledge with others.

“Custer Public Power is proud to have an employee as dedicated to safety,” Nelson said, “who is willing to share his knowledge with his co-workers and active in the community. It is for these reasons that I chose to nominate him for the Jack McEnerney Award.”

Larry's Safety Lesson

Take steps toward holiday tree safety

By **Larry Oetken**



According to the National Fire Protection Association, between 2015 and 2019, Christmas trees that caught fire caused an average of \$10 million in property damage, 12 injuries and two deaths. And in December alone, the number of decoration fires caused

by candles jumped to 45 percent compared to about 33 percent year-round.

- When you purchase a live tree, make sure it's fresh. Needles should be green and springy to the touch.
- Cut 1 to 2 inches off the bottom of the trunk before placing the tree in the stand. A fresh cut allows the tree to absorb water. Place the tree in water right away.

- Fill the tree stand with water every day.
- Make sure the tree is at least 3 feet away from any heat source, like floor vents, fireplaces, radiators, candles or lamps.
- Make sure your tree is not blocking an exit.
- Always turn the tree lights off or unplug them before going to bed or leaving your home.
- Use lights that are approved by a national testing organization like UL.

After Christmas

- Get rid of the tree after Christmas or when it is dry.
- Dried-out trees are a fire danger and should not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside against the home.
- Check with your local community to find a recycling program.
- Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and make them last longer.

Larry Oetken is the Job Training & Safety Coordinator for the Nebraska Rural Electric Association.

Appliances That Use the Most Energy

Have you ever received your energy bill and thought, “I wonder which appliances in my home are using the most energy?” Don’t worry—you’re not alone. A few years ago, after being away for a somewhat lengthy trip, I arrived home to a typical energy bill. I was surprised because I expected a lower bill after being away from home. This led me to an enlightening journey in search of answers.

My first set of answers came from browsing the Energy Information Administration’s (EIA) website, specifically the Residential Energy Consumption Survey. According to EIA, a typical U.S. home spends more than \$2,000 annually on energy bills, and on average, more than half of household energy consumption is for just two energy end uses: space heating and air conditioning. Seeing this, I understood the importance of adjusting my thermostat while I’m away because it truly makes a difference in our monthly bills.

I also learned that water heaters tend to be the third largest energy user at 13%, followed by lighting, which usually accounts for about 12.5% of the average energy bill.

Once I understood the factors driving my energy consumption, I was able to control them and save money by using helpful devices like smart thermostats, water heater controllers, and smart power strips.

Several factors affect the amount of energy a household uses, including geographic location and climate, the number of people in the home, the type of home, and its physical characteristics. The efficiency of energy-consuming devices and the amount of time they are used also impact home energy consumption.



To save energy and reduce your monthly bill, the following tips can help:

1. Use ENERGY STAR®-rated appliances and devices.
2. Replace old, inefficient equipment. For example, if your air conditioner, furnace, or water heater is more than 10 years old, it is likely to use a lot more energy than necessary. A newer model will save you money in the long run and help you avoid an inconvenient breakdown.
3. Use appliances with efficiency in mind. Only wash full loads of clothes or dishes, and when possible, cook with smaller, countertop appliances instead of the oven.
4. Set your thermostat accordingly to scale back heating or cooling when you are asleep or away. When you're in the home and active, the Department of Energy recommends setting it to 78 degrees in the summer and 68 degrees in the winter. Aim for settings as close to those as possible to save energy.
5. Use energy-efficient LED bulbs. They use 75% less energy than incandescent bulbs and last 25 times longer.
6. Plug electronics into a smart power strip, which allows you to designate "always on" devices that need to maintain a network connection while cutting power from devices like speakers and TVs when they are not in use.

In addition to the steps noted above, consider using real-time energy monitors to help identify faulty appliances or other problems like a broken water heater that runs unnoticed for extended periods, leading to high energy bills.

With a little extra attention to how you use energy in your home, you'll be well on your way to a path of energy savings—and lower energy bills.

A smart or programmable thermostat can help you manage energy used to heat or cool your home, which can help you save energy and money.



Colorful, twinkling lights. Brightly lit plastic candy canes and snowmen on the front lawn.

Such decorations help make the holidays a magical time of year, but they must be handled with care. Each year, fires occurring during the holiday season injure 2,600 individuals and cause more than \$930 million in damage, according to the United States Fire Administration, largely due to the misuse of electrical products and decorations.

Here are some tips for using electrical products safely during the holidays:

- Before decorating, read and follow the manufacturers' instructions concerning the installation and maintenance of all decorative electrical products.
- Indoors and out, use lights and other electrical decorations certified by recognized, independent testing firms such as Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. (UL).



- Use lights certified for outdoor use only for outdoor use. The same goes for indoor lights.
- Carefully inspect each light before plugging it into a socket. Cracked, frayed, loose, or bare wires may cause a serious electric shock or start a fire.
- Do not mount or support light strings in any way that might damage the cord's insulation. Never nail or staple light strings or extension cords.

- Always unplug an electrical decoration before replacing light bulbs or fuses.
- Do not connect more than three light string sets. Light strings with screw-in bulbs should have no more than 50 bulbs connected.
- Do not overload extension cords.
- Keep all extension cords and light strings clear of snow and standing water.
- Use caution when decorating near power lines.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.
- Do not allow children or pets to play with electrical decorations.
- Always turn off decorations before leaving home or going to bed.
- Plug outdoor lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable GFCIs for outdoor use can be purchased wherever electrical supplies are sold.

Murphy



Electrical Safety Activity



**Energy
Explorers**

The holiday season is a festive time of year! Remember to keep electrical and fire safety in mind as you decorate your home.

*Can you find the four hazards in the home below?
Use the safety tips for clues.*

Electrical Safety Tips:

- Do not overload electrical outlets with too many decorations or appliances.
- Never leave a candle burning if you're not in the room.
- Make sure your tree is watered daily.
- Extension cords used for holiday decorations should be checked for fraying/damaged or exposed wires.



Q : How can I keep my home warm while saving on my electric bill this winter?

A : Winterizing is an important step to keep your home cozy and your bills low. These tried-and-true methods will ensure your home is sealed tight and ready for colder weather. I've also included tips that address common misconceptions.

Insulating Pipes and Water Heater

You can raise the water temperature inside your home's water pipes by 2 to 4 degrees by insulating them, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). Insulating allows you to turn down the heat on your water heater, saving energy and money.

Start by insulating the pipes coming out of your water heater. If you have a gas water heater, keep pipe insulation at least 6 inches away from the flue. Insulate hot and cold water lines. The latter can prevent condensation and freezing pipes. Insulating your water heater can save 7% to 16% on water-heating costs, DOE says. Insulation kits are available at hardware stores. Don't obstruct the pressure relief valve, thermostats, or access valves.

Air Sealing

Air sealing and insulation are a great combination for minimizing home energy use. Insulation is like a warm sweater for your home, and air sealing is the windbreaker. All the cracks, gaps, and holes in a typical home can be like having a window open year-round. Air sealing eliminates those leaks. It can be done as a do-it-yourself project or by a professional.

Window Sealing and Improvements

Windows can be a source of drafts and wasted energy. Close windows tightly.

Add weatherstripping around windows to prevent warm air from escaping your home and caulk the gaps where the window trim meets the wall and the window frame. Add curtains to make the room feel warmer.

Storm windows are a lower-cost option for upgrading

single-pane windows. They are available with low-emissivity coatings, which insulate better, and are available for installation either from the inside or outside of the window.

Fireplace Dampers

When I was little, my dad told me it was too cold to have a fire. I remember thinking that made no sense, but he was right.

We had an open, wood-burning fireplace—not a wood stove. A fireplace can draw the warm air out of the house, cooling it down or causing your heating system to use more energy.

Your fireplace adds ambiance to your home but isn't necessarily effective at heating it. If you have a wood-burning fireplace, close the damper when your fire is extinguished. An open damper in the winter is an easy exit for the air you paid to heat.

Adding tempered glass doors to a wood-burning fireplace can create an extra buffer between the cold outside and a cozy living space.

Some gas fireplaces require a damper to remain permanently open so gas can vent out of the home. Check the specifications of your unit to ensure safe operation.

Best Practices for Closing Off Parts of a Home

Through the years, I have heard a lot of debate about closing off rooms or parts of the home to save energy.

Best practices come down to the type of heat source. If you have a zonal heating system, where individual areas are controlled separately, you can close doors and only heat the areas you use. Examples of zonal systems are wall heaters, baseboard heat, hydronic radiant heat, radiators, and ductless heat pumps, also called mini-splits.

Keep areas with plumbing or water lines warm enough so pipes do not freeze.

If you have a central forced-air heating system, leave doors open to all heated areas. Closing doors and/or register dampers forces the system to work harder, uses more energy, and can shorten the life of heating equipment.

Small space heaters are meant to do exactly as their name says: heat a small space. But unfortunately, many people use portable space heaters to heat their entire home, which can take a toll on your energy bills. The truth is, whether you should use space heaters depends on your home's efficiency and energy needs.

If you're using a space heater to compensate for problems in your home, like inadequate insulation, drafty windows and exterior doors, or an inefficient heating system, space heaters are not a practical solution. Your best bet is to improve the overall efficiency of your home. If you're on a tight budget, caulking and weather stripping around windows and exterior doors is a low-cost, easy way to save energy. Depending on the size of your home, adding insulation can be a great next step. Loose-fill insulation typically costs \$1 to \$1.50 per square foot. Check with your local rural electric utility to see if they offer incentives for adding insulation to your home. Taking these proactive energy-saving measures rather than relying on space heaters for supplemental warmth can reduce your heating and cooling bills for years to come.

Perhaps your home is energy efficient but you're cold-natured and want a specific room to be cozier than the rest. In this case, a space heater may work for your needs. A good comparison is ceiling fans; we use ceiling fans in the summer to cool people, not rooms.



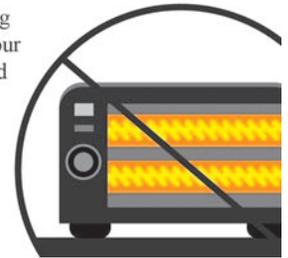
A space heater can be used similarly during winter months. Only use a space heater in small spaces that you're occupying and, if possible, try to shut off other rooms to contain the warmth provided by the space heater. If you decide to use a space heater to heat a small area in your home, make sure the heater is properly sized for the space; most heaters include a general sizing table.

A word about safety: the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates more than 25,000 residential fires are associated with the use of space heaters every year, resulting in more than 300 deaths. If you must use a space heater, purchase a newer model that includes the most current safety features and make sure it carries the Underwriter's

TIPS TO DITCH THE SPACE HEATER

Space heaters are energy hogs, and older models can be extremely dangerous. This winter, ditch the space heater and try these alternative solutions to stay cozy.

- Use an electric blanket to keep warm during the night.
- Caulk and weatherstrip around all windows and doors to prevent heat loss.
- Consider adding insulation to your attic and around duct work.



Laboratory (UL) label. Choose a thermostatically controlled heater to avoid energy waste and overheating, and place the heater on a level surface away from foot traffic when in use. Always keep children and pets away from space heaters.

Consider alternative ways to stay warm like extra layers of clothing or UL-approved electric blankets. If you have hardwood or tile floors, lay down area rugs to provide additional insulation (and appeal!) and maintain warmth.

We know it's cold out there, but remember in addition to safety concerns, space heaters can greatly increase your energy bills if used improperly.

If you're looking for alternative ways to save energy and increase comfort in your home, contact your local electric utility.

Serve Up Smiles with Favorite Holiday Sides

Turkey and ham may sit centerstage, but classic holiday sides can make the season truly special. You can bring smiles to your loved ones' faces by dishing out those favorite recipes everyone asks for year after year.

When it comes to feeding a crowd, it's often best to let your oven do the work. This Brussels Sprouts and Ham Rice Gratin recipe allows you to serve up a filling favorite with little effort using pantry staples. Plus, it's a kid-friendly way to encourage veggies at this year's holiday meal with gooey cheese providing tempting taste bud motivation.

These seasonal classics and more are made quick and easy with an option like Success Boil-in-Bag Rice, a pre-measured, mess-free way to make fluffy, high-quality rice. It's cooked by simply dropping a bag of rice in a pot of water or broth then boiling it for 10 minutes. BPA-free and FDA-approved, the bags are safe to use and made to withstand high temperatures.

An added bonus: If you're aiming to achieve a particular flavor, just season the rice by cooking in water infused with herbs, spices, broth, coconut milk or other liquids like juice for sweeter recipes.

Visit SuccessRice.com to find more holiday recipe inspiration.



Brussels Sprouts and Ham Rice Gratin

- 1 bag Success White Rice**
- 1/2 pound Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved**
- 1/3 cup diced ham**
- 1 clove garlic, minced**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- 3/4 teaspoon salt, divided**
- 3/4 teaspoon black pepper, divided**
- 1 cup heavy cream**
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh chives**
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard**
- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese**
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided**
- 1/3 cup breadcrumbs**
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted**

Preheat oven to 450 F. Prepare rice according to package directions.

In large bowl, toss Brussels sprouts, ham, garlic, olive oil, 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Place on parchment paper-lined baking tray and roast 12-15 minutes, or until caramelized. Decrease oven temperature to 425 F.

In large bowl, toss rice, Brussels sprouts mixture, cream, chives, Dijon mustard, remaining salt and remaining pepper. Stir in cheddar and 1/3 cup Parmesan cheese. Transfer mixture to greased, 2-quart baking dish.

In small bowl, stir breadcrumbs, remaining Parmesan and melted butter. Sprinkle over rice mixture.

Bake 12-15 minutes, or until golden brown and bubbling.

Reader Submitted Recipes



Made with a delicious combination of rice, cheddar cheese, cream of mushroom soup and broccoli florets, this quick and easy version of Broccoli and Cheese Rice Casserole is an ideal one-pot dish to keep the holidays simple. With three easy steps and everyday ingredients, it comes together with minimal effort for traditional casserole taste.

Broccoli and Cheese Rice Casserole

- 1 **bag Success White Rice or Brown Rice nonstick cooking spray**
- 1 **can (10 3/4 ounces) condensed cream of mushroom soup**
- 2 **cups frozen broccoli florets, thawed and drained**
- 1 1/2 **cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided**
- 1/2 **cup evaporated milk**
- 3 **tablespoons butter, melted**
- 1 **tablespoon grated onion**
- 1/2 **teaspoon salt**
- 1/2 **teaspoon black pepper**

Prepare rice according to package directions. Preheat oven to 350 F.

Coat 2-quart casserole dish with nonstick cooking spray. In medium bowl, combine soup, broccoli, 1 cup cheddar cheese, evaporated milk, butter, onion, salt and pepper. Fold in rice.

Pour mixture into prepared dish and top with remaining cheddar cheese. Bake 20 minutes.

Grandma Sally's Sour Cream Sugar Cookies

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 2 cups flour | 1 cup sugar |
| 1/4 teaspoon baking soda | 1 egg |
| 1/2 teaspoon salt | 1/3 cup sour cream |
| 1 teaspoon baking powder | 1 teaspoon vanilla |
| 1/2 cup real butter | 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg |

Sift flour, soda, salt, baking powder and nutmeg together and set aside. Cream butter and sugar well and add egg and mix well. Combine sour cream and vanilla. Add flour mixture and sour cream mixture into butter mixture alternately in 3 parts. Beat until smooth. Chill 12 hours or overnight. Roll out and cut into shapes. Bake at 350 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes. Watch close and do not over bake for soft cookies.

Peggy Hoins, Fairfield, Nebraska

Hearty Breakfast Casserole

- 1 **lb. sliced bacon, diced**
- 1 **medium sweet onion, chopped**
- 6 **large eggs, lightly beaten**
- 4 **cups frozen shredded hashbrowns, thawed**
- 2 **cups shredded cheddar cheese**
- 1 1/2 **cups 4% cottage cheese**
- 1 1/4 **cups shredded Swiss cheese**

Preheat oven 350 degrees. In large skillet, cook bacon and onion over medium heat until bacon is crisp; drain. In large bowl combine remaining ingredients; stir in bacon mixture. Transfer to greased 9" X 13" baking pan. Bake uncovered until knife inserted in the center comes out clean. 35 to 40 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before cutting. *Can substitute bacon with breakfast sausage.

Darlus McWilliams, Norfolk, Nebraska

Grandma's Special K Cookies

- 1 **cup sugar**
- 1 **cup white Karo syrup**
- 1 **cup peanut butter**
- 3 – 4 **cups Special K or Rice Krispies cereal**

In a large saucepan, blend together sugar and syrup, and bring to a hard boil. Remove from heat and immediately add the peanut butter and cereal. Stir well. Drop by tablespoon onto wax paper and let cool.

Carla Donohue, Maxwell, Nebraska

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TWELVE HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

1 Keep decorations at least three feet away from heat sources – especially those with an open flame, like fireplaces and candles.



3 If you have a natural Christmas tree water it to keep it fresh and safe.



2 The best decorations are safe decorations, so when you're decorating, make sure not to run cords under rugs or furniture.



4 Always turn off your decorations when you leave your home and when you're sleeping.



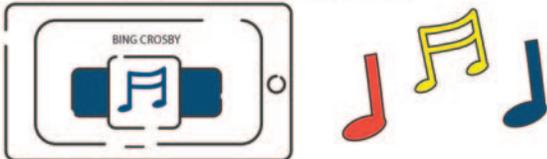
5 If you're using extension cords or adapters that add receptacles, consider having a qualified electrician add more outlets to your home.



6 Only use electronics in dry areas. As tempting as it is, you just can't decorate your aquarium with icicle lights.



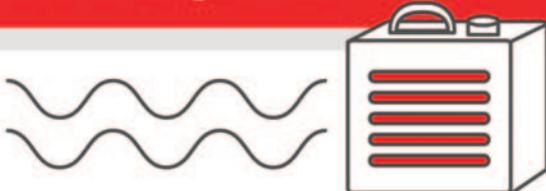
7 Remember that phones and tablets should stay on your nightstand.



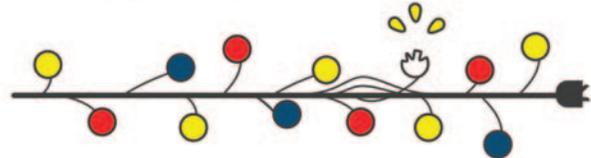
8 Every home needs a working smoke alarm in each bedroom, outside sleeping areas and on every level, including the basement.



9 If you're using a space heater, switch it off before leaving the room.



10 Inspect your decorations and discard any that are damaged or worn out.



11 Keep batteries stored safely in their packaging and out of reach from small children and pets.



12 The best gift for your family is an Arc-Fault Circuit Interrupter breakers or outlets. Many electrical fires that occur every year could be prevented by AFCIs.



Please share this free resource to save lives

BE WINTER READY

As winter temperatures start to drop, work on your livestock operation goes up. Now is the time to prepare. Have a winter emergency plan in place to protect your livestock and your family in case of an unexpected power outage.

Backup generators can help protect against the unexpected and help maintain day-to-day operations.

STAY SAFE AND FOLLOW THESE GENERATOR SAFETY TIPS:



PORTABLE GENERATOR SAFETY

- NEVER plug a generator directly into a power outlet. This can electrocute you and the utility workers attempting to restore power.
- Only operate the generator outdoors, in dry areas, and at least 30 feet away from buildings and any openings.
- Be aware of carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms.



PERMANENT GENERATOR SAFETY

- Installation requires a licensed electrical contractor, must follow local codes, and be inspected.
- Generators not correctly installed can backfeed the power lines and pose a threat of electrical shock to the utility workers attempting to restore power.
- Notify your local electric utility about your backup system. This allows crews to be alert for possible generators in service if they work to restore power in your area.



Scan for more winter safety tips.



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