

● MAY 2025

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING



**Reducing power outages  
with system maintenance**

**What to know if you're  
considering solar energy**

**Spring-inspired recipes**

**Engaging with legislators at REC Day on the Hill ▶ See Page 4**

# CONTENTS



VOLUME 78 • ISSUE 5

3

## STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

Shine the Light on a  
community volunteer

3

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win \$100  
in beef certificates

14

## SAFETY MATTERS

Essential tips for  
electrical safety

15

## HOW YOUR CO-OP WORKS

Save time with  
paperless billing

**EDITOR**  
Ann Foster Thelen

**DESIGNERS**  
Megan Walters  
Bree Glenn

**IAEC DIRECTOR OF  
COMMUNICATIONS**  
Erin Campbell

**IAEC EXECUTIVE  
VICE PRESIDENT**  
Leslie Kaufman

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Marion Denger, Prairie Energy Cooperative –  
NRECA Representative  
Terry Sullivan, Linn County REC –  
Managers' Representative

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**Editorial Office**  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

**Email Address**  
editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

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## ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Emerson Landas, a Consumers Energy member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com). You could receive \$100!



# HELP US SHINE THE LIGHT ON LOCAL VOLUNTEERS AND DESERVING CHARITIES

BY ERIN CAMPBELL



We are gearing up for year five of our statewide Shine the Light program, which celebrates our cooperative commitment to community. During the month of June, member-

consumers and employees of Iowa electric cooperatives are invited to nominate local volunteers who are making a positive difference in their Iowa communities. Three winning volunteers will each receive a \$3,000 donation to their local charity and be featured in the September issue of this magazine.

## Your nomination makes a difference

Starting on June 1, go to [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) to make a nomination. Simply enter some basic contact information for you and your nominee and answer this question in 500 words or less:

***How has your nominee made a difference in the community and how might their local charity/nonprofit use the \$3,000 donation?***

The success of our Shine the Light program depends on co-op member-consumers who take the time to nominate a friend, neighbor or relative who deserves to be recognized. If you have nominated a volunteer in a previous year and they weren't selected as a winner, you are welcome to nominate them again.

Additionally, I will share that the judges who read through all the volunteer nominations respond positively to essays that tell a story and draw in the reader. A little creativity can help your nomination stand out in a crowded field!

## A diverse impact statewide

In the first four years of the program, our 12 winners (three winners each year) represent a diverse group of charities and nonprofits. Some of the winners have included an education



Starting on June 1, go to [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) to make a nomination.

foundation, an animal shelter, a community garden, a local food and furnishings closet, an agricultural pavilion and an air transportation service for medical treatments. You can see our past winners at [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) to learn more about these incredible groups. We are continuously impressed with the range of volunteer activities and local organizations that are nominated each year.

Many of these organizations are small operations that don't have the resources to seek major funding or media attention. Beyond the monetary

donation, the Shine the Light program has been helpful in spreading the word about the great work being done by some incredible volunteers.

Thank you for considering the nomination of someone in your community who should be celebrated for their volunteer efforts and for helping us shine the light on these deserving organizations. Make your nomination online from June 1 through June 30 at [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com).

*Erin Campbell is the director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

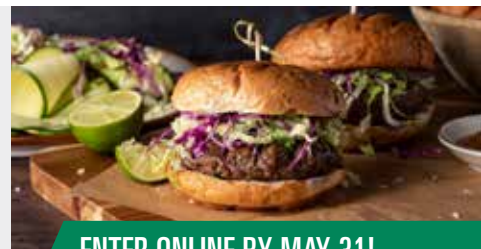
## WIN \$100 IN BEEF CERTIFICATES!

May is Beef Month in Iowa! To celebrate, we're giving away \$100 in beef certificates to use at a grocery store. You can select your favorite cuts to purchase, and then make mouthwatering meals at home.

### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than May 31. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of the \$100 gift card for landscaping from the March issue was **Jeanie Hall**, a **Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY MAY 31!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 11	Happy Mother's Day
MAY 15	Board meeting
MAY 26	Office closed for Memorial Day
JUNE 19	Board meeting
JULY 4	Office closed for Independence Day
JULY 9	Board election voting packets mailed
JULY 17	Board meeting

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*Access Energy Cooperative is dedicated to exceeding members' expectations for safe, reliable and efficient service, while being a good citizen in our communities.*

**Office:** Access Energy Cooperative  
1800 W. Washington St., P.O. Box 440  
Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641

**Phone:** 319-385-1577 or 866-242-4232

**Fax:** 319-385-6873

**Website:** [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/AccessEnergyCoop](https://facebook.com/AccessEnergyCoop)

**Twitter:** [twitter.com/AccessEnergyC](https://twitter.com/AccessEnergyC)

**Email:** [contactus@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:contactus@accessenergycoop.com)

**Office Hours:** Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
Friday, 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Call our office 24/7: 319-385-1577

Payments can be placed in dropbox under flag pole in front of office. Visa, MasterCard and Discover accepted.

**Call Before You Dig (Iowa One Call):** 8-1-1

**General Manager/CEO:** Kevin Wheeler

**Editor:** Kimberly Davis

**Officers and Directors:**

**Marvin Larson**, District 1, President  
[mlarson@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mlarson@accessenergycoop.com)

**David Hollingsworth**, District 1, Vice President  
[dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com)

**Michael Holtkamp**, District 3, Secretary  
[maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com)

**Robert P. Smith**, District 2, Treasurer  
[rsmith@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:rsmith@accessenergycoop.com)

**William Benjamin**, District 3, Director  
[wbenjamin@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:wbenjamin@accessenergycoop.com)

**Jerry Barker**, District 2, Director  
[jbarker@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:jbarker@accessenergycoop.com)

**Fred Hickenbottom**, District 1, Director  
[fhickenbottom@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:fhickenbottom@accessenergycoop.com)

**Marvin Newton**, District 3, Director  
[mnewton@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:mnewton@accessenergycoop.com)

**Larry White**, District 2, Director  
[lwhite@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:lwhite@accessenergycoop.com)

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## CO-OP PRIORITIES DURING THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BY KEVIN WHEELER



As we move through spring, one thing remains constant at your local electric cooperative: our unwavering attention to legislative developments in Iowa and their potential effects on our cooperative. We diligently cultivate relationships with local politicians, regardless of party affiliation, and make regular trips to the state Capitol to discuss critical issues that could impact our operations. Working closely with the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC), we analyze proposed legislation to assess its implications for Access Energy Cooperative and our members.

Recently, I was invited to the Capitol to meet personally with Gov. Reynolds alongside five other

managers from across the state to discuss cooperative impacts of the Governor's energy bill, HF 834/SF 585, which focuses on modifying electric power generation, energy storage and transmission facility ratemaking principles.

As part of the energy bill, we also discussed the right of first refusal (ROFR) for transmission projects, which would allow Iowa's incumbent electric providers to construct and maintain electric transmission projects, ensuring reliability and cost efficiency. We greatly appreciate Gov. Reynolds considering impacts on electric cooperatives and rural Iowans, including Access Energy Cooperative, with this energy legislation. Access Energy Cooperative supports the bill.

Several bills under consideration in the Iowa Legislature during this





# REDUCING POWER OUTAGES WITH SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

BY DANIEL PHILIPS

session could directly affect Access Energy Cooperative, including:

## ■ HF 404 – Community Solar

This bill proposed a community solar facility program, allowing third-party developers to construct solar arrays and sell electricity directly to consumers. IAEC opposed this bill due to concerns about service territory integrity and the financial impact on non-subscribers. It did not survive the legislative funnel, but we will closely monitor this topic going forward.

## ■ HF 852/SF 383 – Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs)

This legislation introduces significant changes to PBM regulation in Iowa, defining 'pass-through pricing' and 'spread pricing' while prohibiting PBMs from discriminating against pharmacies in participation and reimbursement. IAEC opposes this bill, as it could significantly increase healthcare costs for the cooperative.

Access Energy Cooperative remains committed to closely monitoring these legislative developments and advocating for policies that protect our members' interests and the cooperative model. In March, we participated in the annual REC Day on the Hill event, where we met with lawmakers and discussed these topics and other issues.

Our active engagement in the legislative process is critical. If you are interested in joining us when we need additional voices, please let us know – we would be happy to add you to our grassroots team.

*Kevin Wheeler is the general manager/ CEO of Access Energy Cooperative.*



At Access Energy Cooperative, we work hard to ensure you have electricity when you need it. It's what we do. We exist to provide electric

service to our members, not to build a profit.

Continual upgrades and maintenance to our electric distribution system and equipment improve reliability, but there will always be threats causing outages that are out of our control. Tornadoes, ice storms and animals are significant enemies of an electrical system. A person may forget to call before digging for a backyard project and cause an outage. (In Iowa it's the law to call 811 before digging.) Many unforeseen things cause electrical outages that are out of our control, but we do our best to avoid the ones we can. In addition to an aggressive brush control program, Access Energy Cooperative maintains a pole and equipment inspection program to keep the system running as smoothly as we can.

## Ongoing vegetation management and pole inspections

With more than 2,200 miles of electric distribution lines, Access Energy Cooperative has a lot of ground to cover for maintenance. Our vegetation management program is set up to cover the entire system on a five-year rotation. This program includes trimming vegetation under power lines in the first year of the rotation, followed up with preventative spraying two years later. In 2025, trimming is scheduled in areas around Mount Pleasant and Batavia. Spraying is scheduled in the Perlee, Pleasant Plain, Coppock and Lowell areas.

The Access Energy Cooperative pole inspection program is set up to follow the Iowa Utilities Commission (IUC) requirements and covers an inspection

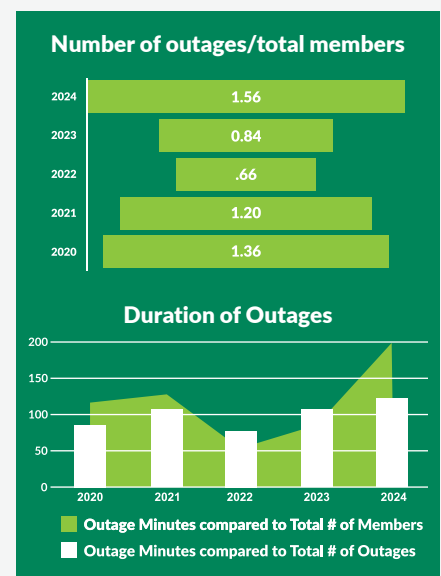
of all 52,000 poles on our system on a 10-year rotation. In 2025, poles are scheduled to be inspected to ensure they are still safe and not decaying in various areas west of Batavia into Wapello County, and near the Douds area in Van Buren County.

## Tracking reliability

Your cooperative provides annual reports to the IUC informing them of outages and reliability for the current and previous four years. In 2024, Access Energy Cooperative reported an increase in the number and length of outages incurred by our members over the previous year. The tornado that traveled across most of our service territory last year was the primary reason, plus a couple of other significant storms; but our stringent equipment and vegetation management plans are doing their job to keep outages down and your power reliable.

Another note about the increased change in outage length stems from the accuracy of the new meter system. We can track actual outage time rather than estimating it based on when a member calls in to report an outage.

*Daniel Philips is the director of operations for Access Energy Cooperative.*





# "MOVE OVER" TO PROTECT ROADSIDE CREWS

BY SCOTT FLOOD

Iowa state law requires motorists to move over or slow down when approaching ANY vehicle stopped on the side of the road with its flashing lights activated, including passenger cars with hazard lights. Those who fail to obey the law could receive a traffic ticket or even lose their driver's license.

When lineworkers are perched in a bucket truck, repairing power lines along a busy road, they have good reason to be concerned about their safety. However, most are less apprehensive about problems like working with high voltages or falling. Their biggest worry is also the most unpredictable: a distracted driver slamming into their vehicle or a nearby power pole.

The National Safety Council reported that 891 people were killed and 37,701 people were injured in work zone crashes during 2022 (the most recent statistics). Most of those crashes occur in construction sites, which are usually well-marked. Electric co-op crews are likely to face even greater danger, as they often work along remote stretches of roads, frequently in adverse weather conditions that can reduce their visibility.

## Move over laws vary

The danger of work zone crashes led every state to adopt "move over" laws that require drivers to lower their speed and switch lanes when possible to protect emergency vehicles. The goal is to provide an added safety buffer and minimize the potential for accidents. Drivers caught violating the laws can face penalties such as significant fines.

Unfortunately, the Journal of Road Safety reports that just 14 states' "move over" laws protect other types of service vehicles, such as construction trucks and utility vehicles. That means drivers in those states are under no legal obligation to give lineworkers that added margin of safety.

In accordance with Iowa state law, motorists must move over or slow down when approaching ANY vehicle

stopped on the side of the road with its flashing lights activated, including passenger cars with hazard lights. Those who fail to obey the law could receive a traffic ticket or even lose their driver's license.

## Distracted driving poses additional risks

Compounding this issue is the dramatic increase in distracted driving. The National Transportation Highway Safety Administration has reported that as many as 1,000 Americans are injured each day because of activities that take drivers' attention away from the road. The most common is reading and responding to text messages. If a driver traveling at 55 miles per hour glances at their phone for just five seconds, they'll have traveled the length of a football field before returning their gaze to the road.



The design of today's vehicles contributes to distraction. Many vehicles have complex controls for entertainment and climate that demand the driver take their eyes off the road to make even simple adjustments.

Geography can also be a factor. Co-ops serving rural and remote areas often have power lines along hilly roads. Locals accustomed to driving those roads at fairly high speeds may be startled and have little time to react when they encounter a work crew past a hill or around a curve.

Besides the potential for lineworker injuries, accidents can also damage or destroy expensive service vehicles, reducing a co-op's ability to respond to outages and other problems. Power poles and other infrastructure may also suffer severe damage.

### **Maintaining focus is essential**

Additionally, many of the tasks performed by lineworkers, such as reconnecting high-voltage power lines, are inherently dangerous and require their complete focus. When their attention is distracted by speeding or noisy vehicles, they're more likely to make mistakes that can complicate the repair or cause injury.

Co-op employees are not only at risk only when their vehicles are parked and repairs are underway. Lineworkers frequently have to drive slowly along the shoulder of roads to pinpoint broken power lines or failed transformers, especially in darkness or conditions that interfere with visibility.



Many state transportation agencies, including Iowa, have work zone awareness programs. Amplifying those efforts by devoting part of a co-op's advertising, publicity and social media reminds co-op members and other drivers of the importance of giving lineworkers a wide berth.

Co-ops are considering ways they can modify bucket trucks and other service vehicles to make them even more visible. Bright colors and additional lighting, such as flashing strobe lights and lighted detour

arrows, can attract attention from a distance. Reflective "work zone ahead" signs can also alert drivers to be ready for an unusual situation.

Remember, if you see any vehicle stopped on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, you are required by law to move over or slow down, preferably both. Please give our employees room on the road; their families thank you!

*Scott Flood writes on energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*





# SPRING-INSPIRED RECIPES



## ASPARAGUS STIR-FRY

- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 cups asparagus, cut into 1 to 1½-inch pieces
- 2 teaspoons fresh ginger root, grated
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- toasted sesame seeds, optional

Stir broth, cornstarch and soy sauce in a small bowl until the mixture is smooth. Heat oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add asparagus, ginger root and garlic and stir-fry until crisp-tender. You can substitute ginger root with ½ teaspoon ground ginger. Add broth mixture to the skillet. Cook and stir until the mixture boils and thickens. Sprinkle with sesame seeds, if desired. Asparagus can be substituted with broccoli, cauliflower or baby carrots. Serves 4

Tammy Neubauer • Ida Grove  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## FRESH CILANTRO DIP

- ½ bunch cilantro
- 1 can black beans, drained
- 1 can black olives, minced or chopped
- 1 small jar pimentos
- 5 banana peppers, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 5 green onions, chopped
- 1 large tomato, chopped
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- nacho chips

Mix all ingredients together and serve with nacho chips.  
Serves 12

Jenny Hall • Woodbine  
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative

## HAM MACARONI SALAD

- 3 cups elbow macaroni, uncooked
- 1 cup cooked ham, chopped
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced
- 1 tomato, seeded and diced
- 1 small red pepper, diced
- 1 small green pepper, diced
- 1¼ cups mayonnaise
- 1½ teaspoons Cajun seasoning
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice

Prepare macaroni according to package directions. Drain and rinse with cold water until cool. Combine remaining ingredients, then add macaroni. Mix until blended. Cover and chill for at least 2 hours. Serves 8-10

Bryce and Kelly Godbersen • Odebolt  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

## RHUBARB CUSTARD PIE

- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon butter, divided
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 3 cups rhubarb, diced
- 1 unbaked pie shell
- ½ cup flour
- ⅓ cup oatmeal
- ⅓ cup brown sugar
- cinnamon

Cream together 1 tablespoon butter, sugar and nutmeg, then mix in eggs. Fill unbaked pie shell with diced rhubarb, then add custard mixture. Bake at 450 degrees F for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, mix ½ cup butter, flour, oatmeal and brown sugar into a crunch topping. Break topping into chunks over top of pie. Bake pie at 350 degrees F for 30 more minutes then sprinkle with cinnamon. Serves 8

Raymond Robbins • Fort Madison  
Access Energy Cooperative



## KALE SALAD

- 8 ounces kale, finely cut
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 1 medium apple, chopped
- ½ cup pecan halves
- ½ cup feta cheese
- ¼ cup bacon, crumbled
- poppy seed dressing, optional
- Mandarin oranges, optional

Mix all ingredients and top with poppy seed dressing, if desired. Cranberries can be substituted with Mandarin oranges. *Serves 4*

Audrey Kreykes • Rock Valley  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## ASPARAGUS AND SPRING PEA SOUP

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 stalks celery
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 5 cups water or broth
- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed and sliced
- 2 cups green peas, fresh or frozen
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ cup canned coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons fresh dill, finely chopped, optional

In a large saucepan, add butter, onion, celery and garlic. Cook over medium heat until veggies soften, stirring frequently. Stir in choice of liquid (water, vegetable broth or chicken broth). Add asparagus and peas. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and simmer 15 minutes, until asparagus is tender. Puree using blender or an immersion blender. Strain through a sieve if needed. Add salt and lemon juice to warm soup. Ladle into soup bowl and pour a drizzle of canned coconut milk into bowl. Top with fresh dill, if desired. *Serves 6*

Anita Doughty • Ankeny  
Consumers Energy

## TERRI'S PASTA SALAD

- 5 ounces dried rotini noodles
- 3 cups broccoli florets, chopped
- 3 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- ½ cup red onion, chopped
- ¼ cup sliced almonds, toasted
- ¼ cup fresh basil, chopped
- 2 ounces goat cheese, crumbled
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

In a large pot, cook pasta in lightly salted boiling water for 5 minutes. Add broccoli and cook for 3 more minutes or until pasta is done. Drain and rinse with cold water. In a large bowl, whisk together vinegar, oil, honey and garlic. Add pasta mixture, pepper, onion, almonds and basil. Toss to combine. Gently stir in cheese. Season with salt and pepper to taste. You can substitute goat cheese with feta, fresh Parmesan or pearled mozzarella. *Serves 4-6*

Lori Kautzky • Perry  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## STRAWBERRY RHUBARB UPSIDE DOWN CAKE

- 1 cup rhubarb, cut into ½ inch pieces
- 1 cup strawberries, hulled and halved
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1½ cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup butter at room temperature
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup milk
- whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

Combine rhubarb, strawberries and melted butter. Spread evenly across the bottom of a 9-inch round cake pan that has been greased and lined with parchment paper on the bottom. Set aside while making cake mixture. Whisk together flour, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl. Cream room temperature butter and sugar in a large bowl. Add eggs, vanilla and milk and beat. Mix with dry ingredients then pour over the strawberry and rhubarb topping. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45-50 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Run a knife around the edge of pan to loosen cake. Place serving plate over pan and invert cake onto the plate. Remove the pan and peel off the parchment paper. Serve warm or at room temperature with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream. *Serves 12*

Kristin Goddard • Charles City  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

**WANTED:**

## FALL APPLE RECIPES

**THE REWARD:**  
**\$25 FOR EVERY**  
**ONE WE PUBLISH!**

**Deadline is May 31**

Submit your favorite fall apple recipes. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

**EMAIL:** [recipes@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

**MAIL:** Recipes

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# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE CONSIDERING SOLAR

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE



Often, homeowners conflate installing solar at home with energy efficiency. But what most people don't realize is solar is not energy efficiency. Solar is generating energy. Energy efficiency is finding ways to use less energy. While these are not one in the same, both are thought of as beneficial to the environment and a way to save money.

If you are interested in installing solar, it is important to understand your motivations. It may be saving money, concern for the environment or both. Focusing first on energy efficiency can address both motivations.

Here are the five key energy efficiency considerations to evaluate when adding solar to your home.

**① Energy consumption** Solar systems are sized based on a home's energy needs. The larger the system, the higher the cost. Before installing solar, make sure your home is as energy efficient as possible. That means it will use less energy and allow you to install a smaller solar system – which will save money and reduce your home's environmental impact.

Verify the efficiency of your lighting, HVAC systems and insulation. A fully insulated and air-sealed home uses less energy, and those insulation measures are less expensive than solar panels. Finish these energy efficiency projects before installing solar.

**② Affordability** Consider your overall out-of-pocket expenses. The expected lifespan of a heating and cooling system is 15 to 25 years. Check the age and condition of your HVAC equipment and consider the expenses of replacement.

**③ Roofing** Consider the age, orientation and shade of your roof. It is more difficult and expensive to reroof a home with solar panels. Evaluate if the roof will need to be replaced before the solar panels need to be replaced.

The best orientation for solar panels is south facing to receive direct light throughout the day. A shaded roof helps keep your home cool in the summertime but reduces solar energy production.

**④ Maintenance** A solar system doesn't last forever. Lifespans range from 25 to 30 years. As systems degrade over time, they produce less energy. Maintenance and repairs may be needed.

**⑤ Electric bills and storage** Solar is not "off the grid." Unless you plan to disconnect from your electric co-op, you will still receive a monthly bill.

Solar panels only produce power when the sun is shining. If you want power to your home at other times, like after dark, you need to be connected to your electric co-op or invest in battery storage system, which comes at an additional cost.

During power outages, don't assume solar panels will supply you with power. Typical solar interconnection to the grid requires panels to shut down during a power outage. This protects lineworkers from injury while making repairs.



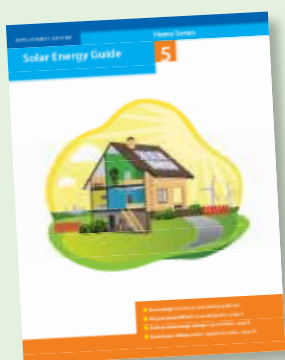
# BEWARE OF SOLAR SCAMS

Before working with any vendor, Iowa's electric cooperatives encourage you to do your homework to ensure you choose a reputable provider.



If you have a complaint regarding solar installation or financing, you can complete and submit an electronic complaint at [bit.ly/3usfVj7](https://bit.ly/3usfVj7).

Consumers can also call the Iowa Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 515-281-5926 or 888-777-4590 or email [consumer@ag.iowa.gov](mailto:consumer@ag.iowa.gov).



## SOLAR ENERGY GUIDE

Iowa's electric cooperatives are committed to helping member-consumers make educated energy decisions that make sense for their home or business. Before moving ahead with a solar project, contact your local co-op first and also review the Solar Energy Guide for tips and to learn interconnection requirements.

[www.iowarec.org/publications/solar-resources](http://www.iowarec.org/publications/solar-resources)

### Contact your electric co-op

Solar contractors often work in several utility service territories and may not be familiar with your co-op's offerings, rate structures and interconnection agreements. Before signing an agreement, check with your electric co-op for local information rather than relying on what the contractor says.

As with any other system for your home, get bids from three contractors to compare equipment and pricing. Another option may be community-owned solar. Many electric co-ops offer community solar programs. You may have an option to enjoy the benefits of solar without the responsibilities of ownership and maintenance.

Understanding these considerations before installing solar will ensure you meet your money-saving and environmental goals.

*Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*



## TOP 10 CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE INSTALLING SOLAR

- 1 Address energy efficiency.** Implementing energy efficiency measures in advance can help reduce your overall energy or water consumption, and subsequently, the size of your solar system.
- 2 Do your homework before writing a check.** Talk to your electric co-op at the outset of the process. Then speak with credible, reputable sources who are skilled professionals that will help guide you through the process.
- 3 Know your co-op's rate structure and policies.** Your co-op will help you understand the rate structure and what type of charges are likely to be incurred. They will also let you know how you will be compensated for the excess, unused energy that is generated by your solar system.
- 4 Analyze your electric load.** Understanding your electricity use and overall energy needs will help determine if solar is a good investment for you.
- 5 Determine costs upfront.** You will likely be responsible for initial upfront costs to install the system, as well as maintenance and repair costs. Doing your homework upfront will help determine if it is economical for your energy needs.
- 6 Research incentives and tax credits.** Visit with your co-op to see if there are financial incentives to offset your investment costs. These are often driven by laws and policies and can vary on the type and size of system.
- 7 Understand responsibilities.** A variety of parties are involved in making a solar project a reality, so it's important to know exactly what tasks and costs you're responsible for.
- 8 Know safety requirements.** Solar is connected to the grid, so it's important that you work with your co-op to ensure you're meeting their requirements to keep the grid reliable and safe.
- 9 Choose a reputable vendor.** It is important to find a reputable installer who will give you realistic expectations. Ask for references, check reviews and ask for third-party input.
- 10 Keep thorough records.** Establish a thorough record-keeping process to retain all data and research you gather.

## FORD LIGHTNING EV

As part of a research project, Access Energy Cooperative is tracking data from the cooperative's Ford Lightning electric vehicle to share with members. The following is the data for February.

- 1,177 miles driven
- 3,375 total minutes charge time with a Level 2 charger
- 621 total kWh for charging
- \$77.60 total cost of electricity at 12.5 cents per kWh
- 67.3 gallons of gas equivalent
- \$187.60 total cost of gas equivalent at \$2.79 per gallon

*Note: Dollar values are dependent on electric and gas prices.*



## WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU SAVE

When summer heats up, our electric bills tend to increase as air conditioners are working overtime, driving up home energy consumption. Access Energy Cooperative is your local not-for-profit electricity provider, and we are committed to helping you find ways to keep your energy bill under control.

As the temperatures get hotter over the next few months, we want to make sure you know about a range of energy-saving offerings designed specifically with you in mind. By taking advantage of these programs and services, you can manage your summer energy consumption and costs.



### Budget billing

When you sign up for Access Energy Cooperative's budget billing program, your energy bill is calculated by averaging your previous 12 months of use. With budget billing, your monthly energy costs are easier to budget and manage, especially during seasonal fluctuations when bills tend to increase based on the weather. Budget billing is a great option for anyone on a fixed income or those with highly variable seasonal needs.



### Home energy audit and energy efficiency improvement rebates

Access Energy Cooperative's energy advisor is available to conduct a no-cost energy audit of your home to identify areas where energy is wasted. The advisor can provide recommendations on ways to improve efficiency and lower your monthly bills. Rebates are available for implementing some of the improvements recommended.



### You have the power

Small actions combined can have a big impact on summer energy bills. The best way to lower energy use during summer months is to raise the thermostat to the highest setting that's comfortable. Ceiling fans can also help you feel cooler but remember to turn them off when you leave the room. On warm summer nights, fire up the grill to keep additional heat out of the kitchen. Remember to change air filters often so your cooling system doesn't have to work harder than necessary.

Visit [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com) for additional energy-saving advice and tips to help you manage your energy use. Contact us to learn more about practical strategies to lower your use and trim your bills this summer.

## TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

If you suspect you're dealing with a utility scam, it's crucial to slow down and take your time before taking any action. Scammers will often pressure you to make quick decisions or immediate payments. Instead, take the time to verify the legitimacy of the communication by contacting your utility directly. Use a phone number from a reliable source, such as your bill or the utility's website. Taking this simple step can help protect you from falling victim to utility scams.

*Source: Utilities United Against Scams*



## STAY COOL. STAY EFFICIENT.

We're here to help you beat the summer heat. Take advantage of our efficiency programs and energy-saving recommendations designed to help you stay comfortable and cut costs all summer long.





# LOCAL STUDENT PARTICIPATES IN CAREER-BASED LEARNING PROGRAM

Access Energy Cooperative is proud to help students reach their goals in the Central Lee career-based learning program. Kayden Calfee has been working at the cooperative to fulfill requirements in this program and plans to attend power line school in the fall.



Pictured from left: Brent Koller, Central Lee instructor; Kayden Calfee; and Steven Klein, Access Energy Cooperative storeskeeper.

## ELECTRIC CO-OP SERVICE DENSITY compared to OTHER ELECTRIC UTILITIES

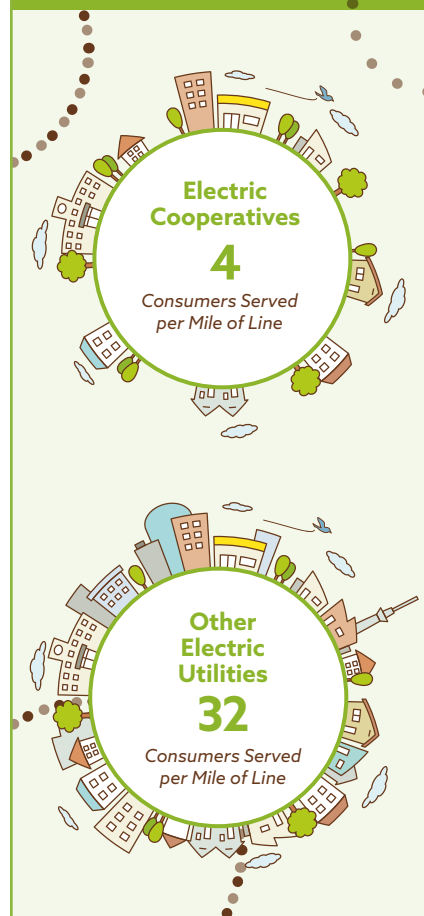
Electric cooperatives maintain more power lines per consumer than other types of electric utilities.

*Even though we serve fewer consumers per mile of line, we will always go the extra mile for our members.*

## SAVE THE DATE

**Save the date for Access Energy Cooperative's Annual Meeting of Members on Aug. 5!** All members are encouraged to attend their annual meeting for an evening of free food, free fun, and free entertainment, and to participate in the business activities of the cooperative. It all starts at 5 p.m.

**New this year:** Kids can win one of two bikes at the annual meeting!



# 5 ESSENTIAL ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUR HOME

BY ABBY BERRY

Every May, National Electrical Safety Month serves as a vital reminder of the importance of preventing electrical hazards at home. Electricity powers nearly every aspect of modern life, but if handled improperly, it can pose serious risks, including injuries and property damage.

Your local electric cooperative understands the risks associated with improper electricity use, which is why we're committed to reminding you to stay vigilant and practice electrical safety not only in May but also year-round.

By following key safety practices, you can reduce the risk of electrical hazards and ensure your family stays protected. Here are five essential tips for powering up safely at home.

**1 Be vigilant.** Regularly inspect your home's electrical system for any signs of damage or outdated components and replace any frayed electrical wires or cords. The Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates roughly 3,300 home fires originate from extension cords every year, either from overloading, overheating or fraying. If you're relying on extension cords as permanent power solutions, consider contacting a qualified electrician to install additional outlets where you need them.

**2 Use surge protectors.** Safeguard your sensitive electronics and appliances from surges with surge protectors. These handy devices help divert excess voltage away from your electronics, reducing the risk of damage or electrical fires. Not all power strips include surge protection, so read the product label carefully. Additionally, surge protectors can lose effectiveness



National Electrical Safety Month serves as a vital reminder of the importance of preventing electrical hazards at home.



Avoid overloading electrical outlets with power strips that exceed the outlet's capacity.

over time and should be replaced when damaged or outdated.

**3 Practice safe power strip use.** Avoid overloading electrical outlets with power strips that exceed the outlet's capacity. High-energy devices, like heaters, microwaves and hairdryers should be distributed across multiple outlets. Overloading an outlet with a "busy" power strip can lead to overheating and create a fire hazard, so be sure to check the power strip's wattage rating before plugging in items.

**4 Avoid contact with water.** It may seem obvious, but accidents involving water contact with electrical items happen. Always keep electrical appliances and devices away from water sources, like sinks, bathtubs or swimming pools. Make sure your hands are dry before touching any electrical switches or appliances – never handle electrical devices with wet hands. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs)



The Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates roughly 3,300 home fires originate from extension cords every year, either from overloading, overheating or fraying.

should be installed in areas where water and electricity are typically in close proximity, including kitchens, bathrooms and outdoor outlets.

**5 Educate family members.** One of the best ways to ensure the safety of everyone in your household is to talk about electrical safety. Teach children not to play with electrical outlets or appliances and ensure they understand the potential dangers of electricity. Create and practice a home fire escape plan that includes electrical safety precautions in case of emergencies.

Practicing electrical safety at home is essential for protecting your family, property and peace of mind. Remember, electrical safety isn't just a one-time effort – it's a year-round responsibility. Taking these steps can help ensure a safer, more secure home for you and your loved ones.

*Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*



# SAVE TIME WITH PAPERLESS BILLING

Paperless billing reduces your monthly paper usage, carbon footprint and mailbox clutter. It allows you to review and pay your monthly electric bill online. It is free, convenient and secure!

To sign up for paperless billing, you must first have a SmartHub account. (However, paperless billing is not required to have a SmartHub account.) SmartHub is a web and mobile app that allows you to take control of all aspects of your utility account. In SmartHub, you can view and pay your bill. Visit our website at [accessenergycoop.com](http://accessenergycoop.com) or download the SmartHub app on your mobile device to create your account.

Once you sign up for paperless billing in SmartHub, you will receive monthly notifications by email when your bill

is available for viewing. This email includes the amount due and the due date. You can pay securely on our website or in the app, anytime, anywhere as long as you have an internet connection.



We are happy to answer your questions.

Call us at 866-242-4232 or email our billing department at [billing@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:billing@accessenergycoop.com).



## DIVIDEND BILL CREDIT DRAWING JUNE 2

Access Energy Cooperative members have the option to choose to receive their dividend payments in the form of a bill credit, rather than a check. If you wish to set your account up to receive bill credits instead of checks, please contact our office at 866-242-4232 or send an email to [finance@accessenergycoop.com](mailto:finance@accessenergycoop.com).

Each member who has signed up to receive dividend payments as bill credits, in lieu of checks, will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 bill credit. If you are already signed up, you do not need to sign up again.

## COMING SOON: UPDATED WEBSITE

A new look and more user-friendly environment are coming for the Access Energy Cooperative website! With the updated website, users will find:

- ✓ Improved search functionality
- ✓ Enhanced mobile capabilities
- ✓ Mobile-friendly enhancements
- ✓ Accessibility tool enhancements

We are working to make things easier to find, plus incorporating a powerful search engine on the site.

The updated site will include new calculators, energy efficiency assistance tools and more safety information.

It will be fully responsive, ensuring a smooth experience whether you are using a desktop, tablet or smartphone.





A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING


The magazine  
for members of  
Iowa's electric  
cooperatives

May 2025

Visit our website at [www.accessenergycoop.com](http://www.accessenergycoop.com)

# SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY

A photograph of two utility workers in yellow safety gear and hard hats standing in the bucket of a white utility truck. The truck has "Touchstone Energy Cooperatives" written on its side. The background shows a clear sky and a grassy field with orange traffic cones in the foreground.

Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative**. This commitment to provide electrical safety has always been our priority so we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's why safety runs through everything we do.



Touchstone Energy® Cooperative  
The power of human connections