

cooperative **REVIEW**

for members of Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative



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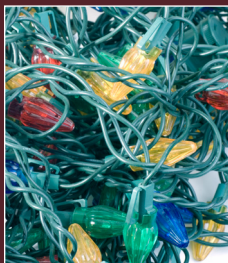
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Stay safe this holiday season with these helpful tips on page 5.

Are you ready for cold weather?

Predictions are calling for snowy and unseasonably cold weather this winter. We can cross our fingers and hope the forecasts are wrong, but it is a good idea to prepare for blustery weather.

Heating and cooling costs are usually the biggest part of your electric bill, accounting for up to two-thirds of your usage. When it gets cold, energy usage increases. When energy usage increases, electric bills go up.

Knowing the type of heating and cooling system you have, how the system works, and how to properly maintain it will help you get the most efficiency from your system. The most common type of heating system in the local area is an air source heat pump.

A heat pump system transfers heat from one location to another. In the winter, heat in the outdoor area



is pumped through the unit and distributed through the house.

Heat pump systems need to be serviced annually by an HVAC technician to operate at peak efficiency. Here are some additional tips to get the most efficient service from your system:

- Clean or change filters once a month, or as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Never set thermostat to emergency heat unless the outdoor unit stops working, then call your HVAC technician immediately.
- Keep thermostat heat settings at one temperature. The recommended setting for winter is 68°F.
- Heat pumps need to breathe, so keep all vents open and free from blockages inside the home.
- Keep the outdoor unit free from snow and ice.
- Keep plants, shrubs, and other obstacles at least two feet away from the outside unit.
- Replace older thermostats with programmable models—ask your HVAC technician which will work best.

Other common heating systems include gas or oil systems, which generate heat from a furnace or boiler. A furnace heats the air and blows it through heat ducts to the registers or grilles in the home. A boiler heats water, and the water is circulated through pipes to radiators or baseboards.

Getting the most efficient use out of a gas or oil system requires some maintenance, as well.

- Keep radiators or convectors clean.
- Replace or clean the filter on a forced-air system at least once a month.
- Check flue and chimney for possible obstruction and have cleaned, if necessary.
- Have oil furnaces serviced once a year by a trained technician.
- Have gas furnaces serviced every two years by a trained service technician.

Keep safety in mind, as well. A poorly maintained or malfunctioning gas or oil furnace can produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide. It is recommended that any home with a gas or oil system have a carbon monoxide detector.

Electric baseboard heating systems use resistance heating like electric stoves and space heaters. This is the most expensive form of heating, so use it as sparingly as possible. Turn off baseboard heaters in unoccupied rooms.

Knowing the type of heating system you have and maintaining it properly will help you save energy and money as the weather turns cold. Here are some additional tips that will help no matter what type of heating system you have.

- Have an energy audit performed on your home to check for air leaks and to check insulation levels. A tight and well-insulated house will make you feel more comfortable and will reduce energy costs. SMECO offers the discounted Home Performance with ENERGY STAR[®], which takes a comprehensive look at your home to determine opportunities for savings.
- Weatherize your home to keep conditioned air in—air leakages are the biggest culprit in making homes uncomfortable—use weather stripping, caulking, spray foam, and clear plastic to seal drafts in the winter.
- Open curtains and blinds during the day—use cellular blinds and insulated curtains to add to overall comfort and R-value.
- Limit the use of exhaust fans during the winter months and prevent the house from becoming too dry.
- Insulate your attic to at least R-38. A clue to know how well insulated your attic is? If snow melts quickly from the roof, you don't have enough insulation. A Quick Home Energy Check-up will assess insulation levels as part of the professional one-hour walk-through of your home.

Remember that energy use varies based on many factors, including the amount of insulation and the type of heating system in the home, as well as the type of appliances you use. Adjusting your energy use on cold weather days can help control winter electric bills. To find more ways to save energy and save money this winter, visit smeco.coop/save-energy-and-money for tips on the many things you can do.

Exercise more control over your electric bill

The best way to save energy is to understand how you use it. SMECO provides a Home Energy Reports web portal that can provide you with detailed information about your home's energy use to help you discover ways to save energy and save money and make your home more energy efficient.

The web portal is open to all residential SMECO customers (excluding net metered customers) and includes many features that offer personalized information about your home's energy use.

- A progress tracker will show how your energy usage changes over time.
- A comparison to other similarly sized and equipped homes in your area.
- A bill comparison that allows you to compare your current bill to the previous month and the same month from the previous year.
- A home energy assessment tool that will help you identify the "load profile" of your home and specific actions that can be taken to reduce consumption.
- Energy conservation tips based on your energy use patterns and specific information about your home.

It's easy to use, all you need to do to access the portal is create a password-protected login using your SMECO account number. To learn more, visit www.smeco.coop/save-energy-and-money/home-energy-reports/faq.

Bill payment address changed

In September 2015, SMECO moved its lockbox banking services. If you mail your SMECO payment or if you use a banking service to mail your payment, please use the following address:

SMECO
P.O. Box 62261
Baltimore, MD 21264-2261

Enjoy a safe and happy holiday season

It's time to celebrate the holidays again! SMECO wants you to have a safe and happy time throughout the holiday season. From Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, please keep safety in mind. Here are a few simple tips to remember.

- ✔ Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree.
- ✔ In homes with small children and pets, take special care to avoid sharp or breakable decorations.
- ✔ If you have a live tree, make sure it always has an adequate amount of water, and keep it away from any source of heat.
- ✔ If you use an artificial tree, choose one that is tested and labeled as fire resistant. Artificial trees with built-in electrical systems should have the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label.
- ✔ Don't use frayed or damaged electric cords, and never use electric lights on a metallic tree.
- ✔ Use no more than three light sets on any one extension cord. Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping hazards.
- ✔ Make sure your smoke alarms are working. Test them by pushing the test button.
- ✔ Make sure the tree does not block foot traffic or doorways.
- ✔ Turn off all holiday lights when you go to bed or leave the house.
- ✔ Avoid using candles; they are a primary cause of house fires during the holidays.
- ✔ Never nail, tack, or stress wiring when hanging lights, and keep plugs off the ground away from puddles and snow.
- ✔ When baking a turkey, stay in the home and check on it frequently.
- ✔ When cooking on the stovetop, stay in the kitchen and keep an eye on the food.

Your cooperative cares about your safety. Please have a safe and fun-filled holiday season.

Help your neighbors keep the lights on

Help your neighbor keep the lights on this winter and receive a special gift that will light up your day. Sign up for Members Helping Members and receive a reward for lending a hand. For people who have fallen on hard times, receiving enough money to pay past due electric bills can make a big difference in their lives. Members Helping Members is a program where customers in Southern Maryland can help their neighbors who are struggling to pay their electric bills throughout the year.



Giving can be rewarding

As a thank you to our neighbors who lend a hand, customer-members who sign up **between November 1, 2015, and January 31, 2016**, will receive a reward based on their level of giving.

- Those who sign up to contribute at the \$1 level during this period will receive a **free t-shirt**.
- Those who sign up for the \$5 level will receive a free t-shirt, **four LED lights and a copy of *Lighting Up Our Lives: The History of Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative*** by Al Gough Jr.
- Those who join Members Helping Members at the \$10 level will receive a free t-shirt, four LED lights and a copy of *Lighting Up Our Lives: The History of Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative* by Al Gough Jr., and a **USB charger kit**.

How do I help?

It's easy! Simply sign up to add \$1, \$5, or \$10 to your SMECO electric bill every month. To enroll:

- Call 1-888-440-3311
- Go online at www.smeco.coop/community/members-helping-members
- In person at the customer service counter at a SMECO location

aroundTOWN

December 4-6

Madrigal Dinners

Sponsor: Historic St. Mary's City

7 to 9 p.m. Historic St. Mary's City, Reconstructed State House of 1676, 47418 Old State House Road, St. Mary's City. Welcome the holiday season with feasting, firelight, and music in the lavishly decorated Reconstructed State House of 1676. Check the website for times and prices. Reservations required.

hsmcdigshistory.org

December 5

Colonial Christmas

Sponsor: Historic St. Mary's City

11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Historic St. Mary's City, Town Center (meet at The Shop at Farthing's Ordinary), 47414 Old State House Road, St. Mary's City. This light-hearted tour follows a young man's progress as he employs colonial holiday traditions and the goodwill of the season to impress a girl. \$ Admission. Free for children ages 5 and younger and for Friends members. Tours depart hourly, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

240-895-4990

hsmcdigshistory.org

December 6

Olde Tyme Holiday Gathering

Sponsor: Town of La Plata

3 to 6 p.m. La Plata Town Hall. The sounds and spirit of the season bring friends and neighbors together for an afternoon of good cheer. Come out for holiday music, crafts, refreshment, horse-drawn carriage rides, and a visit from Santa.

301-934-8421

townoflaplata.org

December 11-12

Madrigal Dinners

Sponsor: Historic St. Mary's City

7 to 9 p.m. Historic St. Mary's City, Reconstructed State House of 1676, 47418 Old State House Road, St. Mary's City. Welcome the holiday season with feasting, firelight, and music in the lavishly decorated Reconstructed State House of 1676. Check the website for times and prices. Reservations required.

hsmcdigshistory.org

December 19

Christmas at The Sanford Concert Series

Sponsor: The Sanford Concert Series

7:30 to 9 p.m. St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Route 4 south, California. Come hear the many moods of Christmas with The Washington National Opera and Two Rivers Harmony. A reception with the performers will follow in the parish hall. Reservations are highly recommended as seating is limited.

301-863-2315

thesanfordconcertseries.com

December 25

Christmas Day

SMECO offices closed. Our Contact Center is available 24/7.

1-888-440-3311

www.smeco.coop





Keep utility poles clear

Posting signs or attaching items to utility poles is against the law and poses a safety hazard for SMECO linemen who climb the poles for maintenance or repairs.

Safety violations include:

- support beams attached to a SMECO utility pole
- a sign on a SMECO pole
- metal wire fencing attached to a SMECO pole

Those found in violation of this law could face up to six months imprisonment, a fine up to \$500, or both. For more information on the law regarding tampering with electrical equipment, see Annotated Code of Maryland, § 6-303.

