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Presidents' Day  
Holiday

SMECO offices closed. Customer Care Center is available 24/7.  
1-888-440-3311  
smeco.coop

Visit [smeco.coop/aroundtown](http://smeco.coop/aroundtown) for upcoming local events or to have your non-profit event included in SMECO's online calendar and Cooperative Review newsletter.

**Submission guidelines:**

SMECO's Around Town community calendar is designed to announce educational, social, cultural, or recreational events, open to the general public, sponsored by non-profit civic, social, charitable, fraternal, or educational organizations. The calendar may not be used to promote business, political, or advocacy events, or regularly scheduled activities. Exceptions to these guidelines may be made at SMECO's discretion.

**Energy efficiency tip of the month**

Replace standard power strips with advanced power strips to save energy. Advanced power strips look like ordinary power strips, but they have built-in features that are designed to reduce the amount of energy used by standby electronics that consume energy even when they're not in use (also known as phantom load).

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) estimates that the average home loses \$200 annually to energy wasted by phantom load.

Source: [nrel.gov](http://nrel.gov)

**Why is my bill high?**

Bills are based on the amount of electricity you use. When you use more energy, your bill goes up. Energy use changes seasonally. When it's cold in the winter and your heating system runs, or when it's hot in the summer and your air conditioning runs, your bill will be higher. Your bill is typically at its lowest in May and October, because you use less energy heating and cooling in those months. You can see how much energy you use every hour of every day when you log in to Account Manager.

**Know your heat pump.** Your heat pump has different heating modes. The normal mode is the most efficient. The auxiliary or emergency mode is less efficient (more expensive to run). If it is very cold and your heat pump runs continuously, it may still be more efficient than running it in the auxiliary or emergency heating mode.

**Know your heating system.** Whether you use a heat pump, gas furnace, oil furnace, electric furnace, or electric strip heating, get to know how to use your system efficiently. If you can control your heating and cooling costs, along with your water heating costs, you can control your energy bills.

**Control your heating costs:**

- Have your heating system serviced annually.
- Clean or replace filters monthly.
- Find the coolest comfortable setting. (We recommend 68°F in winter.)
- Install a programmable thermostat.
- Take advantage of sunlight.
- Weatherize doors and windows.
- Ensure duct work is sealed and insulated.
- Insulate your attic, walls, and crawlspace.

**Control your water heating costs:**

- Set your water heater thermostat between 120° to 125°.
- Use cold water whenever possible, such as when washing clothes, and only run full loads.
- Take shorter showers.

Visit [smeco.coop/highbill](http://smeco.coop/highbill) for more reasons for a high bill.

**Energy rate decreased**

SMECO recently received approval for a decrease in the power supply rates that residential members pay for their electric service. On September 30, 2020, SMECO submitted a filing to the Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) to reduce its residential base energy charges. The lower rates were approved by the PSC on November 25 and went into effect on December 1, 2020. This is the second time SMECO has filed for and received approval for a rate decrease for residential customers in 2020.

SMECO's Standard Offer Service (SOS) rate is made up of the energy charge and the Power Cost Adjustment (PCA). SMECO's base residential energy charges for winter will decrease by 2.7 percent, from 6.74 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) to 6.56 cents per kWh. Winter energy charges appear on bills rendered October through April. Base residential summer energy charges will be reduced from 6.21 cents per kWh to 6.11 cents per kWh, a 1.6 percent reduction.

Base SOS Rate (energy charge)	PCA (charge for December)	Total SOS rate (price to compare)
\$0.0656	-\$0.003737	\$0.061863

On SMECO's monthly electric bills, lower power supply costs have been reflected in the PCA, which has been a credit for the last several months. The PCA, which changes monthly, was a credit of 0.3737 cents per kWh for December. The PCA credit reduced the total SOS rate for December from 6.57 cents per kWh to 6.1863 cents per kWh.

Learn more about SMECO's Standard Offer Service rate and check the up-to-date energy rates including the PCA at [smeco.coop/customer-choice/standard-offer-service](http://smeco.coop/customer-choice/standard-offer-service).



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- 5 Do you have a high bill? Learn ways to reduce energy use and save.
- 6 Residential base energy rate decreased.

# Automate your electric bill payment

Free yourself from the drudgery of paying bills every month by taking advantage of SMECO's Budget Billing and AutoPay programs. Budget Billing removes any guesswork and provides you with even monthly payments. Sign up for AutoPay and that even monthly payment is taken right out of your bank account.

## AutoPay

You can use your bank checking or savings account or your Visa, MasterCard, or Discover credit or debit card to have your electric bill paid automatically each month.

- Signing up for the AutoPay program permits SMECO to deduct money from an account to pay your monthly electric bill.
- Once you are enrolled, each month you will receive a message on your bill advising you of the date the payment will be withdrawn from your bank or charged against your credit card and the amount of the payment.
- If you should need to temporarily suspend your AutoPay, just contact SMECO four working days prior to the payment date on your bill. You can then pay by cash or check. You can also elect to discontinue your participation in the program by contacting SMECO at 1-888-440-3311.
- All SMECO customers with accounts in good standing are eligible to join the program.

To enroll, fill out the form at [smeco.coop/autopay](http://smeco.coop/autopay) or go to Account Manager. You can also enroll, update, or cancel your participation in AutoPay by calling 1-888-440-3311.

## Budget Billing

Signing up for Budget Billing makes bill payment a breeze because you will know in advance how much your monthly payment will be.

Signing up is easy. To apply, go to Account Manager and use the Budget link under Account

Services. If you do not have an online account in Account Manager, you can fill out an enrollment form at [smeco.coop/budget](http://smeco.coop/budget). After your acceptance in the program, your bill will be the same each month. In order to be eligible:

- The customer must be billed under SMECO's residential rates.
- The electric bills at the customer's location must total \$300 or more for the most recent six consecutive months.
- The customer's account must not be past due.
- In the absence of a six-month history for the location, a customer may be accepted on the Budget Plan when a reasonable estimate can be made by SMECO.

After six months, the amount of your even monthly payment will be reviewed and may be adjusted to include any credit on your account or any difference between what you've paid and what you owe. You can request a review of your payment plan at any time; SMECO may also make adjustments to your payment plan amount during the year if necessary.

A customer can terminate budget billing at any time; however, any credit will be applied to future bills. The Budget Plan will be terminated when the customer requests disconnection of electric service. At that time, any debit balance will become due. The Budget Plan may also be terminated if the customer fails to pay the full monthly Budget Plan amount by the "Amount Due After" date on the bill.

## Key things to remember:

- If you have multiple accounts, you will need to set up AutoPay for each one that you would like on the program.
- If your payment information changes, make sure that information is updated for every account that is on AutoPay.

# Benefits of tree trimming

Clearing trees and overgrown vegetation is vital to provide safe, reliable power to our members.

We clear certain areas in our service territory, known as rights of way, to:

- Keep power lines clear of tree limbs
- Restore power outages more quickly
- Keep crews and members of our community safe
- Reduce unexpected costs for repairs

Vegetation management improves service reliability for you—our members.



# Five ways to stay cozy this winter

When you're feeling chilly at home, you can choose budget-friendly ways you can keep comfortable without turning up the thermostat.

Here are five easy ways to stay cozy this winter.

1. Whether you're experiencing extremely cold winter temps or you simply "run cold," an electric blanket can deliver quick warmth like a regular throw or blanket cannot. Electric blankets can include a variety of features, like timers and dual temperature settings (if your cuddle buddy prefers less heat). This winter, consider an electric blanket instead of turning up the heat, and your energy bill will thank you.
2. One of the easiest ways to stay cozy at home is to keep your feet warm. Our feet play a critical role in regulating body temperature, so when your feet are warm, your body automatically feels warmer. Try a pair of comfortable wool socks or house slippers to stay toasty.
3. On winter days when the sun is shining, take advantage and harness natural warmth from sunlight. Open all curtains, drapes and blinds in your home to let the sunshine in—you'll be able to feel the difference.

4. Another way to make your home cozier is to use a humidifier. Cold air doesn't hold water vapor like warm air, so by adding humidity inside your home, you can feel a little warmer. A favorable level of humidity inside your home can also help clear sinuses, soften skin, and improve sleep.
5. Beyond adding visual appeal to your home, area rugs can also provide extra insulation and a warm surface for your feet on cold winter days. Use large area rugs in rooms where you spend the most time. You'll enjoy the new colors and textures of the rug, and the additional warmth will help keep your home comfortable.

These are just a few ways you can stay cozy this winter without turning up the thermostat. Don't forget the hot chocolate!

*Written by Abby Berry. Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56 percent of the nation's landscape.*