



Last month this magazine celebrated its 75th anniversary. The feature story found in July's *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* gave readers insight into how a small idea of providing more information to electric cooperative members became the magazine you receive today. The story describes how a few people, perhaps gathered in an orchard, came together to accomplish a common goal.

Today, the goal might be different but the methods remain the same for most cooperatives. It boils down to people working together to meet a common goal, and it's a daily effort at Richland Electric Cooperative. Sometimes the results of this cooperation are clearly apparent and a part of our featured outreach programs, such as the story about the Yuba Feed Mill featured in this month's *WECN* magazine. Other times the results are a rather mundane part of everyday business but an important part of making sure we are accomplishing our goals of safety, reliability, and affordability.

Safety

Our safety program, which includes ongoing training on how to safely operate high-voltage electrical equipment, is part of a shared program that includes all Wisconsin electric cooperatives. By working together we are able to employ professional instructors, develop advanced curriculum, and share ideas among all cooperatives. A portion of each regular safety meeting is set aside

to discuss close calls, incidents that could have had tragic consequences had they gone just a bit differently.

Many times these close calls did not happen at Richland, but through our joint training and safety program every lineman in Wisconsin's electric cooperatives can learn from the experience of others. Without this cooperative program, the cost and the quality of Richland's safety program would be much different—more expensive and less robust. This shared service is complemented by a joint program of safety excellence administered by a nationwide team from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.





Reliability

Operating a system of over 900 miles of power lines in the greater Richland County area is challenging given our terrain, vegetation, and other natural perils. Occasionally some of these natural threats are overwhelming, causing outages that without additional manpower would last for days. We are part of a mutual aid organization known as ROPE, which is an acronym for Restoration of Power Emergency. With one phone call we can summon aid from other cooperative partners for additional manpower and equipment. In some cases we go to the aid of others suffering from storm damage as part of our responsibility to the program.

Over 10 years ago we developed a shared vegetation management program with our neighboring electric cooperatives that allows us to bid tree-clearing work as part of a much larger project, thereby making specialized equipment available due to the economy of scale.

Even now, we are working with our neighboring cooperatives to evaluate new technologies such as fault finding and self-healing network equipment that would be far more expensive if we were bidding this equipment on our own.

Affordability

Economy of scale can lead to big savings for your electric cooperative. By working together we can go to the market and offer vendors much larger orders, which usually results in much lower cost per unit. We are part of a purchasing cooperative, Rural Electric Supply Cooperative, which allows us to get pricing on poles, wires, and equipment as if we were 100 times our size. This relationship alone saves us nearly 17 percent on average for most equipment we purchase.

Our information technology needs are met by the National Information Solutions Cooperative, an organization owned by electric and telephone cooperatives nationwide, including Richland. This sharing of resources and the economy of scale provide us with significant savings on everything from our desktop computers to the postage we pay to send electric bills and notices. Furthermore, because of the common goals electric cooperatives share, we can save on software development and network connection expenses.

There are hundreds of examples of electric cooperatives working together to save considerable money. But it goes beyond purchasing.



As legislation is introduced that could threaten our members' ability to afford energy, we act collectively to deliver a message to policymakers so they understand exactly the consequences of their actions. When delivering our collective message we are often successful in keeping energy costs down while still meeting the goals of policymakers.

For 75 years this magazine has been meeting the needs of electric cooperatives through a cooperative effort. It's a shining example of one of our cooperative principals, "Cooperation Among Cooperatives," and there are hundreds more that are part of our everyday culture. ■



A Small Change Can Make a Big Difference

Replacing the Filter on Your Air Conditioner Regularly Pays Off in Comfort and Costs

By **Anne Prince**

When it comes to energy efficiency in the home, sometimes small changes can make a big impact. A small, unglamorous task like changing the filters on your HVAC system makes your unit run more efficiently—keeping your house cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. It also saves money. And the savings gained from having your system run more efficiently can be applied to more fun or entertaining pursuits that your family can enjoy together.

The Lowdown on Dirt

As you move around your home, you drive dust into the air from carpets, furniture, and drapes. Regardless of where it comes from, dust and dirt trapped in a system's air filter lead to several problems, including:

- Reduced air flow in the home and up to 15 percent higher operating costs
- Costly duct cleaning or replacement
- Lowered system efficiency

Making the Switch

Now that you know the facts, it's time to get busy changing or cleaning the air filter in your heating/cooling system. Many HVAC professionals recommend that you clean or change the filter on your air conditioner or furnace

monthly. It's a simple and easy task that in many cases only takes a few minutes. Filters are also readily available in most hardware or home-improvement stores.

Filters are available in a variety of types and efficiencies, rated by a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV). MERV, a method developed by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, tests filter effectiveness. The higher the MERV number, the higher the filter's effectiveness at keeping dust out of your system.

While most types of filters must be replaced, some filters are reusable. And don't forget about the winter months. Your home's heating system needs to work as efficiently as possible to keep you warm, and a clean

air filter helps it do just that.

Heating and cooling professionals recommend turning your system off before changing the air filter. Make sure that the arrow on the filter—which indicates the direction of the airflow—is pointing toward the blower motor. When you've made the change, turn your system back on.

A Teachable Moment

Beyond saving money and improving the air quality in your home, changing your air filter is a great opportunity to teach your family more about energy efficiency. Consider getting everyone involved, and the entire family will learn how simple changes can make a big difference.

For other tips on how to save, visit www.TogetherWeSave.com. ■

Anne Prince writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned electric cooperatives.

Maintaining Your Air Conditioner

Annual maintenance can help improve your comfort and the efficiency of your air conditioner while prolonging the life of your unit. Hire a certified professional when your unit needs more than basic maintenance.

- 1 Routinely replace or clean your air filters. This can lower your air conditioner's energy consumption by 5-15 percent.
- 2 Check your air conditioner's evaporator coil every year and clean it as necessary.
- 3 If your coil fins are bent, use a "fin comb" to straighten them.
- 4 If you have a split system, be sure to clean debris and leaves from the fan, compressor, and condenser.
- 5 Occasionally pass a stiff wire through your unit's drain channels to prevent clogs.
- 6 For window air conditioners, inspect the window seals to keep cool air from escaping.

Source: Department of Energy



Barbershop Memories

When I was a kid, Ma cut my hair with a hand-operated clipper that pulled like the dickens. Getting a haircut was in the same category as having a tooth drilled. On special occasions, Pa took me to the barber in town. This was usually before school started in the fall, or sometimes just ahead of the school Christmas program. Mr. Ehlert was the barber in Wild Rose, a man of considerable reputation for his ability to talk nonstop. His barbershop was a little room behind the bank and right on the shore of the millpond.

On a warm late August afternoon, Pa dropped me off at the barbershop and said he'd be back in an hour to pick me up. I soon learned that someone was ahead of me, so I picked up a copy of *Outdoor Life* and began paging through it.

Mr. Ehlert was talking nonstop: about the weather, about the fish in the millpond, and about the troubles Emil Sorenson was having with one of his horses. One topic after another, without a break. The electric clipper hummed, the shears clicked and a pile of hair accumulated on the floor. Soon the customer in the chair was finished.

"Next," said Mr. Ehlert. I crawled up into the chair and made myself comfortable.

"You're Herman Apps' kid, aren't, you?"

"I am."

"How do you want your hair cut?"

"So it looks good for my first day of school."

"And it will," said Mr. Ehlert as he grabbed his clipper and began buzzing around my ears. Mr. Ehlert kept on talking nonstop, but I didn't listen much. I was thinking about school and how hard it would be this year.

When he finished, he asked, "Want some smelly stuff on your neck?"

"Sure, sure," I mumbled. I hadn't been listening.

Soon Mr. Ehlert was rubbing lilac-smelling water on my neck. Pa hadn't come back yet, so I sat down in an empty chair to wait.

"Next," Mr. Ehlert said. He took the barber cloth and gave it a massive shake so that it snapped.

A big, burly-looking man stood up. He was huge, well over six feet tall and wide as an oak tree. I didn't know him and couldn't recall if I'd ever seen him before.

He shuffled across the floor and sat down heavily in the barber chair. Mr. Ehlert flung the barber cloth around the man's neck, fastening it in the back.

"And how would you like your hair cut?"

"In silence, please," the big man said.

You'd think that a tree had fallen on Mr. Ehlert.

He turned an odd shade of white, and for a moment he said nothing. The other men in the barbershop heard the exchange and began laughing, louder and louder. Some were waiting for a haircut; others were just there.

Mr. Ehlert pretended he didn't hear as he busied himself cutting the hair of this customer who requested silence. Folks recalling that day said they'd never known Mr. Ehlert to be quiet for so long a time. ■



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