Another October and another Member Appreciation Picnic have passed. We are thankful to all of our members who attended the picnic this year. It turned out to be a respectable fall day compared to the previous several weeks, and we were thankful for a little sunshine. Our numbers were down this year, but we believe members were taking advantage of the nicer weather. It has been a tough year for southwest Wisconsin due to the numerous rainy days and flooding. We still served approximately 300 plates. We are also extremely grateful to those who donated towards flood relief and to the food pantry. We were able to raise just under $450! From the board of directors and staff of Richland Electric Cooperative, we thank you for being wonderful members, and we hope to see you at our picnic next fall!
Perhaps you are familiar with an undesirable aspect of the electronic and IOT (Internet of Things) revolution: vampire loads. Vampire loads come from devices that use electricity even when they appear to be off. The primary culprits are chargers, set-top television boxes, instant-on televisions, and gaming systems. There are others, but these four represent the major offenders.

Let’s look at how these vampire loads occur and why they are approaching 10 percent of average household electric use, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Chargers take the 120 VAC (volts alternating current) power at the outlet and reduce it down to the voltage required by the connected device, usually 5 to 12 VDC (volts direct current). Obviously, when your device is charging, the charger is using electricity, but you might be surprised to learn that chargers are still using small amounts of energy even when they’re not connected to a device.

Television set-top boxes also consume energy when they appear to be inactive. Anytime the set-top box’s lights are on, it is using power. Like chargers, they use more when the television is on, but they are always working—even when the TV is off. This is especially true for those devices with a DVR function that records your favorite TV shows.

The instant-on television is another culprit. The intention of the “instant-on” feature is instant gratification for the viewer, meaning no waiting for the TV to turn on and warm up. Unfortunately, for that convenience, the TV must be on at nearly full power. So, in this mode, it can be a real energy drain.

The typical gaming console can use as much energy as a regular refrigerator even when it’s not being used. Make sure to check the console settings and disable automatic updates, which is where the energy drain comes from. Games on the console are frequently updated, which requires a lot of electricity.

So how does the average family combat these dreaded vampire loads? Garlic garlands? Silver bullets?

Fortunately, none of the remedies of fable are necessary. You just need to change how you handle these energy-sucking electronics. Here are a few suggestions.

- Unplug chargers when not in use.
- Invest in smart power strips. These look like normal power strips but have a twist—one of the outlets is the “master” that receives power all the time. The others are off. When the device connected to the master outlet turns on, the rest of the outlets receive power too. It’s ingenious and perfect for entertainment set-ups. Have the television in the master outlet and when you turn it on, the set-top box, speakers, streaming devices, etc. will turn on too. Smart power strips are also ideal for PCs and their peripherals.
- Turn off the instant-on function on your TV. Turn off set-top boxes that do not contain the DVR functionality or use a smart power strip.
- Disable automatic updates in gaming consoles, and turn the console completely off when you finish using it.
- When replacing any device or appliance, look for an EnergyStar rated product.

Vampire loads are a real problem that will only continue to grow as the digital age advances. But you can fight the vampires with vigilance and application of the recommendations above. Check with Richland Electric Cooperative for additional suggestions and energy-saving advice.
SET THE TABLE FOR SAFETY

Whether testing out a new dish or whipping up a family classic, there’s one recipe that should also be included on the menu this holiday season: safety. Follow this “Recipe for Kitchen Safety” and help this year’s festivities create memories instead of danger.

INGREDIENTS FOR SAFETY

FUNCTIONING SMOKE ALARMS

FUNCTIONING GROUND FAULT CIRCUIT INTERRUPTERS (GFCIs)

VIGILANCE

DIRECTIONS

1. Smoke alarms should be installed in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the home. For the best protection, smoke alarms should be interconnected, so that they all sound if one sounds.

2. Test the batteries in each smoke alarm every month, replace them once a year, and replace the unit every 10 years.

3. GFCIs are electrical safety devices that trip electrical circuits when they detect ground faults, or leakage currents, that could shock or electrocute someone. GFCIs should be installed where electricity and water may come in contact, such as the kitchen. GFCIs should also be tested every month. Additional instructions for testing can be found at www.esfi.org.

4. Prevent fires by making sure your oven and stovetop are clean and free of grease and dust. You should also clean the exhaust hood and duct over the stove regularly. Lastly, vacuum the refrigerator coils every three months to prevent potentially dangerous dirt build-up.

5. Never leave cooking unattended. You should not cook if you are sleepy or under the influence of alcohol. Children should also be closely supervised and kept at least three feet away from all cooking appliances.

6. It’s easy to forget about something that’s cooking, especially when you’re entertaining guests. Use a kitchen timer to make sure your dish doesn’t become a fire hazard.

7. Enjoy! Being proactive about safety will give you peace of mind and allow you to enjoy your time with loved ones.

For more information about cooking and holiday safety visit www.esfi.org

ESFi
WOODPILE DAYS

Woodpiles are reminders of life on the farm before central heating and oil or gas-fired furnaces.

For those of us growing up in the country, woodpiles elicit memories of hard work, when “making wood” was as important as making hay or threshing grain. Those who recall those woodpile days will remember the many times they were warmed as they cut and split wood, and the pride felt when they had constructed a beautiful woodpile.

In my country neighborhood, a big woodpile made a statement to those driving by. A substantial woodpile said of a farmer, “I’m ready for the worst kind of winter.” Woodpiles also demonstrated neatness and attention to detail—important values for any rural person, but especially important for farmers. Pa would often say, “Just look at Miller’s nice woodpile.” A translation of “nice” revealed first that Bill Miller had a big woodpile, not some little dump of wood sticks but a pile of blocks as high as the tallest man in the neighborhood and as long as the chicken house. A second meaning of “nice” was the way the split blocks were piled on top of each other, end to end with the split sides showing, forming a roof.

Miller’s woodpile was the kind that people noticed and talked about; it made them stand out among the neighbors and gave them a place of prominence. Miller’s woodpile also evoked envious comments from those with lesser woodpiles. “If Bill Miller spent as much time with his cows as he did with his woodpile, maybe his cows would amount something, too.” Or, “Jeeze, Bill Miller and his wife must have cold blood. They need all that wood to keep warm? You’d think they lived in Alaska.”

Although neighbors commented about the size and beauty of woodpiles, and what made a nice woodpile, nobody acknowledged that a woodpile was temporary. It was put up to be taken down. The colder the winter, the faster the woodpile disappeared.

A popular myth associated with making wood and woodpiles is, “He who saws his own wood is twice warmed.” This is a lie, a real whopper of mistruth. First, let’s correct the language. No rural person every talked about sawing his own wood. You “made wood.” During the process of making wood, from the time you cut down a tree, to the time you built a woodpile, there were many opportunities for warming.

Of course, it wasn’t just any old tree that you cut down for firewood. No willow trees. No box elder trees. For starting a fire quickly, pine wood served the purpose. Red pine, white pine, scotch pine, all would suffice. For sustained heat, you turned to the oaks—black oak, burr oak, and white oak. Cherry wood held the heat well, as did hickory and walnut, and black locust—if you could stand the smell of locust smoke. Not good.

Today, few farm people heat their homes with wood stoves, although wood-burning outside furnaces are popular in some places. But one almost never sees a “nice woodpile” these days.

Go to www.jerryapps.com for more information about Jerry’s writing and television work. Contact Jerry at jerryappsauthor@gmail with questions or comments. Also check out Jerry’s latest book, “Simple Things: Lessons From The Family Farm.”