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One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.
10700 Fairgrounds Road
P.O. Box 477
Huntingdon, PA 16652-0477
814/643-2650
1-800-432-0680
www.valleyrec.com

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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Is America ready for the electric car?



by Wayne Miller
President & CEO

MUCH BUZZ surrounded the 2011 release of electric vehicles by two prominent automakers. The Chevrolet Volt and Nissan Leaf were hailed as “the future is now” cars that would usher in a new era of energy independence and technological innovation for our country.

Many of you “Back to the Future” fans are probably still waiting for the fly-

ing DeLorean that Doc Brown and Marty McFly promised us by 2015. Auto manufacturers have only three more years to figure that out.

In the meantime, we will have to settle for the speculative phasing out of the gas combustion engine.

One question I hear a lot about electric cars centers around their effect on the environment. Because you plug them in just like any other appliance — creating more work for power plants — will they really help prevent carbon emissions? According to the Electric Power Research Institute, a Palo Alto, Calif.,-based consortium, the short answer is, “Yes.”

Despite the extra load, various airborne emissions supposedly should decline with the use of electric cars. Each region of the country should see reductions in greenhouse gas emissions over several decades, thanks in part to technologies — very expensive ones, I might add — that decrease carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. In


addition, electric cars could perhaps help rather than hinder electric utilities if consumers plug them in at night, helping the system run more cost-effectively because that is when power costs and demand are at their lowest.

However, the costs of owning electric cars may still keep most Americans from buying. The Cooperative Research Network estimates that payback in terms of gasoline savings would take about a decade (depending on your driving habits). And if you want the car to charge up quickly (instead of the usual four to eight hours or so with a regular 110-volt outlet), you’ll have to install a higher-voltage outlet at your home.

Besides the hefty price tag of having the 220-volt outlet installed, which one co-op wholesale power provider estimates to be about \$2,000, your home’s wiring may need to be upgraded to accommodate it. The charges quickly add up.

Whether or not an electric car suits you also depends on your lifestyle, how much you drive, and if you want your vehicle to have fancy amenities that use more electricity.

Some cities across the county are attempting to do their part — electric vehicle charging stations are springing up at various locations. But there are very few, if any, in most suburban and rural areas.

It seems that barriers, including expense, limited driving range on a charge, and easy access to chargers, still inhibit widespread use of these cars. 

Stay healthy, safe this school year

BY MAGEN HOWARD

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

BACK-TO-SCHOOL preparation means more than just toting a list of needed classroom items to the store or buying a new pair of jeans and some sneakers. Consider these issues as the first bell sounds.

You are what you eat

Packing lunch ensures that you control what fuels your child's body. The National Institutes of Health recommend making lunch a family activity — kids usually want to eat what they've helped prepare.

Let your child choose from a variety of easy-to-pack snacks, like cheese sticks, whole fruits and crackers. And if your morning is rushed, try packing lunch in the evening before bedtime.

Of course, sometimes packing isn't always practical and school-provided lunches become necessary. In January 2012, the federal government upped standards for school meals — the first revision in 15 years — that now makes them healthier. Among the requirements are an offering of fruits and veggies every day, along with more whole-grain foods. Plus the amounts of saturated fat, trans fats and sodium in the foods have been reduced.

All the preparation in the world, though, won't help if your child gets to school and swaps his or her carrot sticks for someone else's pudding cup.

Health professionals have long agreed that, like most habits, healthy eating begins at home. If good food choices are all a child has grown up with, he or she will be more likely to continue making good choices at school and beyond.

Wash, wash, wash your hands

Schools are breeding grounds for illness, thanks to a myriad of shared surfaces and hygiene habits that are still a work in progress. Hand-washing remains the first line of defense in preventing the sniffles.

Warm running water and soap are



NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE/BILL BRANSON

the preferred tools to clean hands. But in a pinch, alcohol-based hand sanitizers work, too (unless hands are grubby — then soap is the only way to go), according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Teach your child good hand-washing techniques, which include scrubbing the backs of hands, between fingers and under nails, and washing for at least 20 seconds.

One trick is to tell youngsters to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice while washing to ensure enough time has been spent de-germing.

Hand-washing is necessary around mealtimes (both for eating and preparing food), and after using the bathroom, touching animals or handling trash.

Also, instill in your child the necessity of using a tissue when sneezing or coughing (or an elbow or shirt sleeve if tissues aren't handy), and washing hands afterward.

Staying safe

The start of each school year is a

RIGHT START: Begin teaching your children healthy and safe habits at home so they'll make good choices at school, too.

great time to have a chat with your kids about safety — from walking or driving to school to how to handle a bully. And encourage them to take safety drills seriously.

Teaching them how to be safe around electricity is vitally important as well. Make sure they know the basic rules for electric safety:

1. Don't plug a lot of things into one outlet or extension cord. This has the potential of damaging your home's electrical system and it could even cause a fire.

2. Be sure to keep all electrical cords out of walkways and tucked away neatly, if possible. Pets might chew on the cords or people might trip and fall over them.

3. Don't ever climb the fence or go into an electrical substation. If a ball or pet gets inside the fence, ask an adult to call the electric cooperative

to retrieve it for you.

4. Don't pull an electrical cord out from the wall. Pulling on the cord (rather than the plug) can damage the appliance, the plug or the outlet.

5. Remember to fly kites far away from power lines or substations.

Kites and strings may conduct electricity, which means the person holding the kite could get electrocuted.

6. Ask a grown-up for assistance if you need to use appliances or electronics that must be plugged into outlets.

7. Look up and look out for wires before climbing trees. The electricity can travel right through the tree branches and into you!

8. Have an adult place safety caps on all unused electrical outlets. Covering outlets can also help to save energy because it reduces air flow from outside the home.

9. Remind mom or dad to look out for power lines when they're using a ladder, chainsaw or other outdoor equipment.

10. Keep electrical items far away

from any water sources. Many electrical accidents around the house happen when people use electricity near water.

For more resources on how to keep your kids healthy and safe at school, visit www.cdc.gov/features/safeschools. For more tips and information on electrical safety and efficiency for youngsters, visit www.valleyrec.com and click the Kids Korner tab. ☀

Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health and alliantenergykids.com. Susan Penning contributed.

CUTTING CAMP COSTS:

Give your seasonal home an energy checkup

BY SUSAN PENNING

Contributor

AS SUMMER WINDS DOWN and your family scrambles to enjoy those last warm days at the cabin, probably the last thing on your mind is how much the place's energy bill is costing you.

But keep in mind that cutting back on your seasonal home's energy use means you will have more money for fun stuff, like that new volleyball net or stainless steel grill you've been eyeing.

How can you scour your cabin for energy leaks without giving up too much time around the fire pit? Start by visiting www.valleyrec.com. Follow the Save Energy tab to the HomeEnergyCalculator. This robust — and free — energy auditing software allows you to input specific information about your camp's or cottage's energy use and then offers steps you can take to improve its efficiency.

If you aren't yet computer-savvy or you don't have easy access to the internet, Valley Rural Electric employs a certified energy auditor who can visit your seasonal property and perform a series of tests to determine where the bulk of your energy dollars are going. He can offer a comprehensive, hourly bill analysis that may help determine how energy is being used. He can also provide on-the-spot recommendations for saving money on your energy bills. In addition,



he will soon have the capability of using thermal-imaging technology to hunt for leaks and offering a complete report of those findings.

While you work on completing an energy audit at your home away from home, consider these tips to cut energy costs right away:

1. Seal cracks and openings to prevent air from leaking into the cabin. Add caulk or weather-stripping to seal air leaks around leaky doors and windows.

2. Water heating can account for 14-25 percent of the energy consumed in your seasonal home. Turn down the temperature of the water heater to 120 F. You'll not only save energy, you'll avoid scalding your hands.

3. Install more efficient lighting. Only about 10-15 percent of the electricity that

GREAT ESCAPE: Seasonal homes, like this cabin near Ferguson Valley Road, Mifflin County, can be great sources of peace and quiet. They can also be energy hogs. Energy audits can help identify problems and help you pinpoint areas for improvement.

incandescent bulbs consume results in light — the rest is turned into heat.

4. Turn off the cooling system and open windows while sleeping. When you wake in the morning, shut the windows and blinds to capture the cool air. Install window coverings to prevent heat gain through your windows.

5. Set your thermostat as high as comfortably possible in the summer. The smaller the difference between the indoor and outdoor temperatures, the lower the overall cooling bill will be. ☀

Some information courtesy of the U.S. Department of Energy.

Fireplace efficiency: Don't let energy savings go up in smoke

BY KELLY TRAPNELL
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

YOUR FIREPLACE will create a warm, cozy atmosphere when upcoming chilly weather arrives, but you shouldn't let it add unnecessary dollars to your electric bills.

Fireplaces heat the room where they are located, but often at the expense of the rest of the house. Much of the heat in traditional fireplaces goes up the chimney instead of warming the living space, and the draft actually pulls heat from other rooms as well. So if your thermostat is located away from the fireplace, it will work harder to maintain room temperatures in the rest of the house.

Fireplace inserts help boost energy efficiency a bit. However, the emissions from old inserts and fireplaces without inserts increase pollution up to 20 times more than using U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-certified wood or pellet stoves, or gas/oil furnaces. So, it is better to look for an EPA-certified insert if you are in the market for something to supplement your home's heating system.

You may also contact a local retailer to learn more about efficient stoves and inserts that will circulate hot air into a room to help lower heating costs. But keep in mind the disadvantages of using high-maintenance fires as heat sources,



COZY YET COSTLY: Fires are a low-efficiency, high-maintenance source of heat requiring constant tending and ash removal.

including constant attention and ash disposal.

If you don't have an efficient insert, but love a crackling fire, follow these measures for safety and improved efficiency:

Seal those cracks. While sealing drafts around your home, don't forget to check the chimney. Smoke and heat that

escape through cracks can pose a fire hazard. It's best to hire a professional to fix cracks in high-heat areas.

Fight the draft. If you plan on a long-lasting fire, lower the thermostat to save energy. Just be prepared to wear a sweater in other rooms. Resist the temptation to crank the temperature back up after the fire goes out.

Clean sweep. A National Fire Protection Association standard suggests having your chimney and fireplace inspected once a year and cleaned or repaired when necessary. Even if you don't use your fireplace often, an annual inspection should reveal deterioration that needs attention or any blockage from animal nests.

Batten down the hatch. Keep the chimney flue closed when not using your fireplace to prevent conditioned or heated air from escaping.

Choose wood wisely. Wood that is dried at least six months provides the best heat, so avoid any that is wet or newly chopped. The harder the tree species, the longer your fire will burn. This makes ironwood, rock elm, hickory, oak, sugar maple and beech good choices. Store wood off the ground and away from your house to remove the threat of termite infestation, and cover the top to lessen moisture, but leave the sides open for air circulation. ☀

Sources: U.S. Department of Energy, Consumer Reports, EPA, Chimney Safety Institute of America.

COMING NEXT MONTH:

The list of local discounts you can get just by using your Co-op Connections discount card

YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS IT!

