

THE CONNECTION

Look out for scams



Jim Kidd

Unfortunately, in today's world, scams are inevitable. Scammers can threaten you with everything from legal action involving the IRS to turning off power to your home.

Utility scams often involve an individual or group posing as an employee of your electric cooperative. The scammer may use threatening language in order to frighten you into offering your credit card or bank account information. Don't fall victim to these types of scams.

Understand the threats posed and your best course of action:

- If someone calls demanding you pay your electric bill immediately, gather as much information as you can from that individual, hang up the phone, and contact the local authorities. Scammers often use threats and urgency to pressure you into giving them your bank account number or loading a pre-paid credit or debit card. Consumers Energy mails the regular monthly bill as well as a reminder if a member's bill is past due. Cooperative staff also typically attempts to contact any members several times via phone if there are collection issues for member accounts, and we will never require you to obtain a prepaid card to make payment. If you have any concerns about your electric bill, contact our Member Services Department at 800-696-6552. Our staff will be happy to check the status of your account for you.
- If someone comes to your home to collect money or inspect parts of your property, and you are unsure if that person is an employee of Consumers Energy, you can

continued on page 8-B ►



WIN

ONE OF ~~TWO~~ **FOUR** MONTHLY \$5 BILL CREDITS

THIS MONTH'S CONTEST:

How many Christmas presents can you find in The Connection? FOUR winners will be chosen for the month of December!

◆ ◆ ◆

Winners for the month of October:
Sonya & Tom Colvin, Cambridge
Merrell & Mona Kilborn, Marshalltown

Here's how to enter:

1. Answer the question or challenge posed each month.
2. Send answers to Consumers Energy with:
 - Name
 - Service address
 - Account number
 - Phone number
 - Email address

Email to: kglenney@consumersenergy.coop
Subject line: Contest

Mail to: Consumers Energy
2074 242nd Street
Marshalltown, IA 50158

3. Winners' names will be drawn at random and published in upcoming issues of *The Connection*.

December 2017
– Your Source for
Power and Information

Dates To Remember:

Dec. 1	Read Meters
Dec. 3	Bills Due
Dec. 5	Automatic Payments Deducted
Dec. 8	Mail Bills
Dec. 25	Christmas Holiday
- 26	Office Closed
Dec. 27	Automatic Payments Deducted
Dec. 29	New Year's Eve Holiday
	Office Closed at 11:30 am
Jan. 1	New Year's Day Holiday
	Office Closed
Jan. 2	Read Meters
Jan. 3	Bills Due
Jan. 3	Automatic Payments Deducted

Look out for scams *(continued)*



call us to verify that the person is, in fact, an employee. If the individual is not, call local authorities for assistance, and do not let that person into your home.

There are other types of scams to watch out for:

- Government agencies like the IRS will never call to inform you that you have unpaid taxes or other liens against you. You will always receive this type of information in the mail. If someone calls claiming to be from the IRS, hang up immediately.
- If you receive an email from an unknown sender, an email riddled with spelling errors and typos, or an email threatening action unless a sum of money is paid, do not click any links provided within the email, and do not respond to the email. Simply delete the email, or send it to your spam folder.
- If someone calls your home claiming to have discovered a virus on your computer, hang up. This caller's intent is to access personal information you may be keeping on your computer.

Consumers Energy takes member safety seriously. Cooperative staff wants to make sure you avoid any and all types of scams that could put you or your financial information in jeopardy. If you are concerned that you may be a victim of a scam call regarding your Consumers Energy account, contact the co-op at 800-696-6552.

~ Jim Kidd, General Manager

Prepare for Winter Storms Now

A winter storm occurs when there is significant precipitation and the temperature is low enough that precipitation forms as sleet or snow, or when rain turns to ice. A winter storm can range from freezing rain and ice, to moderate snowfall over a few hours, to a blizzard that lasts for several days. Many winter storms are accompanied by dangerously low temperatures.

Winter storms can cause power outages that last for days. They can make roads and walkways extremely dangerous and also negatively affect critical community services including public transportation, childcare, health programs, and schools. Injuries and deaths may occur from exposure, dangerous road conditions, carbon monoxide poisoning, and other winter storm conditions. Be better prepared this winter, and learn more at ready.gov/prepare. The checklist on page 8-C can help you begin preparing for storms in the upcoming winter season.

If the power does go out, Consumers Energy crews will be working safely to get power restored as quickly as they can.

WAYS TO PAY YOUR CONSUMERS ENERGY BILL

Automatic recurring
monthly payments



By dropbox



By mail



In person

By phone



Online



For more information, contact the Member Services Department at

800-696-6552 or info@consumersenergy.coop



WINTER STORM PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

The right time to prepare for a winter storm is now. This checklist will help get you started. Make sure to include your entire family in the preparation, and discuss your emergency plan with them. Then, post this checklist in an easily accessible location so it is always close by. Every family is different, so when you fill this out, be sure to consider your family's specific needs.

BEFORE A WINTER STORM

Stock your emergency kit for sheltering with:

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

- Important contact information for family, school, work, doctors, etc., including phone numbers and email addresses
- Cellular phone, extra battery, and chargers for electrical equipment
- AM/FM radio/NOAA weather radio (extra batteries)
- _____

MEDICAL NEEDS

- Medications, plans for refrigeration for at least one week, and copies of prescriptions
- Extra eyeglasses/contact lens
- Medical equipment/assistive technology and backup batteries
- First aid kit
- _____
- _____

CRITICAL DOCUMENTS

- Photo ID (e.g., driver's license, passport)
- Cash and credit cards
- Personal records (e.g., birth certificates, marriage certificates)
- Medical records
- Financial information (e.g., bank account or credit card information)
- Property records (e.g., insurance policies, deed, or lease)

- Waterproof, portable container for important documents
- _____

TOOLS & SAFETY ITEMS

- Flashlight
- Multi-tool
- Matches or lighter in waterproof container
- Local Map
- Fire Extinguisher
- Bag of sand or cat litter
- Shovel
- _____
- _____

FOOD/SUPPLIES

- At least a three-day supply of non-perishable food; if possible, stock for a week or more for sheltering
- At least a three-day supply of water (1 gal per person per day), if possible stock for a week or more for sheltering
- Infant formula and diapers
- Pet food, supplies, and extra water
- _____
- _____

HYGIENE & SANITATION

- Soap/disinfectant/sanitizer
- Paper towels/moist towelettes
- Toilet paper
- Bleach
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- _____

PROTECTIVE GEAR & CLOTHING

- Extra warm clothes
- Sturdy shoes
- Blankets or sleeping bags (sleeping bags should be labeled for low temperatures)
- Snow gear including gloves
- _____
- _____

CAR EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT

- Cellular phone charger
- First aid kit
- Jumper cables
- Flares
- Whistle
- Water, snacks
- Full tank of gas
- Flashlight
- Tow rope
- Boots, mittens, warm clothes
- Blanket
- Shovel
- Ice scraper, snow brush
- Snow traction mats and bags of sand or cat litter (cat litter helps with the tire traction)
- Tire chains or snow tires
- _____
- _____



COMFORT & PRICELESS ITEMS

- Items like: books, puzzles, favorite stuffed toy, photo albums, valuables
- _____
- _____

Don't Get Left Out in the Cold on Generator Safety

Those who use generators must be mindful of risks such as electric shock and toxic exhaust. Many of the annual accidents with generators occur between November and February, the coldest months of the year. Safe Electricity shares tips on the safe preparation and operation of generators this winter.

Since generators come in a variety of sizes, capacities, and power sources, read and follow all manufacturer instructions. Also before you use a generator, inspect it for damage. If no damage is found, prepare it for use in an area outside of the home and away from dangerous or wet conditions.

Because carbon monoxide is colorless and odorless, you should always run the machine outdoors as carbon monoxide levels may be fatal within minutes in enclosed areas such as inside a house, shed, crawlspace, basement, or garage. Be aware of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, which include headaches, dizziness, confusion, fatigue, and nausea. If you suspect that someone has been exposed to carbon monoxide, move them into fresh air immediately. It is also a good idea to install carbon monoxide detectors in your home. Follow the instructions in the manufacturer's guide for proper placement, and test the batteries regularly.

Carbon monoxide produced by generators is not the only hazard from generator use. If you are not careful with the preparation of a portable or standby generator, you can put the lives of others in danger because of backfeed. Backfeed is a situation where a generator is feeding electricity back through your electrical system and meter into the power lines. This jeopardizes the safety of line crews working to restore power as well as anyone who may be near the downed or sagging line that becomes energized.

To prevent backfeed, standby generators should have a transfer safety switch installed by a professional. This device automatically separates your home system from the utility system. Portable generators should never be plugged directly into a home outlet or electrical system; use a heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cord to plug appliances into an outlet on the generator for power. Your generator should have more output than the wattage of the appliances you will plug into it.

Be sure to keep pets and children a safe distance away. When the generator needs a refill on gasoline, reduce flammability by turning off the machine for at least 10 minutes so that fumes dissipate.

For more information on electrical safety, visit www.SafeElectricity.org.

Avoid the 12 Dangers of Christmas
brought to you by ESFF

- 1 Do not use electronics near water.
- 2 Never sleep with electronics under your pillow.
- 3 Keep batteries safely stored in their packaging; they can be deadly if swallowed.
- 4 Do not leave space heaters unattended when in use.
- 5 Keep decorations at least 3 feet away from any open flame.
- 6 Never play with fire.
- 7 Do not run cords under carpets, rugs, furniture, or out of windows.
- 8 Do not overload outlets.
- 9 Sometimes less is more; be careful not to over decorate.
- 10 Always turn off decorations when you're sleeping or leaving your home.
- 11 Inspect all decorations and discard any that are damaged or worn.
- 12 Keep your natural Christmas tree hydrated and water it daily.

Make Winter Work for Your Budget

Falling temperatures can mean rising bills. Follow these helpful tips and see how a few easy steps can keep your home warm and cozy ... and your energy bill nice and chill.

Cozy up to a comfy sleep.
Keep up to **15% of warm air** from escaping by closing your curtains at night.

Harness your heat.
Close your fireplace damper when not in use and keep up to **8% of warm air inside.**

A toasty tidbit.
The first scarf can be traced back to Egyptian Queen Nefertiti in 1350 B.C.

Temp down. Savings up.
Every degree you lower your heat in the 60 – 70° range saves **5% on heating costs.**

Spicy origins.
Chili first gained popularity at the San Antonio Chili Stand at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

Snuggle up and save.
Use an electric blanket for only **4¢ a night.**

Seriously!
A heated blanket is the most energy-efficient appliance in your home.

Flip that fan.
Make your ceiling fan run **clockwise** to push warm air down into the room.

Ready. Set. Save.
Set your water heater to 120° to **use less energy.**

Stay heated.
Save up to **20% on your heating bill** by sealing leaks around outer walls, windows and doors.

Figures represent national averages. See energy.gov for more info.

Did you buy anything this year that qualifies for an incentive?

If you purchased a new washing machine or equipment for your home or business in 2017, you may qualify for an incentive from Consumers Energy. Below are important reminders before filing incentive forms with the cooperative. All requirements must be met in order to receive the incentives offered.

- All incentives are due within six months of **purchase** date.
- Fill the forms out completely, and sign in all places indicated.
- Attach copies of receipts for purchases.
- In order to ensure prompt payment of the incentives, it is recommended to turn paperwork in as soon as possible in case of delays or missing information.



For more information on Consumers Energy's Incentive Program, call 800-696-6552 or visit www.consumersenergy.coop, then click the *Incentives* button on the home page.



Santa's Office

A mischievous elf wants one of Santa's cookies. Can you find the seven differences between the two pictures of Santa's office?



Attention high school sophomores, juniors, & seniors:
Win an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C.
 FROM CONSUMERS ENERGY!



2018 dates:
June 8-15



Application deadline:
February 23



Applications are available at the co-op office and online.

www.consumersenergy.coop
 Click the Community tab
 then Youth Tour.

For more information, contact Tami Kerwood at
 800-696-6552 or
tkerwood@consumersenergy.coop



Favorite Christmas Songs



- Across**
 2. Santa Claus is Coming to _____
 5. The _____ Noel
 7. Jolly Old St. _____
 8. Away in a _____
 9. O _____ Tree
 11. _____ Bells
- Down**
 1. Little _____ Boy
 3. Silent _____
 4. Joy to the _____
 5. _____ the Snowman
 6. _____ We Have Heard on High
 10. Deck the _____



S J X R P U X H R E F B Q T N
 Q Z R N E E X M M M U U E W E
 L Q B T C N I H J O H M T G X
 R E C N A D N K O D O Y E H I
 Y U S T T D R O A C F J I E V
 N H J S F O X S D O Q Z W H V
 E Z Y A M Y H Y Z D J L C Z N
 G H B U J E J Q T L Q R I X T
 B I U B R S N P A O G S E E K
 I F Q L J R U M R M M G V R V
 V H W I O S P C P A P D I X G
 U U J T O E U B T A N G W U S
 A E C Z C U P I D H C C X N O
 D T M E K R R P O V V B E L H
 J A G N F V J K J P L F B R S



BLITZEN COMET CUPID DANCER DASHER DONNER FRANCRER VIXEN



Office Hours
7:30 am — 4:30 pm
Monday through Friday

Contact Us

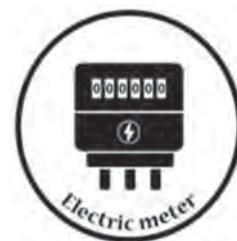
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Notice to Members in the Nevada Area

Consumers Energy is changing meters for some members in the Nevada area beginning in the December/January timeframe. Members whose meters are changed will experience a blink or short outage while the meter is being changed. We apologize for the inconvenience this may cause. This change is taking place in order to diminish interference that has been experienced due to distributed generation equipment in the area.



Consumers Energy has hired Chapman Metering to assist with the installation of these meters. Personnel will have Chapman Metering trucks and identification. If you have any questions, please call us at 800-696-6552.

If you have an idea for a topic for The Connection, please contact Kippen Glenney at 800-696-6552 or kglenney@consumersenergy.coop.

When you donate your spare change to Operation Round-Up, Consumers Energy will round your electric bill to the next highest dollar each month.

Help make fellow co-op members' lives a little brighter!

Sign up for Operation Round-Up!

All donations stay LOCAL!

The money contributed goes into a fund to help members who need economic assistance with winter electric bills.

COMPLETE THIS FORM AND RETURN WITH YOUR NEXT BILL PAYMENT,
OR VISIT WWW.CONSUMERSENERGY.COOP.

CLICK THE PROGRAMS/SERVICES TAB AND SELECT OPERATION ROUND-UP.



NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY/STATE/ZIP _____
EMAIL _____
PHONE _____
ACCOUNT NUMBER _____