

NEBRASKA

Magazine

NREA.org

June 2022

POWER RESTORATION

Lessons Learned
From Line Crews

Inside:

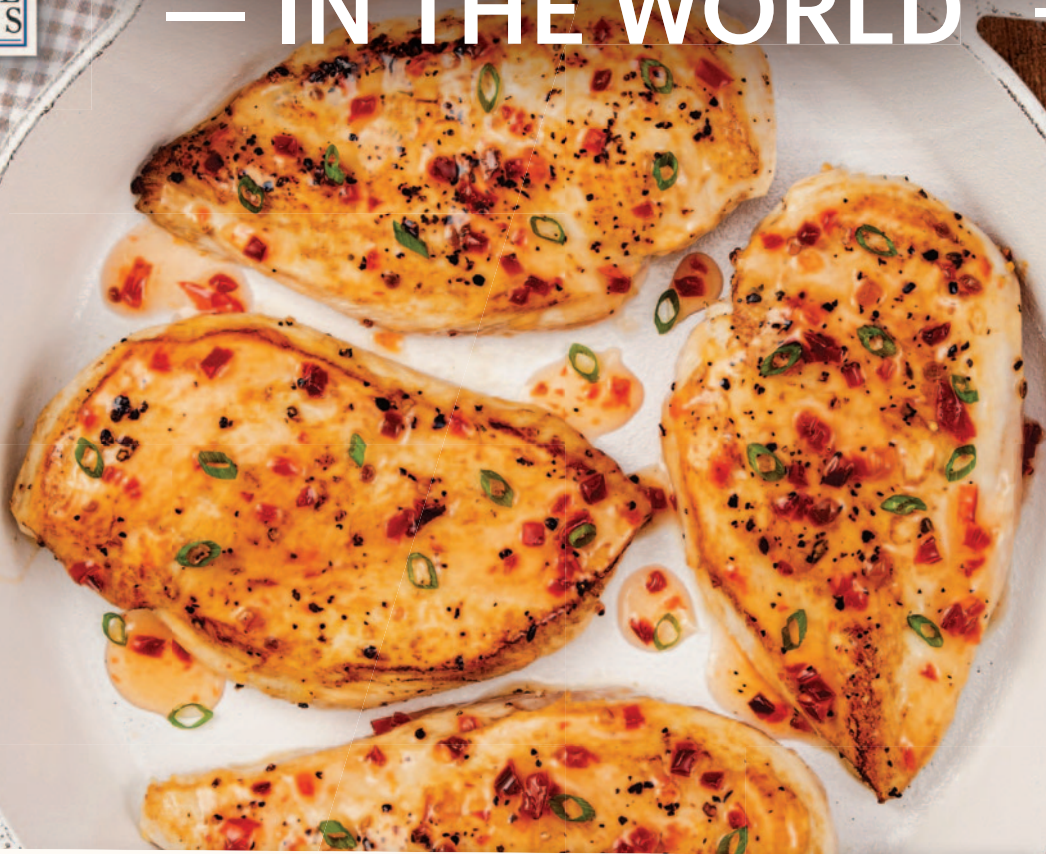
• Smart Thermostats • DIY Is Your Workshop Safe? • What You Need to Know Before Going Solar

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Rural Nebraska

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Contents



6 Power Restoration

There are a lot of reasons your electricity might go off, with weather by far the leading cause. But to a lineworker, all power outage repairs have one thing in common—safety. Writer Paul Wesslund shares how you can learn a lot about power outages and restoration by watching a utility crew at work, from a safe distance of course.



14 Smart Thermostats

A programmable thermostat can help you reduce energy use when you don't need to be heating or cooling your home. While installing a smart thermostat may not be the right choice for those who move often, rent or seldom leave their home, most can enjoy this hassle-free way of managing home temperatures and energy use.

Marcela Gana, Resource Media

Departments

Editor's Page

Safety Briefs/Murphy

Energy Sense

Down Home Recipes

Marketplace

If you ever wonder why restoring electricity after an outage can take a while, there's a good answer: line crews never compromise on safety. See related article on Page 6. Cover photograph by Jamie Oakley



Wayne Price

Don't Let High Gas Prices Ruin Your Budget

It is just over 34 miles from my house to the office so I get to spend a bit of time in my car each day commuting back and forth. My car gets pretty good gas mileage but with a gallon of unleaded gas costing about a dollar more than it did last year at this time, I'm always trying to improve fuel efficiency whenever I can.

I have tried to reduce the amount of quick trips to the store or the bank. Now I try to schedule a single trip with multiple stops. I try to visit places that are on my way home, rather than go to stores that are on the other side of town. Those impulse trips out to just "look around" at a store during my lunch break are a thing of the past.

It is amazing how quickly those little trips can add up. Taking steps to improve fuel efficiency can help keep more money in your wallet and will help your vehicle last longer.

One way to increase your vehicle's fuel efficiency is to make sure it's running at its maximum potential. Be sure to have your vehicle tuned up and checked out for other maintenance problems. Fixing a problem, such as a faulty oxygen sensor, can improve mileage by up to 40 percent.

Making sure the tires are properly inflated can improve mileage by up to 3.3 percent. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), under-inflated tires can lower gas mileage by 0.3 percent for every 1 psi drop in pressure in all four tires. In addition, proper inflation improves tire longevity – and your safety while driving. DOE cautions not to go by the maximum pressure printed on the tire's sidewall, but to find the proper tire pressure for your own vehicle on a sticker on the driver's side door jamb or in the glove box, as well as in your owner's manual.

Be sure to use the manufacturer's recommended grade of motor oil when you get your oil changed. Using a different grade could cost you a reduction in mileage by up to 2 percent.

Look in the trunk and make sure it is not filled with unnecessary items. The extra weight you're carrying around in the trunk could reduce your mileage by up to 2 percent. It's a good idea to have an emergency kit but you shouldn't carry around a lot of extra stuff.

Same goes for a roof rack. If you're carrying a lot of things on the roof, you could be cutting your fuel economy by 5 percent.

Another way to improve your fuel efficiency is to change your driving habits and slow down where you can. Forms of aggressive driving, such as speeding, rapid acceleration and rapid braking, can lower gas mileage by 33 percent on the highway and by 5 percent in town.

Meet Our Newest Employee



Stephanie Woutzke

The NREA Credit Union has hired Stephanie Woutzke as the credit union's Member Service Representative.

Stephanie was born in Colorado Springs, Colo. and moved to Nebraska when she was 10 years old.

She recently lived in Beatrice, Neb. where she worked for MembersOwn Credit Union. She also worked for a law firm in Beatrice, before accepting the position with the NREA Credit Union.

She currently lives in Lincoln, Neb. with her two daughters, who are in high school.

Her credit union duties include setting up new member accounts, posting member transactions,

including deposits, withdrawals and transfers, and processing loan applications.

In her free time she enjoys reading and watching movies.



NEBRASKA WATER LEADERS ACADEMY

WATER!

If you are interested in water, and would enjoy learning about "Nebraska Water" and water leadership skills... Consider joining the Nebraska Water Leaders Academy

For more information please go to www.waterleadersacademy.org or call Lee at 402.476.0162.

The Academy is funded through a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. The Trust is funded by proceeds from the Nebraska Lottery and has awarded \$328 million to Conservation projects in Nebraska since 1992.

Whether the lights go out because of weather or squirrels, safety comes first for lineworkers.



POWER RESTORATION

Lessons Learned from Line Crews

by Paul Wesslund

You can learn a lot about power outages and restoration by watching a utility crew at work, from a safe distance of course.

The first thing you'll notice is the deliberate, careful pace. If working in the right-of-way, they will deploy signs to alert motorists and mark the work area with orange cones. Always in hardhats, fire-protective clothing, along with safety glasses, anyone working on an energized power line pulls on heavy rubber gloves, rubber sleeves and spreads insulating orange hoses and blankets over the wires. Those gloves they pulled on have been tested before each use to make sure there's not even a pinhole that could allow a deadly electric current to pass through.

And there's more you won't see. Before beginning any



There are a lot of reasons your electricity might go off, with weather by far the leading cause. But to a lineworker like Lane Cole, an apprentice lineman with Northeast Power in Wayne, Neb., all power outage repairs have one thing in common—safety. Photograph by Mandy Backer

Making Safety a Habit

There are a lot of reasons your electricity might go off, with weather by far the leading cause. But to a line-worker, all powerline work and outage repairs have one thing in common—safety.

Safety comes down to all the workers wanting to return home to the ones they love and care about. Safety must be first and foremost in every part of their daily work.

Rural electric utility leadership makes it clear that skipping any safety measure or procedure isn't an acceptable work practice. Line crews attend safety meetings aimed at driving home the importance of safety. Sharing "near-misses" and accident information is critical.

So, if you ever wonder why restoring electricity after an outage can take a while, there's a good answer: line crews never compromise on safety.

The next thing you can learn from watching a line crew at work comes from seeing what task they're doing. There's a good chance they're replacing old equipment. Poles and transformers wear out, and failing equipment is one significant cause of power outages. The crew you watch might be restoring an equipment outage, or they might be switching out an old device to prevent a future outage.

You might see them replacing a downed utility pole, a process of removing the old pole and setting the new one, using trucks specifically designed for the job.

Trees vs. Power Lines

The pole might be down because a motorist ran into it—another cause of outages. Or it could be weather related. Wind, ice, fires—these natural disasters cause about 80% of power outages. One characteristic of those natural disasters is that the damage can be widespread. If

work, they huddled around one of the trucks to discuss safety with the job, what each of them would be doing that day, etc. with an emphasis on safety. It's a best practice in the industry—commonly called a "tailgate meeting" or a "job briefing." Another common practice is to designate one person on the crew to watch the person(s) aloft in the bucket truck during safety sensitive duties, such as working with high voltage energized lines. This is to ensure that the person in the bucket does the correct work, so they aren't injured. The next time you drive by a work site, and it looks like one person is just "watching the work", you are correct but remember that they have a critical job of making sure that the employee conducting the hazardous work, goes home safely at the end of the day.

Continued on Page 8

From Page 7

one pole is down, lots of others could be as well. That means crews will be repeating the pole-replacement process, one job at a time.

That's why bringing the lights back on after a major storm with widespread outages can take days, or even weeks. Crews will normally restore power starting at the substation working towards the end of the line. This process allows the maximum number of customers to have their power restored. After the main lines are returned to normal, the crews will finish up restoring individual outages.

It's also likely the crew you're watching will be trimming trees. Trees are beautiful but a common cause of outages as wind and nearby branches can lead to wires getting knocked to the ground. Public power districts and electric cooperatives devote a lot of time and resources to urging and enforcing limits on planting anything too close to power lines. And crews regularly set up to trim limbs that get too close to the wires. It's vital that customers allow

utilities to trim trees to assist in preventing outages due to trees contacting or bringing power lines down.

One common cause of outages you probably won't learn about by watching a crew make repairs is wildlife. Squirrels and other critters routinely crawl around utility equipment, occasionally making a connection between high-voltage wires. Snakes that slither into an electric substation bring consequences—for them and the utility. Sometimes crews need to investigate and correct the cause, before restoring power. Often the system will reset itself after only a brief power interruption (your lights may blink) if the fault clears itself.

Outages can be caused by a variety of factors. Restoring power is an intricate process in a complex utility system. And safety—for crews and the community—will always be the top priority.

Like most professions, linemen continue their education by attending specialized trainings that NREA offers, such as Overhead (Hotline) School, Underground School, Meter School, OSHA 10-Hour Training, Job Training and Safety Conference, to name a few. Their learning never stops, as our industry continues to change.



Above: Northwest Public Power District linemen work on a substation. Photograph by Jamie Oakley

Top right: Perennial Public Power District linemen Aaron Norquest, left, and Brian Soukup use rubber guards to work on an energized line. Photograph by Courtney Giesenhagen

Bottom left: A Perennial PPD crew installs bird guards on a line in Fillmore County. Photograph by Dustin Arduser

Bottom right: Josh Seaberg, Perennial PPD, works on a transformer. Photograph by Lisa Jacobsen



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Rating of **A+**





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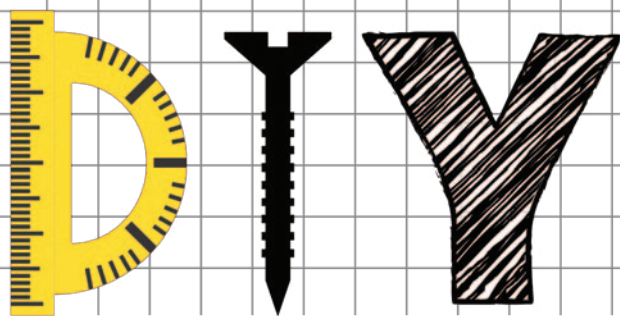
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IS YOUR WORKSHOP SAFE?

Without taking proper precautions, the enjoyment of a do-it-yourself project can quickly turn into disaster. You may have all the latest power tools, hand tools, hardware and materials, but if you do not put safety first, you may end up with a trip to the hospital instead of a new set of shelves, upgraded lighting in the kitchen or a trendy shiplap accent wall in the bedroom. Here are some fundamental workshop and electrical safety tips to help keep things running smoothly.

Wear safety gear, glasses and gloves

The first rule of workshop safety is to dress appropriately. Avoid loose clothing that can get caught in power tools. Never wear dangling jewelry or scarves. Roll up your sleeves or choose ones that are tight against your skin. Closed-toe shoes are a must, and steel-toed boots are recommended.

Safety glasses are necessary 100% of the time. Gloves are fine for handling materials. Before you reach for a belt sander or scroll saw, however, take the gloves off to minimize the risk of them getting caught and so you get tactile feedback in case anything goes wrong.

Observe electrical safety

Before you start any DIY project, inspect all your power tools and their cords for loose plugs, exposed wires or worn insulation. Fires are one of the top dangers when working with electric gear, especially if you have combustible materials around, such as sawdust.

If you must use an extension cord, choose one long, heavy-duty (appropriately rated) cord and keep it untangled and out of the way to prevent tripping and yanking your tools off the workbench. When you are done working, unplug everything from the extension cord and put it away.

Keep your workshop clean

Anything left on the floor is a tripping hazard, and you do not want to imagine what could happen if you trip while using a power tool. Anything cluttering up your worktable introduces obstacles that can get caught in a saw or drill mechanism or block your ability to move your project safely as you work on it. The byproducts of do-it-yourself work, such as sawdust, cast-off nails and screws, and rags or brushes with potentially combustible or hazardous fluids on them, increase the risk of fires and projectiles.

Keep tools in good condition

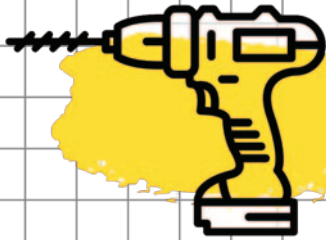
Besides inspecting the cords and plugs for electrical safety, everything works better in the workshop if you have clean, sharp and well-lubricated tools. A dull saw blade brings a much higher chance of injury than a sharp one. It is less likely to cut smoothly through the wood or other material and more likely to kick back and cut you. Dull saws, routers or drill bits also run the risk of breaking during use. Use appropriate lubrication, such as WD-40 or others specifically created for power tools.

Know your limits

If you have a lot of experience as a do-it-yourselfer, there are projects you can tackle from memory. However, approach anything new as if you are a beginner for maximum workshop safety. Read instructions. Look up reputable guide videos to refresh your skills or learn something new. Most importantly, recognize when you are in over your head and leave those non-DIY projects to the professionals.

For more information about electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org.

MAKE THESE TIPS STANDARD PRACTICE IN YOUR WORKSHOP



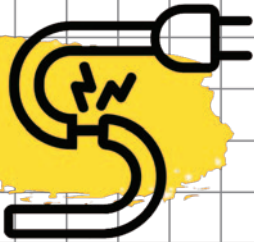
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(GROUND FAULT
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OF WEAR



ENSURE CORDS
DO NOT POSE
A TRIPPING HAZARD



WEAR PROPER CLOTHING:
AVOID LOOSE CLOTHES
AND JEWELRY



KEEP FLOORS AS
CLEAN AND DRY
AS POSSIBLE



USE A CLAMP
OR VICE TO SECURE
YOUR PROJECT



MAKE SURE YOU
HAVE ENOUGH LIGHT
TO WORK SAFELY

Smart Thermostats

When was the last time your home's thermostat was adjusted to reduce energy costs? A 2018 survey indicated that only half of Nebraskans living outside metropolitan areas were very likely to adjust their thermostat when leaving home. Considering about 50% of home energy consumption is used for heating and cooling, significant savings could be realized. The U.S. Department of Energy states that energy costs can be reduced up to 10% a year by simply turning your thermostat back by 7° to 10°F for eight hours a day. They recommend settings of 68°F in the heating season and 78°F during the cooling season when someone is home and active. When away or during sleeping hours, they suggest turning the thermostat down to 55°F in the winter and up to 85°F or higher in the summer.

Unfortunately, there are countless explanations why more people do not employ this energy-saving strategy. While some are perfectly reasonable, inconvenience no longer has to be one for homes with a smart thermostat. These energy-efficient devices work in much the same way as a traditional thermostat. However, smart thermostats connect to Wi-Fi and can be controlled via smartphone apps. Some types of smart thermostats can even learn repetitive user behaviors to decide when to heat and cool a home.

Though programmable thermostats allow some of the same automated control by entering a fixed routine of setpoints, users often override and even abandon their programs when personal schedules fall outside the norm. On the other hand, smart thermostats can change setpoints in real-time so no one has to come home to an overly cold or stifling place.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's EnergyStar program concluded that homes with smart thermostats can save up to \$180 per year on heating and cooling. With quality units ranging from \$60 to a few hundred dollars, they quickly pay for themselves. While installing a smart thermostat may not be the right choice for those who move often, rent or seldom leave their home, most can enjoy this hassle-free way of



managing home temperatures and energy use.

When shopping for a smart thermostat, start with the certified models on the EnergyStar website at: <https://www.energystar.gov/productfinder/product/certified-connected-thermostats/>. While there are various features to look for when choosing a smart thermostat, the importance of each will vary from buyer to buyer. Regardless of preferences, everyone should keep the following concerns in mind:

Compatibility – It's vital to choose a thermostat that is compatible with the current HVAC system. Otherwise, homeowners can expect to spend several hundred dollars on complex compatibility work.

Price – The budget often impacts a buyer's options, and those who do not intend to remain in a particular



A programmable thermostat can help you reduce energy use when you don't need to be heating or cooling your home. Photograph provided by Consumers Energy

thermostat functions with your heating and cooling system. While professional installation may add significantly to the overall cost of a smart thermostat, it may save tons of frustration and ensures your system operates as expected.

Contact your local electric utility for information on additional ways to efficiently use the energy they provide while keeping your home comfortable.

Earn up to a \$100 incentive when installing a qualifying smart thermostat

If you have a home Wi-Fi connection and a central air-conditioning or heat pump system, you may qualify for an EnergyWise incentive of up to \$100 for installing a qualifying smart thermostat.

Smart thermostat technology is most beneficial for households that have extended periods during the day when no one is home, those that turn their thermostat down during bedtime hours or those that have irregular occupancy through the week, month or year.

Eligible smart thermostats must be an EnergyStar-certified Smart Thermostat. Check with your local electric utility for eligibility.

Only residential customers/owners that have a home Wi-Fi connection and a central air conditioning or heat pump system qualify for Smart Thermostat energy efficiency incentives. Duplexes and multi-family dwellings in which each residence is individually metered are eligible. Commercial, Industrial and other customer classes do not qualify.

home for a long time may not want to invest in a more-expensive model. Fortunately, lower-cost smart thermostats are very common, popular and often just as effective as pricey models.

Ease of Use – Most smart thermostats allow users to adjust parameters and settings via a smartphone app. Others track the behaviors and patterns of tenants to formulate software-generated schedules of heating and cooling. These types of software depend on at least some user interface and interaction. That is why it is important to familiarize yourself with your preferred product's app and system before making a final decision.

Professional Installation – Some HVAC systems cannot be easily connected to certain smart thermostats. Before choosing a product, ensure that your preferred

Although road maintenance crews come to mind when thinking of orange directional signs and work zones, other workers perform job duties near the road as well, including utility and tree-trimming crews.

Streets and highways are lined with power poles and electrical equipment, and narrow roadways often require crews like ours to place their equipment in traffic lanes. Their work is often taken for granted but benefits us all; and, like everyone, they deserve a safe workplace. Be alert to utility crews and other work zone workers for their safety as well as yours.

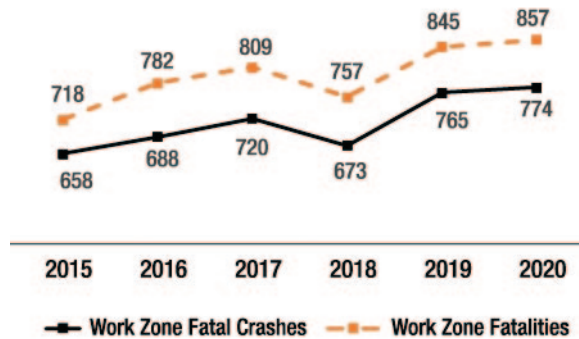
According to the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse, 774 fatal crashes and 857 deaths occurred in work zone crashes in 2020. Many other work zone crashes result in injuries. An estimated 102,000 work zone crashes occurred in 2020, resulting in 44,000 people injured.

To help keep roadside crews safe follow these safety tips from SafeElectricity.org:

- Keep a safe distance between your vehicle and traffic



Work Zone Fatal Crashes and Fatalities



barriers, trucks, construction equipment, and workers.

- Be patient. Traffic delays are sometimes unavoidable, so allow time for unexpected setbacks in your schedule.
- Obey all signs and road crew flag instructions.
- Merge early and be courteous to other drivers.
- Use your headlights at dusk and during inclement weather.
- Minimize distractions.

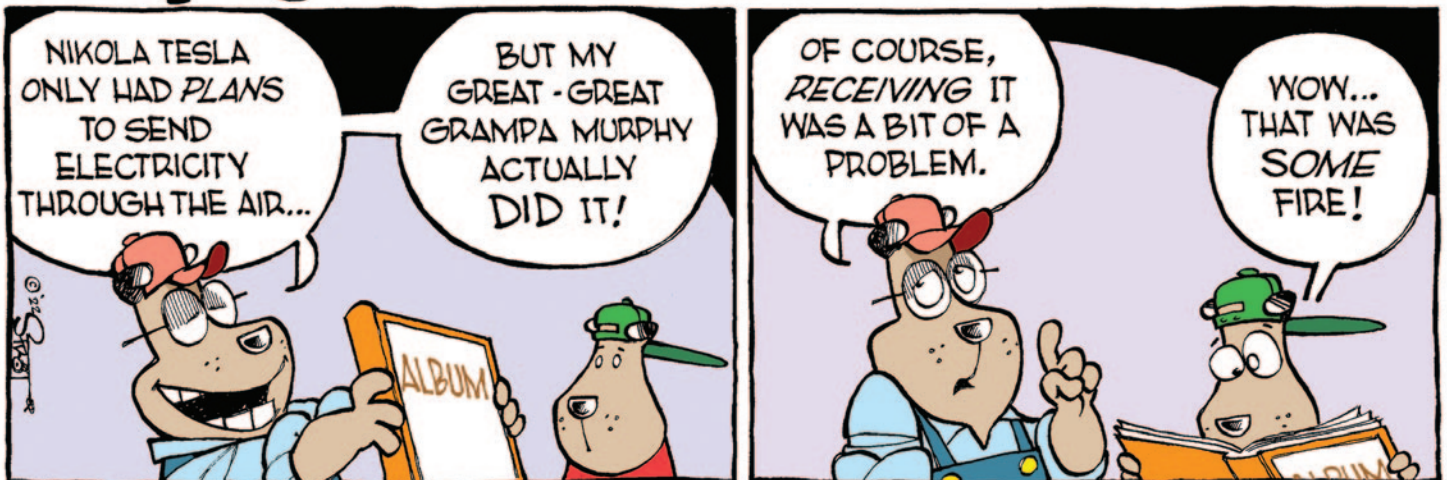
Avoid activities such as operating a radio, applying

makeup and eating while driving.

The most common crash in a roadway work zone is the rear-end collision, so remember to leave at least four car lengths of braking distance between you and the car in front of you. Be prepared to leave more room between you and the car ahead of you if the weather presents hazardous driving conditions.

Don't make the jobs of road workers, utility crews, tree trimmers and others who work near traffic more dangerous. Slow down when approaching a work zone and move over for first responders and work crews on the side of the road. This helps keep you safe as well.

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The U.S. Mint Just Struck Morgan Silver Dollars for the First Time in 100 Years!

It's been more than 100 years since the last Morgan Silver Dollar was struck for circulation. Morgans were the preferred currency of cowboys, ranchers and outlaws and earned a reputation as the coin that helped build the Wild West. Struck in 90% silver from 1878 to 1904, then again in 1921, these silver dollars came to be known by the name of their designer, George T. Morgan. They are one of the most revered, most-collected, vintage U.S. Silver Dollars ever.

Celebrating the 100th Anniversary with Legal-Tender Morgans

Honoring the 100th anniversary of the last year they were minted, the U.S. Mint struck five different versions of the Morgan in 2021, paying tribute to each of the mints that struck the coin. The coins here honor the historic New Orleans Mint, a U.S. Mint branch from 1838–1861 and again from 1879–1909. These coins, featuring an "O" privy mark, a small differentiating mark, were struck in Philadelphia since the New Orleans Mint no longer exists. These beautiful

coins are different than the originals because they're struck in 99.9% fine silver instead of 90% silver/10% copper, and they were struck using modern technology, serving to enhance the details of the iconic design.

Very Limited. Sold Out at the Mint!

The U.S. Mint limited the production of these gorgeous coins to just 175,000, a ridiculously low number. Not surprisingly, they sold out almost instantly! That means you need to hurry to add these bright, shiny, new legal-tender Morgan Silver Dollars with the New Orleans privy mark, struck in 99.9% PURE Silver, to your collection. Call 1-888-395-3219 to secure yours now. PLUS, you'll receive a BONUS American Collectors Pack, valued at \$25, FREE with your order. Call now. These will not last!

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A+

Q : I am considering a solar array on the roof of my home. What steps should I take with efficiency and energy savings in mind?

A : When I tell people I work in energy efficiency, one of the first responses I hear is, “Oh, I’m thinking about getting solar installed on my house.” I hear it around campfires, meeting other parents at the park and on the ride to the airport.

Most people don’t realize solar is not energy efficiency. Solar is generating energy. Energy efficiency is finding ways to use less energy. I can see the association because both are thought of as beneficial to the environment and a way to save money.

My follow-up question is, “What are your motivations for installing solar?”

In my experience, people are motivated by saving money, concern for the environment or both. Focusing first on energy efficiency addresses both motivations.

Here are some considerations if you are interested in installing solar.

Energy Consumption — Solar systems are sized based on a home’s energy needs. The larger the system, the higher the cost. Before installing solar, make sure your home is as energy efficient as possible. That means it will use less energy and allow you to install a smaller solar system—which will save money and reduce your home’s environmental impact.

Verify the efficiency of your lighting, HVAC systems and insulation. A fully insulated and air-sealed home uses less energy, and those measures are less expensive than solar panels. Finish these energy efficiency projects before installing solar.

Roofing — Consider the age, orientation and shade of your roof. It is more difficult—and expensive—to reroof a home with solar panels. Will the roof need to be replaced before the solar panels need to be replaced?

The best orientation for solar panels is south facing to receive direct light throughout the day. A shaded roof helps keep your home cool in the summertime but reduces solar energy production.

Maintenance — A solar system doesn’t last forever. Lifespans range from 25 to 30 years. As systems degrade



Before adding a solar array to your roof, make sure you take into account energy efficiency and cost-savings. Photograph by Mike Teegarden, Pioneer Utility Resources

over time, they produce less energy. Maintenance and repairs may be needed.

Electric Bills and Storage — Solar is not “off the grid.” Unless you plan to disconnect from your electric utility, you will still receive a monthly bill.

Solar panels only produce power when the sun is shining. If you want power to your home at other times, like after dark, you need to be connected to your electric utility or invest in battery storage system—that comes at an additional cost.

During power outages, don’t assume solar panels will supply you with power. Typical solar interconnection to the grid requires the panels to shut down during a power outage. This protects lineworkers from injury while making repairs.

Contact Your Rural Electric Utility — Solar contractors often work in several utility service territories and may not be familiar with your utility’s offerings, rate structures and interconnection agreements.

Before signing an agreement, check with your public power district or electric co-op for local information rather than relying on what the contractor says.

As with any other system for your home, I recommend getting bids from three contractors to compare equipment and pricing.

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A Bowl Full of Flavor For the Whole Family

If you're looking for a dinner or lunch combination that is wholesome, filling and, of course, easy, you're not alone. Meal prepping is a popular trend for many people (and families) who are working on healthy eating habits but are constantly on the go.

No matter if you're searching for a healthy family dinner, a quick lunch at home or an easy idea to meal prep for the week ahead, this Orange Shrimp Quinoa Bowl is perfect for seafood lovers who also enjoy a hint of spice. It's fresh, healthy and full of deliciously prepared shrimp and veggies, including mushrooms, peppers and cucumbers.

Or try this recipe for Stuffed Bell Pepper Casserole next time you are in a pinch.

It's made with hearty ground turkey breast, delicious bell peppers, crushed tomatoes and brown rice then topped with gooey sharp cheddar cheese. This short ingredient list makes it easy to assemble. It's simple to prepare before baking to perfection.

It's just right for little ones who are hungry and ready for a wholesome and appetizing home-cooked meal. Adults enjoy the natural flavors and fresh ingredients that keep all ages happy and content.

Find more family dinner recipes at Culinary.net.



Orange Shrimp Quinoa Bowls

- 1 cup quinoa
- 1 cup orange juice
- 1 tablespoon hot sauce
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1 tablespoon white miso
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 1/2 pounds shrimp, peeled, deveined and tails removed
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup mushrooms, sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 cucumber, sliced into half moons
- 5 green onions, sliced
- 1 avocado, sliced
- 1 teaspoon sesame seeds
- 2 tablespoons cilantro, chopped

Cook quinoa according to package instructions. Set aside.

In medium bowl, whisk orange juice, hot sauce, honey, soy sauce, vegetable oil, lime juice and miso until combined. Pour one-quarter of liquid into separate bowl. Set aside.

Add shrimp to remaining mixture and marinate 15 minutes.

Heat large skillet over medium heat with butter. Add shrimp, salt and pepper. Cook 2 minutes on each side until pink. Add mushrooms and cook until tender.

In two serving bowls, divide quinoa, bell pepper, cucumber, onions, avocado and shrimp. Sprinkle sesame seeds and cilantro over both bowls.

Drizzle with reserved dressing.



Stuffed Bell Pepper Casserole

- 20 ounces ground turkey breast**
- 1 yellow onion, chopped**
- 1/4 teaspoon salt**
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper**
- 3 large bell peppers, chopped (1 each red, yellow and green)**
- 1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes**
- 1/2 cup long-grain brown rice**
- 1 teaspoon oregano**
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder**
- 8 ounces shredded sharp cheddar cheese**

Heat oven to 350 F.

In large skillet over medium heat, add turkey, onions, salt and pepper. Break up turkey and cook until browned.

Add turkey mixture to 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Add bell peppers, crushed tomatoes, brown rice, oregano and garlic powder. Mix until combined. Cover with aluminum foil. Bake 80-90 minutes until rice is tender.

Remove foil, add shredded cheese and bake 5 minutes until cheese is melted.

Asparagus Caprese Salad

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 cups loosely packed baby arugula, plus additional for garnish 1/2 cup loosely packed fresh basil, plus additional for garnish 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese 1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted 1 clove garlic, crushed 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt 1/4 teaspoon coarse-ground black pepper 1 cup halved sweet grape tomatoes 1 8 oz. package fresh mozzarella cheese pearls, halved 1/4 cup small red onion, thinly sliced 1 lb. fresh asparagus, trimmed Non-stick cooking spray |
|---|--|

Place 2 cups arugula, 1/2 cup basil, Parmesan cheese, pine nuts, and garlic in food processor or blender. Cover and process or blend until finely chopped. With the motor running, gradually add olive oil until well combined. Stir in salt and pepper. Combine tomatoes, mozzarella and onion in a medium bowl. Add 2 tablespoons arugula pesto; gently stir to combine. Heat a grill pan over medium-high heat. Spray asparagus with nonstick spray. Grill 6 to 8 minutes or until crisp-tender, turning occasionally. Arrange asparagus on serving platter. Spoon tomato mixture over asparagus. Garnish with additional basil leaves and fresh arugula, if desired. Serve with remaining arugula pesto.

Rachael Black, Lincoln, Nebraska

Strawberry Pretzel Dessert

- 2 2/3 cups crushed pretzels**
- 1 cup powdered sugar**
- 2 10 oz. packages thawed frozen strawberries**
- 1 cup melted butter or margarine**
- 2 cups Cool Whip**
- 1 8 oz. package soft cream cheese**
- 1 6 oz. package strawberry Jello**

Mix pretzels and melted butter and press into the bottom of a lightly sprayed 13" X 9" pan. Bake 10 minutes at 325 degrees. Let cool. Beat cream cheese and powdered sugar together. Fold in Cool Whip. Spread on top of cooled base. Refrigerate till set. Add 2 cups boiling water to Jello, mix well. Let cool slightly. Fold in strawberries and pour over Cool Whip layer. Refrigerate till set. Top with Cool Whip if desired. Recipe in memory of Grandmother Marge Novak "Grammage."


Michelle Ploeger, Bruno, NE

Whiskey Weiners

- 2 lbs. hot dogs, cut into 1/2 inch slices (or use little smokies)**
- 3/4 cup bourbon**
- 1 1/2 cups catsup**
- 1/2 cup brown sugar**
- 1 tablespoon grated onion**



Put everything into a crockpot and simmer for at least 4 hours.

Carla Donohue, Maxwell, Nebraska



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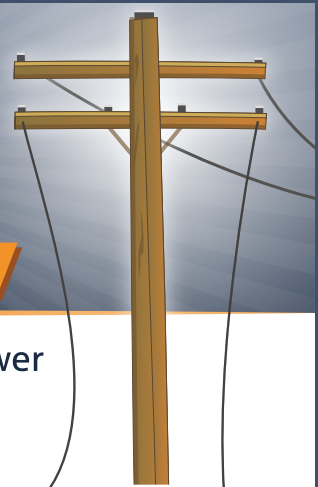
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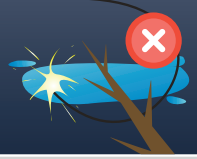
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Downed power lines can energize the ground up to **35 feet away**. Even more in wet conditions.



If you see a downed power line, **call 911**.



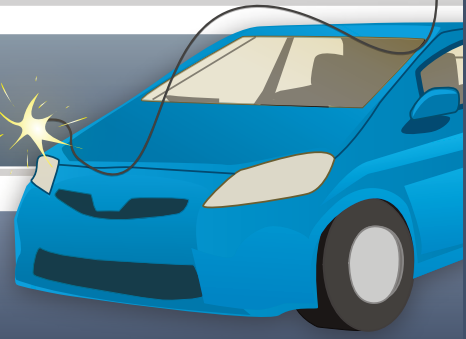
Never drive over downed power lines or anything in contact with them.



Never try to move a downed power line.

If a vehicle contacts a **power line** or **utility pole**...

STAY AWAY AND CALL 911



Consider **all lines** to be live and dangerous.



Stay in place or inside your vehicle unless you see **fire** or **smoke**.



Warn others to stay at least **35 feet away**.



Tell others not to approach vehicle, downed lines, or anything that may be in contact with downed lines.



Call **911**.

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