

RURAL ELECTRIC

# NEBRASKAN

August 2020

**Keeping Crews  
Safe and Power  
Flowing**

**Cheater Bars:  
Signatures on  
Rangelands**



Make your home more comfortable than ever

“To you, it’s the **perfect lift chair**.  
To me, it’s the **best sleep chair** I’ve ever had.”

— J. Fitzgerald, VA

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Pictured: Leather chair chestnut color. Chestnut color also available in Duralux fabric

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EASILY SHIFTS FROM FLAT TO  
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Footrest may vary by model

	Chestnut			
<b>Genuine Leather</b>				
<b>Long Lasting DuraLux</b>				
<b>DuraLux II Microfiber</b>				

Because each Perfect Sleep Chair is a custom-made bedding product, we can only accept returns on chairs that are damaged or defective. © 2020 firstSTREET for Boomers and Beyond, Inc.

RURAL ELECTRIC  
**NEBRASKAN**

"The Rural Voice of Nebraska"

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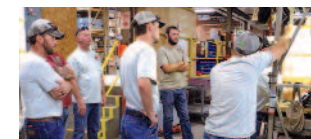
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Before starting a project, linemen hold a safety tailgate session at Polk County Rural Public Power District. See related article on Page 6. Photograph by Wade Rahn





by Wayne Price

## Don't let your generator generate trouble

**W**hen the power goes out during a severe storm many people turn to a portable generator to help light the home or keep food in the freezer from going bad. But if this is not done safely, it can be a dangerous time for everyone.

There are a couple ways to connect a portable generator to a home. The first way is with a powered circuit panel that has a power transfer switch, which monitors incoming voltage from the utility line. The circuit panel and transfer switch should always be installed by a qualified electrician. The second option is to plug in a limited number of home appliances directly into a fuel-powered portable generator with heavy-duty extension cords.

Never try to power your home by plugging a generator into a wall outlet. This is known as back feeding, and it could electrocute a neighbor or an electric lineman working to restore power.

A permanent generator must also have a transfer switch installed by a qualified electrician to avoid back feeding. Because of the harm an incorrectly powered generator

can cause, the transfer switch is required by the National Electrical Code.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, most of the generator related deaths and injuries are from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. Portable generators can produce deadly levels of CO, a colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas when used indoors or in partially enclosed spaces.

Carbon monoxide can kill a person in as little as five minutes if the levels are high enough. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reported that from 2005 to 2019 more than 900 people have died of carbon monoxide poisoning while using portable generators in the United States.

Some models now feature a built-in sensor that triggers an automatic shut off if CO builds up to dangerous levels.

Other hazards from portable generators include electric shock or electrocution and fire.

A permanent or standby generator also has significant risks if not installed by a qualified electrician. Installing one is extremely dangerous and definitely not a DIY project.

# GENERATOR Safety

Learn more at:



### FOLLOW THESE TIPS TO ENSURE EVERYONE'S SAFETY:

- Make sure there is **nothing plugged into the generator when turning it on**. Use a **heavy-duty** extension cord to connect appliances to the outlets on the generator.
- Always operate the generator on a stable, dry surface **outside the home**—out and away from the garage, doors, windows, and vents into your home. The carbon monoxide the generator produces is **DEADLY**.
- **Never** connect your portable generator to the home directly. This **can result in potentially deadly backfeed**, which happens when electricity is fed back through the electrical system onto power lines, creating a hazard for line workers and others.



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# NREA names Dennis Houston as new GM and CEO

The Nebraska Rural Electric Association has named Dennis Houston as their new General Manager and CEO. The Board of Directors of the Nebraska Rural Electric Association conducted a nationwide search over the last few months to identify the person to lead the organization.

Dennis Houston joins the Nebraska Rural Electric Association from the Chamber of Commerce industry. He brings 25 years of association and organizational leadership to NREA from his experience in rural Nebraska and Colorado.

Houston said “As a 32-year Nebraska resident, I want to bring my association leadership skills to rural Nebraska to make a difference. I look forward to partnering with the board, our members and our consumers to create the future of the Nebraska Rural Electric Association.” Houston went on to say “I look forward to accomplishing great things with the NREA team who each share my passion for rural



**Dennis Houston**  
**General Manager and CEO**

Nebraska. It will be an honor to work by their side on behalf of rural Nebraskans.”

Houston has served as the CEO of the Norfolk Nebraska Chamber of Commerce that was recognized as the National Chamber of the Year under his leadership. He was the State Vice Chair of the Nebraska

Chamber of Commerce Executives. He also served as State Chair of the Colorado Chamber of Commerce Executives and CEO of the Parker Area Chamber of Commerce.

The Nebraska Rural Electric Association (NREA) is the statewide association for 34 rural electric systems that provide electric service to consumers in most of the rural areas and many small towns in the great state of Nebraska. Together, the more than 1,000 dedicated employees of NREA member systems serve 240,000 meters across more than 87,000 miles of line to impact the lives of rural Nebraskans and improve the Nebraska economy.

Bryan Monahan, President of the Nebraska Rural Electric Association Board of Directors, indicated, “NREA and our member-systems impact the quality of rural life throughout our state. The Association needs a leader with demonstrated association management experience and a passion for Nebraska to guide us to new heights of success. That leader is Dennis Houston.”

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## Dorothy Wasmer joins NREA Credit Union staff

Dorothy Wasmer was hired as the Nebraska Rural Electric Association Credit Union Member Service Representative in May.

Her duties include setting up new member accounts, posting member transactions, including deposits, withdrawals and transfers, and processing loan applications.

She was born in Great Lakes, Illinois but she said she never really had a place to call home since her family moved often because her father was in the U.S. Navy. They eventually settled in Florida where she graduated from high school.

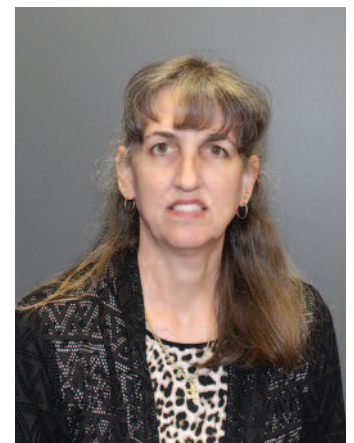
“I am unique in the fact that I have no real place I call home,” she said.

Wasmer joined the U.S. Air Force a

month after graduating from high school and worked in a supply squadron during the Gulf War conflict. She received a campaign badge for her service during war time. She served for nearly six years.

She has worked in banking, in a variety of positions since 2006. Most recently she worked for several years at Parkway Bank in Arizona prior to her family’s move to Nebraska.

Her husband, Todd, works for the Nebraska Department of Corrections at the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution. She has six children.



**Dorothy Wasmer**  
**Member Service**  
**Representative**



## Keeping Crews Safe and Power Flowing

*In the breakrooms and gear rooms of several rural electric utilities, the family connection to safety is a regular reminder for utility employees, with family photos hanging on the walls to remind crews that one mistake can be fatal.*

Public power district and electric cooperative employees across Nebraska participate in numerous meetings each year to work on one of their greatest challenges, keeping employees safe.

Lineworkers are handling 7,200-volt and 14,400-volt power lines daily, and while that can become routine, the hazards of the work should never be taken for granted.

That's why the Commitment to Zero Contacts program has become a central component of safety training for electric co-ops throughout the U.S. Developed as a joint initiative by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and Federated Rural Electric Insurance Cooperative in 2017, it was introduced to public power districts and electric co-ops the following spring as a major focus of safety awareness.

“Since April of 2018, more than 570 CEOs of public power districts and electric co-ops have personally endorsed the goals of the program,” said Bud Branham, NRECA’s director of safety programs. “These commitments are centered on reviewing current safety efforts against the initiative findings and adjusting where possible to mitigate risk. It is not meant to be a top-down initiative, and the real value comes through involving employees as part of the commitment.”

According to Larry Oetken, job training and safety coordinator for the Nebraska Rural Electric Association, the Commitment to Zero Contacts program raises awareness and draws attention to the Life Saving Rules.

“There has to be intentional effort, focus and communication so everyone is on the same page at ALL times,” Oetken said.



The consequences of an incident in this industry are so high, and getting that critical “buy-in” requires much more than lectures, memos and discussions. So, rural electric utility safety instructors are using a variety of techniques to make safety awareness personal and encourage lineworkers and other employees to regularly discuss safety concerns.

In the breakrooms and gear rooms of several utilities, the family connection to safety is a regular reminder for utility employees, with family photos hanging on the walls to remind crews that one mistake can be fatal.

Polk County Rural Public Power District General Manager Phil Burke said there are many reasons why they spend so much time and energy on the safety program.

“I could explain the actual cost savings that a safety program brings in our insurance rates or the unrealized savings of avoiding injuries or property damage but that is not the real reason,” he said. “Or I could explain how a safety program improves employee morale and buy-in and how the process of evaluating best practices in safety actually increases employee production and quality of line craft, but that is not the real reason either.”

The real reason that Polk County is committed to continuous safety improvement is that it is the right thing to do.

“When we consider what is the most important thing for our employees, it is easy to see that family and safety are at the top of everyone’s list,” Burke said. “Sure, having a job with great pay and benefits is important, but without family and without safety a wage is not that important.”

The goal was to create the safest working environment for Polk County RPPD employees possible so that they can go home to their families every night. In that context, it is unimaginable to do anything less. As a result they created their own Work Safe ~ Home Safe program.

“We want our employees to know the ‘why’ behind our safety program,” he said. “Too often we have seen videos of injured linemen who have become distracted about how to get the job done and forgot the reason why they should work safely. They forget the impact that one action will have, not just to them or the company, but to their family.”

**More on Page 8**



*Above: Tanner Cockle, Polk County RPPD apprentice lineman, prepares for a project. Photograph by Wade Rahn*

*Left: The Commitment to Zero Contacts program logo.*

*Below: A display at Custer PPD shows some of the work crews perform on the job.*

*Opposite: Polk County RPPD created their own Work Safe - Home Safe program.*



## Keeping Crews Safe From page 7

There is another aspect to Polk County RPPD's program that is more subtle but as important. Burke understands that any safety program's success comes from a continual practice of evaluating risk and creating habits.

"The work safe home safe tag line has given us a goal to identify when we are creating those practices in our employees, and that is when safety practices at work create safety practices at home," he said. "We believe that if we see linemen using the same evaluation of risk and use of PPE at home as they do at work, we are creating the culture to sustain improvements."

Reinforcing safety fundamentals is key, and rural electric utility safety instructors are looking for ways to interject Commitment to Zero Contacts into their regular discussions and training lessons.

One of the "tools" used is called the SAFE (Stop And Focus Everyday) app. It's a job briefing app that is available on any electronic device.

"The job briefing is completed before every job, no matter how large



*Posters of employee's family line the wall at Polk County RPPD as a reminder of why safety is important.*



*Custer PPD employees display photos of loved ones in their breakroom. Photograph by Tarin Burrows*

or small it may be," Oetken said. "It's designed to slow everyone down so they can recognize the potential hazards that are, or that could, present themselves and communicate those with everyone involved with the job or task at hand."

Custer Public Power District embraced the Commitment to Zero Contacts initiative and started using the S.A.F.E (Stop and Focus Everyday) job planning app introduced by the NRECA and Federated Rural Electric Exchange in 2019. Operations Assistant Manager and Safety Coordinator Cindy Lindner stated, "We want everyone to come to work and go home to their families safely, so implementing the initiative was a no brainer."

Each day at the morning meetings crews shares a Life-Saving Rule. After the morning meetings, crews use the app for job briefings and tailgates before starting a job. Lindner commented that the Commitment to Zero Contacts initiative started with the Board of Directors signing the Commitment to Zero Contacts pledge which is located in the employee break room at

Broken Bow. Then, each employee signed the pledge. Employees also have the opportunity to carry or give to their family plastic tokens that say, "Committed for the ones I love most!"

At the main office in Broken Bow and each area service center, there is Commitment to Zero Contacts boards where employees can put pictures of their families and other memorabilia that represents why they are committed to the pledge of zero contacts.

Lindner stated that linework is dangerous and each person has to do their part.

Across the country, public power district and electric co-op employees remain committed to safety—for all. And when utility crews are protected and ready to get the job done, members can count on the safe, reliable power they depend on.

"When signing the Commitment to Zero Contacts pledge, it's not saying that no one hasn't been committed to safety in the past," said Oetken, "but it's a re-commitment to look deeper at the root causes of accidents and alleviate the risks associated with the job."



# The Benefits of LED lights:



## Efficiency

LED lights use 30-70% less electricity than traditional lights. This translates to lower electric bills.

## Environmental Safety

LED lights do not contain arsenic, lead, mercury or other harmful gasses. It's not hazardous to dispose of LED lights, like it is with CFL lights.

## Long Lifetime

LEDs can last 8 times longer than compact fluorescent, and 50 times longer than incandescent bulbs. Left on for 6 hours daily, LED lights may last 18 years!

## UV Free

UV emissions are said to be harmful to health after prolonged exposure. LEDs emit far less UV radiation than traditional lights.

## Durability

LED lights are made with solid-state components that are resistant to shocks and vibrations. They are far less likely to be damaged than lights with delicate filaments.

## Temperature

LEDs put off 20-30% less heat than incandescent, fluorescent or halogen bulbs. This is primarily due to an absence of IR radiation.

## Low Maintenance

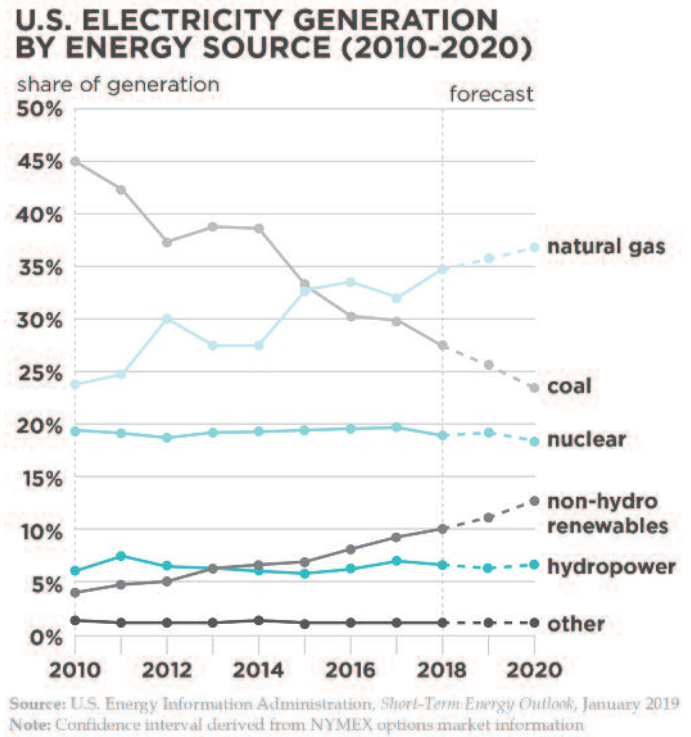
Due to their long lifetime, LEDs are ideal for outdoor and commercial lighting applications.



Working for  
Nebraska

# U.S. Renewable Energy Generation and the Impacts of COVID-19

*The future of how we receive electricity is changing. The energy that we see all around us—from the sun, the wind and water—is rapidly being harnessed to power our lives.*



Looking at the numbers, we can see that renewable energy generation has steadily increased over the last decade. As of 2019, almost 18% of all energy generated in the U.S. came from renewable sources, according to the Energy Information Administration (EIA). This is a significant jump up from only 10% in 2010.

To break it down by energy type: wind energy makes up 7.3% of the total energy generated, hydropower makes up 6.6%, solar energy makes up 1.8% and other sources like biomass and geothermal energy make up 1.8%. And those percentages will continue to grow as a result of several factors.

The largest contributing factor is that the costs of building renewable energy projects have become much cheaper. Additionally, many states across the country have set guidelines and policies for producing a certain percentage of energy from renewable sources by a set goal year. Lastly, many large corporations like Google, Amazon and Facebook, have started to invest in large-scale renewable energy projects. In addition to receiving a return on

their investment from renewable energy projects, these companies are able to show a concern for sustainability to their consumers. Combined, the declining costs, state policies and large-scale action have brought the industry to where it is today.

Although the growth trends for renewable energy have been steady for nearly a decade, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought uncertainties to the industry. Many projects have been delayed, or even cancelled, because of manufacturing and construction issues. Financial concerns of an uncertain market further worsen the impacts of COVID-19 on new renewable energy projects.

New installations for solar energy are expected to drop 20% this year, according to the energy research group Wood Mackenzie. Similarly, but not as steep, wind energy installations are expected to drop 6%. The overall decline of renewable energy projects also means many lost jobs. Research from BW Research Partnership shows that over 100,000 jobs were lost in March 2020 alone, and there is a potential for more

than half a million jobs lost as a result of COVID-19 through the rest of the year.

Despite these drawbacks, there is abundant hope for the renewable energy market. Forecasts by the U.S. EIA show that the electricity produced in the U.S. will decline by 5% in 2020. However, despite the overall drop of electricity production, EIA shows that renewable energy will still grow 11% this year in the electricity power sector. Renewable energy is predicted to be the fastest-growing form of energy produced this year.

Looking to the future, there are many states that remain committed to their renewable energy policies, and many investors and corporations continue to see economic and social value in renewable energy investments. COVID-19 will undoubtedly affect the renewable energy industry in the short-term, but we expect to see the industry continue to grow over the coming decades.





# Don't overload your home's electrical system

With power strips and outlet converters (a multiple outlet "bar" plugged directly into an existing outlet), we can plug in multiple items in or near the same outlet.

But just because we can, doesn't mean we should.

You can eat a whole box of chocolates, but that doesn't mean you should.

Just like chocolate consumed in excess can overload your body with too many calories, attempting to draw too much power from an outlet or circuit can overload your home's electrical system. Depending on how your home is wired, you may get away with it — or you may not. If too much current is drawn, usually a circuit breaker would trip or fuses would blow, but this is never guaranteed.

The results of overloading a circuit could range from a damaged appliance to starting a fire. That is because when too much electrical current flows through a circuit, things can overheat. Whether it is a wire, an outlet, or any other part



along the electrical path, excess heat can cause serious problems.

Follow these electrical safety tips to help prevent overloading a circuit:

- Do not plug too many things into one outlet, extension cord, power strip, multi-outlet device or outlets on the same circuit.
- Look for loose connections or damaged or corroded wires, which can also cause an overload.
- If you continually upgrade your home with more electrical demands (lighting, appliances, electronics and so on), your home's circuits may not be able to handle the increased load.
- Plug in a space heater to a

dedicated outlet (with nothing else plugged in) and do not plug a space heater into an extension cord.

- Major appliances (e.g., refrigerator, stove, washing machine) should be plugged into their own outlet since they draw a lot of power. For smaller appliances, do not plug more than two into one outlet.

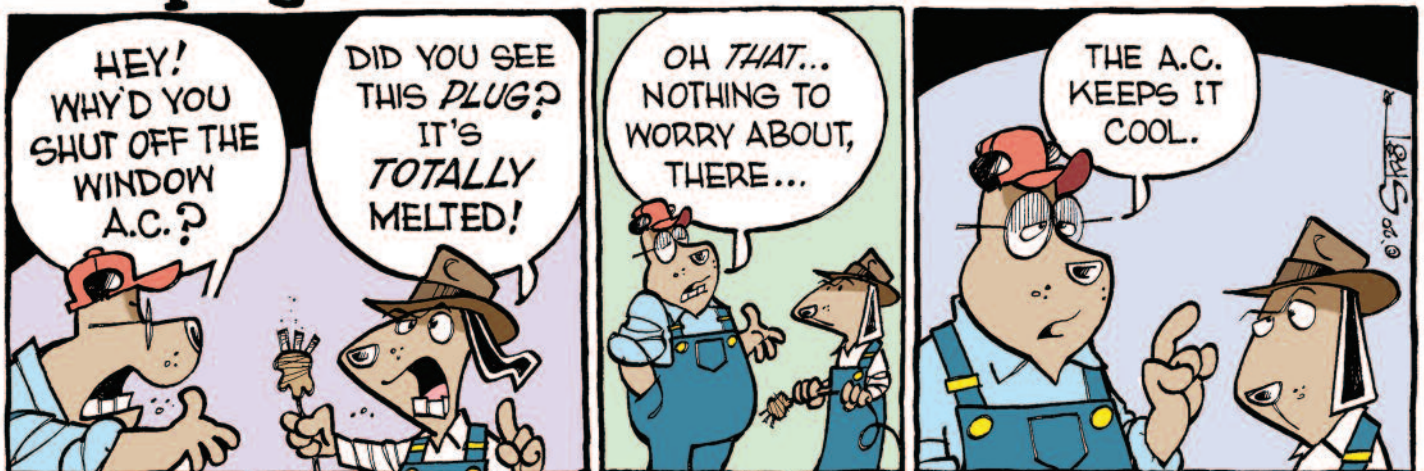
- Know how much power you draw on an outlet or circuit; some experts recommend no more than 1,500 watts per outlet or circuit.

- Consult a qualified electrician to assess your home's electrical system, especially if you have an older home.

Although we take for granted that our homes are electrically sound or that we can plug in "just one more thing," don't take chances. When in doubt, have a qualified electrician assess your home, and mention any odd symptoms you may notice, like flickering or dimming lights, warm or discolored outlets or cover plates, and frequent blown fuses or tripped circuits.

For more information about electrical safety, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).

## Murphy





*Introducing the  
future of personal  
transportation.*



The Zinger folds to a mere 10 inches.

## It's not a Wheelchair... It's not a Power Chair... It's a Zinger!

More and more Americans are reaching the age where mobility is an everyday concern. Whether from an injury or from the aches and pains that come from getting older—getting around isn't as easy as it used to be. You may have tried a power chair or a scooter. The **Zinger** is NOT a power chair or a scooter! The **Zinger** is quick and nimble, yet it is not prone to tipping like many scooters. Best of all, it weighs only 47.2 pounds and folds and unfolds with ease. You can take it almost anywhere, providing you with independence and freedom.

Years of work by innovative engineers have resulted in a personal electric vehicle that's truly unique. They created a battery that provides powerful energy at a fraction of the weight of most batteries. The **Zinger** features two steering levers, one on either side of the seat. The user pushes both levers down to go forward, pulls them both up to brake, and pushes one while pulling the other to turn to either side. This enables great mobility, the ability to turn on a dime and to pull right up to tables or desks. The controls are right on the

steering lever so it's simple to operate, and its exclusive footrest swings out of the way when you stand up or sit down. With its rugged yet lightweight aluminum frame, the **Zinger** is sturdy and durable yet convenient and comfortable! What's more, it easily folds up for storage in a car seat or trunk. Think about it, you can take your **Zinger** almost anywhere, so you don't have to let mobility issues rule your life. It folds in seconds without tools and is safe and reliable. It holds up to 275 pounds, and it goes up to 6 mph and operates for up to 8 miles on a single charge.

Why spend another day letting mobility issues hamper your independence and quality of life

**Zinger Chair®**

**Call now and receive a utility basket  
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Please mention code 113099 when ordering.



The Zinger Chair is a personal electric vehicle and is not a medical device nor a wheelchair. Zinger is not intended for medical purposes to provide mobility to persons restricted to a sitting position. It is not covered by Medicare nor Medicaid. © 2020 firstSTREET for Boomers and Beyond, Inc.

by Larkin Powell

## Cheater bars: signatures on rangelands

The drive west on Highway 2 from Grand Island can be a relaxing introduction to ranch country. As the city disappears in the rearview mirror, visitors to our open rangelands may ask, “When are we in the Sandhills?” A geologist may point to the dune features to answer the question. A botanist might look for changes in the species of grass and wildflowers. I look for cheater bars.

A cheater bar, or “cheater,” is used throughout the western USA and Canada to secure a barbed-wire gate tightly. Growing up on a farm in Iowa, I had never seen this device until I started doing wildlife research for the University in the Sandhills. My dad simply used a loop of heavy wire to snug the gate pole to the gate’s brace post. A roving salesman sold us some metal gates when I was in high school, and that was the end of the barbed wire stretch gates on our farm.

Any Sandhills rancher will tell you that they have too many gates to replace them with expensive metal gates, and their gates need to be opened often. More importantly, the gate needs to be tight because there are cattle behind it. The wire loop just won’t cut it.

The cheater bar becomes the tool that solves all of the problems. Anyone, weak or strong, can use it to open the gate, and that barbed wire is tight after the cheater pulls the pole snug to the brace post.

If you haven’t watched fence lines for cheater bars, give it a try. Each rancher family uses the same style, so you can loosely define who owns what land by the type of cheaters they use on their gates. Most ranchers don’t go for the easy way out, which can be found as ‘gate latch’ in the local farm store. A good cheater bar is welded in the ranch shop during winter when there is time for such chores. The most interesting models use metal that was available: a horseshoe, an old metal rod, an old horse collar hame, or other leftovers from a previous project.

Cheater bars can be grouped into two general styles. The first is the simple bar that helps to cinch around the gate pole and tightens it by swinging horizontally. The







second type is a swing-bar latch that is posted on the gate post and moves vertically to cinch a sturdy metal loop around the gate pole. Ranchers tell me that the latter style can be unopened and closed on horseback by a good rider without getting off the horse.

Watching fence lines can also give you a view of landscape change. Many cheater bars now hang useless on a gate post that marks the entry to a soybean field or a stand of trees, where a pasture once was located. These metal gargoyles are a testament to days gone by when the land had a different use, and we can think about how wildlife and society have changed during that time.

*Larkin Powell is a professor of conservation biology and animal ecology in the School of Natural Resources (SNR) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He also serves as an Associate Dean for Experiential Education for UNL's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. Larkin teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on wildlife management and research, and his research program focuses on landscape dynamics, animal demography and movements, and decisions made by private landowners in the Great Plains and throughout the world. He is the author of Great Plains Birds (University of Nebraska Press).*



# Sealing air leaks, step by step

by Pat Keegan

**Q** : I love my older home, but it's drafty and uncomfortable at times. What can I do to reduce drafts that won't cost me an arm and a leg?

**A** : This is a common problem, particularly in older homes. In many homes, about half of the conditioned air leaks to the outside every hour. The good news, especially if you don't want to spend a lot of money, or if you're hesitant to invite contractors into your home right now, is that you can seal air leaks on your own with a little time and effort.

Here are three steps to get you started. Keep in mind, there's much more to learn about sealing your home than we can cover in this article, so consider researching trusted websites for additional tips and tutorials.

## Step 1: Find the Leaks

The first step is a thorough visual search of the interior and exterior of the home. Look for gaps and holes in exterior walls, flooring and the ceiling. These will often occur where different building materials meet, such as the top of cement foundation walls or around windows and doors. Another common source of air leaks is where pipes or wiring penetrate a wall, floor or ceiling. Ductwork located in unheated crawl spaces or attics can also contain air leaks.

Exterior doors and windows that open deserve your attention. Open each door or window and place a dollar bill between the door or window sash and the frame. If you can pull the bill out easily when the door or window is closed again, the seal is not tight enough. Also, a window that rattles when it's closed

or when it's windy probably isn't sealed sufficiently.

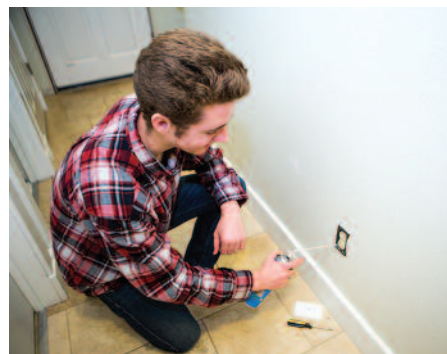
The best way to find all air leaks is to hire an energy auditor to do a blower door test. The blower door is a large fan that is mounted in a doorway to depressurize the house. The auditor can then find the leaks and may even be able to recommend ways to seal them.

It's also possible to conduct your own whole-home pressure test. The



*Above: Use caulk to seal gaps around non-moving parts of doors and windows. Photograph by Scott Van Osdol*

*Below: Electrical outlets on outside walls are a common source of air leaks and are easily patched. Photograph by Marcela Gara, Resource Media*



Department of Energy provides detailed instructions at [www.energy.gov/energysaver/weatherize/air-sealing-your-home/detecting-air-leaks](http://www.energy.gov/energysaver/weatherize/air-sealing-your-home/detecting-air-leaks).

## Step 2: Gather the Materials You'll Need

Here's a quick list of materials to get you started:

- **Caulk:** You'll need a caulk gun (\$4+) and caulk (\$4 to \$10). We recommend indoor/outdoor waterproof silicone or latex caulk that is water-soluble until it cures and is paintable when dry.

- **Expanding spray foam:** One can typically costs \$4 to \$6. This is an effective way to plug leaks, but keep in mind, it's a messy job.

- **Weather stripping:** Prices vary depending on type and length of the materials, but there's a wide variety of weather stripping options made of vinyl, metal and felt, or open-cell foam that works for most situations.

- **Pre-cut foam socket sealers:** You can typically purchase a pack of 24 sealers for about \$3.

- **Chimney plug balloon:** Prices range from \$50 to \$90. You may need a chimney plug balloon if your chimney flu doesn't seal well. Buy a square or round one to match the shape of your chimney flu.

- **Adhesive plastic window insulation sheets:** Prices range from \$2 to \$14 depending on size. You may need insulation sheets later in the year for windows that can't be sealed and don't have storm windows.

## Step 3: Do it!

If you are unfamiliar with how to apply any of these materials, we recommend watching online tutorial videos. Sealing air leaks is one of the best ways to boost your home's energy efficiency. Whether you're a DIY pro or novice, with a few simple steps (and low-cost materials), you'll be well on your way to a sealed, more efficient home.



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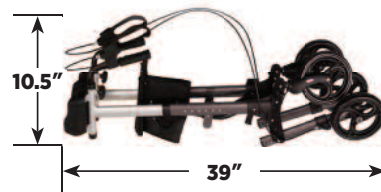
It's a cruel fact of life, as we age, gravity takes over. Our muscles droop, our bodies sag and the weight of the world seems to be planted squarely on our shoulders. We dread taking a fall, so we find ourselves walking less and less- and that only makes matters worse.

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# Managing home energy use through a summer of social distancing

If you want to make the best use of your efforts to save money on your energy bill, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) can show you where to start.

Nearly half of the electricity Americans use in their homes, 43%, goes to heating and cooling air and water. Nearly a third of our electric use, 31%, goes to running our heating and air conditioning systems. Another 12% powers our water heaters.

In second place for residential electricity use is a grab bag of appliances and lighting. One-fifth of the electricity we use in our homes goes to refrigeration (6%), lighting (5%), clothes drying (4%), and TV and video games (4%).

That means if you want to get the quickest and biggest return on energy savings, focus on how you use your heating and cooling system, and your water heater. That's according to Keith Dennis, VP of consumer member engagement for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

"Turning off an LED light bulb may come to mind when you think about saving energy," he says. "But in

the grand scheme of things, looking at EIA's numbers, it's adjusting your thermostat that's going to make the biggest difference."

Other appliances and devices consume even smaller shares of our total energy use. Eight percent of residential electricity use comes from a combination of computers, freezers, washing machines, dishwashers and cooking appliances. Other home energy users include a range of devices like small appliances, exterior lights, outdoor grills and spa heaters.

## How COVID-19 is impacting energy use

Even with the recent disruptions to daily life during the COVID-19 pandemic, the advice to focus on heating and cooling to save energy holds up. EIA has started revising its energy use predictions for 2020, and because of business closures and social distancing, they project that electricity sales to commercial and industrial customers will decline 6.5%. With more people staying home, you might expect residential sales to increase, and they will, but not enough to overcome the weather.

*Even though many of us are spending more time at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Energy Information Administration projects that 2020 residential energy use will decline by 1.3%. But those projections may change depending on how quickly businesses reopen and Americans get back to work. If you're looking to reduce energy use, monitor how you cool and heat your home, which is where the biggest potential for saving energy lies.*



Even with more people staying home and using more heating and air conditioning, the weather is expected to be mild enough that EIA projects a 1.3% decline in residential electric sales this year. However, those predictions could well be adjusted depending on how quickly businesses reopen, and whether they adopt new ways of operating.

With so many unknowns in 2020 patterns of energy use, EIA's forecast tried to imagine what's going on inside our homes in order to make their projections for the year. Their May 2020 Short Term Energy Outlook says that as a result of the actions to control the spread of COVID-19, use of household electronic equipment will increase, and other uses of electricity, such as cooking or water heating, may also increase. Residential air conditioning use during summer months is also





likely to increase.

### Small adjustments for significant savings

During summer months, setting your thermostat a few degrees higher than normal can make a significant difference in energy use. The Department of Energy recommends setting your thermostat to 78 degrees or higher when possible. Consumers can achieve additional energy savings by investing in a smart or programmable thermostat.

In addition to monitoring your thermostat, Dennis suggests keeping an eye on another significant energy user, your water heater.

According to the Department of Energy, lowering your water heater temperature to 120 degrees is an easy way to save energy, and for every 10 degrees reduced, consumers

can save 3% to 5% on water heating costs. Dennis also recommends replacing an older, less efficient water heater with a newer, energy efficient model, which could pay for itself in the long run.

For persistently high energy bills, Dennis recommends contacting your local electric utility for a more thorough evaluation of your home and how you use energy. Consumers can also find a wide range of additional ways to save energy at [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov).

Small changes to energy use habits, like turning off lights when you leave a room or unplugging devices when not in use, can help you save. But to make the biggest difference in energy use—even during a global pandemic—pay attention to how you heat and cool your home. That's where the biggest potential for saving energy lies.

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## SEAL AIR LEAKS



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HOME - HUNT DOWN  
AND SEAL THEM USING  
WEATHER-STRIPPING  
AND CAULKING TO REDUCE  
YOUR ENERGY BILLS BY  
AS MUCH AS 20%

# Comfort food consumption is on the rise

**A**s families spend more time at home, Americans are finding comfort in a surprising source: bread. In fact, a 20-year trend of declining grain food consumption has been reversed.

A national study by the Grain Food Foundation suggests that the turnaround is more than a one-time sales blip due to pantry loading. In reality, consumers count bread among their top comfort foods. The study revealed one-third of Americans named pasta and bread as foods that are comforting during a stressful time.

In addition to the comforting flavor, this trend provides valuable nutritional benefits. As a part of many healthy eating plans, bread and pasta are nutritionist approved and provide nutrients needed for healthy aging such as B vitamins, magnesium, selenium, iron, folate and fiber.

The highest-ranking comfort foods were ice cream; baked goods like cakes, cookies and pastries; salty snacks; candy; and fast food. However, when asked to identify comfort foods with nutritional advantages, consumers identified bread and pasta as the top two.

Beyond identifying comfort foods and their nutritional value, consumers also expressed worry that bread is in short supply right now.

To learn more about the role of grain foods in a healthful diet, visit [GrainFoodsFoundation.org](http://GrainFoodsFoundation.org).



## Cheesy Black Bean Toast with Pico de Gallo

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 Roma tomatoes, diced</li> <li>1/2 medium onion, finely chopped</li> <li>1 clove garlic, finely minced</li> <li>2 serrano or jalapeno peppers, finely chopped</li> <li>3 tablespoons fresh cilantro, chopped</li> <li>1 lime, juice only</li> <li>1/8 teaspoon oregano, finely crushed</li> <li>1/8 teaspoon salt (optional)</li> <li>1/8 teaspoon pepper</li> <li>1/2 Hass avocado, diced</li> <li>4 bolillos (6 inches) or large Kaiser rolls, sliced in half lengthwise</li> <li>1 can (16 ounces) seasoned low-fat refried black beans</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 cups shredded Chihuahua or mozzarella cheese</li> </ul> <p>Heat oven to 350 F.</p> <p>In medium mixing bowl, combine tomatoes; onion; garlic; peppers; cilantro; lime juice; oregano; salt, if desired; pepper; and avocado; set aside.</p> <p>On medium platter, split rolls. With medium spatula, spread refried beans onto each bread half; sprinkle cheese on bread.</p> <p>Bake 5-8 minutes, or until cheese is melted and hot.</p> |
|---|---|





### Rotini with Sausage and Mushrooms

- 1 box (13 1/4 ounces) whole-grain rotini
- 1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil
- 1 pound chicken sausage, sliced
- 1 cup leeks, thinly sliced
- 1 cup green onions, thinly sliced
- 2 cups mushrooms, sliced
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1/4 cup parsley chopped
- 6 leaves from tarragon sprigs, chopped
- 1 cup Romano cheese grated
- Parmesan-Romano cheese (optional)

Prepare rotini according to package directions. Drain and transfer to large bowl.

In large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Cook sausage 2-3 minutes, or until well browned. Add leeks, onions and mushrooms; cook until tender. Add chicken stock and simmer 3-5 minutes, or until hot. Fold sausage mixture into warm pasta. Add parsley, tarragon and Romano cheese; toss again. Top with Parmesan-Romano cheese, if desired.

### Crockpot BBQ Chicken

- 3-4 chicken breasts, boneless and skinless
- 1 16 oz. bottle of BBQ sauce
- 1/2 cup zesty Italian dressing
- 1/4 cup brown sugar

Mix all ingredients together. Cook 2-3 hours on high or 4-5 hours on low. Shred to serve on buns or serve them whole.

**Jenny Bergt, Amherst, Nebraska**

### Zucchini Pizza

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 4 cups shredded zucchini  | 1 cup mozzarella cheese, shredded             |
| 2 eggs, slightly beaten   |   |
| 1 lb. lean ground beef  | 1/2 clove fresh or 1/4 teaspoon dried, garlic |
| 1 1/2 cup chopped, fresh tomatoes or 1 – 8 oz. can tomato sauce | 1/4 teaspoon salt                             |
| 1 green pepper, sliced thin                                     | 1 medium onion, chopped                       |
| 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese   | 2 teaspoons oregano                           |
| 1 cup sharp cheddar cheese, shredded                            |   |

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Mix the zucchini with the eggs and 1/2 cup each cheddar and mozzarella cheese. Press into a 10 X 15-inch pan and bake for 10 minutes. Use medium-size pan and brown beef. Add onion and garlic; cook until limp. Drain off the fat. Stir in tomatoes and oregano, heat through. Spoon over crust. Arrange pepper on top. Sprinkle remaining cheese over top and bake for 30 minutes.

**Lois Schaaf, Stuart, Nebraska**

### Fresh Mulberry and Fresh Cherry Pie

- 3 cups fresh tart cherries or frozen tart cherries
- 1 cup fresh hand-picked mulberries
- 1 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup flour

Make pastry for two crust pie. Makes a 9 inch pie. Line pie pan with pastry. Mix cherries and mulberries together. Toss the sugar and flour together and blend with berries. Put into pastry lined pan. Dot with 2 tablespoons butter or margarine. Place top crust on pie and perforate for the steam to escape. Brush top of pastry with a little milk and sprinkle with 1 tablespoon sugar. Bake at least one hour until crust is golden brown and filling is bubbling. If using purchased pie tin, place your pie on a cookie sheet so the crust will bake well on the bottom of the pie. Disposable pie tins reflect the heat which does not let the bottom crust brown like it should. Serves 8. Preparation time one hour.

**Juan Hofer, Elgin, Nebraska**



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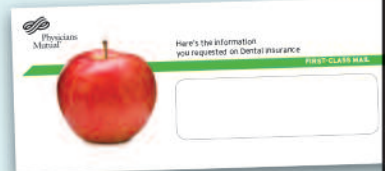


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