

MANAGER'S MESSAGE:

Tech Products to Avoid



Brian Heithoff, CEO/General Manager

When it comes to saving energy, caveat emptor (buyer beware) is alive and well. We are all bombarded by claims that border on outright falsehoods, so it pays to view savings claims from third parties cautiously. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it generally is.

We all know that electric space heaters drain energy savings from your home if used incorrectly. Companies make elaborate claims about the amount of money you can save and charge exorbitant sums for their products.

The advertisements frequently target those on a fixed income, presenting false hope while extracting precious dollars from their customers. I have seen several space heaters and admit they appear to be well made, but they typically offer no better economy than any other 1,500-watt electric heater. Bottom line, electric space heaters should only be used to heat small spaces – not your entire home.

Black boxes that claim to clean up power, protect appliances and reduce energy use come and go. These often require an electrician to install and claim to improve power quality, smooth out power fluctuations and store energy so you can reduce your bills. Save your money. Something that can fit in a shoebox is not going to deliver any value, at least not in the areas promised. If you are concerned about protecting your sensitive appliances and electronics, High West Energy will soon offer a surge protection program.

When you see the ad that reads, "The power companies don't want you to know," skip it. These are generally claims around building your own renewable energy source from parts

easily obtained at the local hardware store or a motor that produces limitless "free" electricity. I would equate these with the emails I get from foreign countries telling me I can receive millions of dollars by simply sending all my banking information. At least in the case of the homemade renewables and limitless motor you get some cool plans and parts lists. You decide if it's worth \$50 – \$200. I'd give it a pass.

I will close with a non-technology warning. Scammers love to call or stop by your home, claiming they represent the local power company. Never give anyone personal or financial information who claims to be a High West Energy employee without confirming their identity. Ask for a call back number from the caller, or some other question that they'll be able to prove.

Most of us want to save energy and keep our bills manageable. Technology can help do this, but be careful. Call us at (307) 245-3261 before making any investments in technology that seem too good to be true. You'll be glad you did.

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Ransomware Prevention

A secure grid is paramount for America's electric cooperatives, and we are closely monitoring the cyber-attacks in Europe. As threats evolve, co-ops continue to develop and implement appropriate prevention, response and recovery strategies. Co-ops remain vigilant against cyber and physical threats. They are active partners with state, local, and federal agencies to mitigate threats, protect data and ensure a secure grid.

The first step in ransomware prevention is to invest in a cyber security program with real-time protection, which is designed to fend off advanced malware attacks. There are many anti-virus programs out there, but look for features that will shield your computer from threats and block ransomware.

Next, set some time aside every month to back up your data. It may seem like an inconvenience, but if you are a target, you will be glad you backed up your files. You can purchase USBs or an external hard drive almost anywhere. Be sure to physically disconnect the devices from your computer after backing up; otherwise, they can become infected with ransomware too. Cloud storage is another option, but we recommend using a server with high-level encryption and multiple-factor authentication.

Then, be sure your systems and software are always updated. The most recent ransomware outbreak took advantage of a vulnerability in Microsoft software. While the company had released a patch for the security

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Ransomware Prevention

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loophole back in March, many folks didn't install the update which left them open to attack. It's hard to stay on top of a growing list of updates from software and applications used at work or home. That's why we recommend changing your settings to enable automatic updating.

Finally, stay informed. One of the most common ways that computers are infected with ransomware is through social engineering. Educate yourself on how to detect phishing campaigns, suspicious websites, and other scams. And above all else, exercise common sense. If it seems suspicious, it probably is.

Remember these Four Steps to prevention...

- Keep all computer software up to date.
- Install all system updates.
- Make sure you have a good computer security application, such as AVG Antivirus.
- Backup your data frequently to encrypted cloud backup or external storage devices.

For more information, contact High West Digital Solutions at (307) 245-4333.

The Power of 7,200 Volts

You already know that electricity is one of the most widely used forms of energy that we consume. We use it in our homes, schools and businesses every day. We are most familiar with how it cooks our meals, heats water, cleans our clothes and heats or cools our homes. Look at the power lines outside your home. Have you ever seen what 7,200 volts can do when not on the power line?

To illustrate that power, our linemen created a trailer to give a hot line demonstration. This is an example of how power lines work, what can interrupt your service, what conducts electricity, and offers safety tips for different situations.

First, each lineman talks about his safety equipment and what will happen in the demonstration. He wears rubber gloves and carries a yellow pole called a hot-stick. Both items are insulated to protect his skin from risk of electrocution or burns. He talks about the demo trailer and points out some things to help you understand how the structure works. It has transformers, conductors, fuses, a light fixture, some food items, a tire, and a bucket of sand.

To begin the demonstration, he connects a live line to one end of the hot-stick and touches a rubber tire and talks about why electricity moves through items touching the ground. He then lowers it into a box of sand. Upon contact, the sand turns into a glass. This is not clear window glass, but a chunk of sand that bonded the particles together to crystalize. After that, he sticks a hot dog on the end of the live line and touches it to the power line. When it touches the wire, it smokes the hot dog instantaneously. He jokes that you can consume it, but does not recommend it.

Next, he talks about the equipment on the trailer, like the transformers, fuses, insulators, and how it is back fed. He points out a switch on one of the breakers and gives an example: if a tree were to fall on the line because of a storm, it disturbs the flow of electricity, which then may cause your lights to fade in and out up to three times. You may think that it means you may soon experience an outage, but that

is not necessarily the case. On the fourth time, a lever on the transformer automatically switches off; then, there is an outage. Do not worry too much! That means the transformer is doing its job and trying to protect your home from electrical damage. Other times, if you hear a loud burst and your power goes out, that may be a curious animal who clawed at the wires and blew a fuse.

To close the demonstration, the lineman talks about what to do if you encounter downed power lines or items or animals touching lines. Always call it in! Please do not assume we know about what you are experiencing. Our linemen are trained to handle outages in all weather conditions, and can restore power in a timely manner. He reiterates that electricity is always trying to find a way into the ground, so if you become a middle-man, it can be deadly.

If you're interested in seeing a hot line demo, call Ken Haas at (307) 245-4316 to schedule. Each lineman brings his safety gear and equipment to make it an interactive experience for all ages.



Power Strips Versus Surge Protectors

As the proliferation of electronics impacts our daily lives, we realize there simply are not enough outlets in our homes. This is particularly true for older homes. As a result, we end up with a number of "outlet expanders," more commonly known as power strips.

Power strips are generic and fulfill a very simple function. They are inexpensive, and the quality, I suspect, is on par with the price.

Keeping this in mind, let's look at factors to consider when purchasing a power strip or a surge protector, the power strip's more talented cousin.

Important tip: Make sure you know the amperage rating of the outlet into which you are connecting the strip and other equipment. A residential circuit can overload if you are not careful.

Purchasing a power strip:

- Look for power strips with a built-in circuit breaker. If you connect too many electronics and devices, the strip will kick out the circuit breaker rather than causing the breaker in your electric panel to trip.
- Pay attention to the orientation of the outlets. The typical design is along the length of the strip, facing the bottom or end of the strip. I recommend power strips with the outlets perpendicular to the length of the strip.
- Get a smart strip. These are becoming more common and less expensive. With smart strips, one outlet serves as a master, receiving power all the time. The other outlets do not receive power until the master device is turned on. This is ideal for home entertainment setups.

If you are connecting expensive electronics, you may want to consider a surge protector. Here, price is even more important because a cheap surge protector can be worse than none at all for two reasons. One, they use cheap, small surge fighting components. Two, these

components can fail and the strip still will provide power, all without any indication that its protective side is gone.

Like power strips, there are some key factors to consider when buying a surge protector.

- Go for a significant joule (jewel) rating. This is a measure of how much energy it can withstand.
- Cable and internet connection protection. You may want to consider this for your entertainment and computing needs as surges can enter via any wired connection. Be sure the protector is designed to handle a digital television. Otherwise, it can cause pixilation if it's only designed for analog signals.
- Indicator light that shows if protection has burned out.
- The same outlet orientation as previously mentioned.
- Power conditioning feature (for PCs, this is a nice-to-have feature but not a necessity).
- A smart capability as mentioned above.

Power strips and surge protectors are worth the investment when you follow these simple suggestions. Don't get "burned" by purchasing cheap, inefficient strips and protectors. Pun intended.



FEATURED PERSON

Lloyd Sisson Engineering Manager

Lloyd started working at Rural Electric Company in 1972. What started as a temporary summer job turned into a full-time position to help meet the demands of the department. Ten years later, he stepped into the role of Engineering Manager.

Today, Lloyd calculates base loads, budgets, works closely with the operations department and line crews, and helps with numerous projects. "I love doing this job because of the cooperative model; those principles drive the way that we do business. Everything we do is for the members," he said. "I have some great memories of my time here. The strangest thing that happened to me was when a few years after I started working here, we were out laying and staking line east of Kimball, when a while into the job we saw an elephant walking toward us on the road. I had to blink a few times to make sure I actually saw an elephant. Turns out, the circus was in town, so the trainers weren't far behind."

High West Energy is proud and excited to celebrate Lloyd's 45th year of service.



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