

# Prepare Your Home for Old Man Winter

**H**eavy accumulations of ice and snow coupled with fluctuating winter temperatures can bring down utility poles, trees, and limbs with the ability to disrupt power for days on end. With this comes a threat to property and also to life itself.

“In a winter storm emergency, restoring power and heat to consumers is the highest priority, and electric utility crews work around the clock to restore service,” says Natalie Hemmer, member of the Safe Electricity team. “Severe damage to power lines and distribution systems may take days to repair, especially if the icing conditions are ongoing.”

Avoid going outside if possible. Downed power lines could be submerged in snow and ice and difficult to identify. When outside, treat all downed and hanging lines as if they are energized electric lines: Stay away, warn others to stay away, and immediately contact your electric cooperative. Remember that downed power lines do NOT have to be arcing, sparking, or moving to be “live” — and deadly.

Safe Electricity stresses the importance of being prepared for dangerous winter storms and the power outages they may cause. Preparing ahead of time in order to have the right supplies and the knowledge to stay warm safely are keys to weathering a winter storm emergency. Safe Electricity offers the following tips to winterize your home:

- Insulate walls, attics, and pipes.
- Caulk and install weatherstrips on windows and doors.
- Install storm windows or plastic sheeting to cover windows.



## Ice and Heavy Snows Can Produce Prolonged Power Outages

- Repair roof leaks.
- Call the electric cooperative to cut branches away from your home and power lines.

Safe Electricity emphasizes that everyone, particularly families with special needs, must be prepared in case of a winter emergency and long-term power outages.

- Always keep a battery-powered radio or TV, flashlights, and a sup-

ply of fresh batteries in case of an emergency. Test these ahead of time to make sure they are operational.

- Know where to find extra blankets.
- Fill spare containers with water for washing, and keep a supply of bottled drinking water on hand.
- Keep a supply of non-perishable food items, along with a hand opener for canned food.

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# Back-Up Generators Could Be Deadly

## Professional Installation Important for Safety

Portable generators may come in handy during long-term power outages. The growing popularity of portable electric generators has resulted in millions being placed in homes and small businesses across the nation. However, recent studies show that an overwhelming percentage may be installed incorrectly.

“A qualified vendor or electrical professional should be consulted to determine the best equipment for your situation or needs,” advises Jeff Joseph, member services representative at Richland Electric Cooperative. “A reliable vendor will know existing

safety codes and your utility’s safety requirements. If installed and operated correctly, use of standby or portable electric generators poses little danger, but improper installation or use could be deadly.”

Properly connecting the generator into the system is a critical step for safe and effective use. A licensed professional should install a permanent, standby electric generator and can help with proper equipment for safely using a portable generator.

Have a qualified electrician install a transfer switch. The transfer switch breaks the path of electricity between the power lines and your main electrical panel. This is the best way to protect you, your neighbors, and REC line crews from “back feed.” Back feed occurs when an improperly connected generator begins feeding electricity

“back” through the power lines. It is your responsibility to take necessary steps to prevent the injury of anyone near lines, especially crews working to restore power.

“Safety for the operators and users of a generating system in the home and utility crews cannot be over-emphasized,” says Joseph. For more information about safe installation, visit [www.SafeElectricity.org](http://www.SafeElectricity.org).

Some homeowners choose smaller, portable generators to power essential electrical equipment during outages. Safe Electricity offers these tips for the safe operation and use of portable generators:

- Read and follow all manufacturer operating instructions to properly ground the generator.
- Maintain adequate ventilation.
- Never plug a portable electric generator into a wall outlet or connect directly to a home’s wiring.
- Turn off the generator and allow cooling before refueling.
- Protect your appliances.
- Generators pose electrical risks, especially when operated in wet conditions.
- Keep children and pets away from portable generators at all times.
- Use proper extension cords.
- Shut down the generator properly.
- Remember maintenance between uses. ■



*To ensure safety, portable electric generators should be installed only by qualified vendors or professionals.*

## Old Man Winter

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- Switch off lights and appliances to prevent damaging appliances and overloading circuits when power is restored. Leave one lamp or light switch on as a signal for when your power returns.
- To prevent water pipes from freezing, keep faucets turned on slightly so that water drips from the tap. Know how to shut off water valves just in case a pipe bursts.
- Check on elderly or disabled friends and neighbors.
- Do not use charcoal grills or gas ovens to heat your home; this could lead to carbon monoxide poisoning.

It's a good idea to assemble a disaster supply kit that includes needed items ahead of time. Don't forget to include a first aid kit, prescription medications, and any special items needed for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.

Maintaining warmth is a priority during a winter emergency. Loss of body heat or hypothermia can be life threatening. In order to avoid cold-weather fatalities:

- Stay inside and dress in warm, layered clothing.
- Close off unneeded rooms.
- When using an alternative heat source, follow operating instructions, use fire safeguards, and be sure to properly ventilate. Always keep a multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher nearby and know how to use it.
- Stuff towels and rags underneath doors to keep the heat in.
- Cover windows at night.
- Maintain a regular diet. Food provides the body with energy for creating its own energy.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.
- Move around to keep warm, but not enough to per-

spire. Perspiring causes the body to lose fluids which could potentially lead to dehydration.

- Keep a close eye on the temperature in your home. Infants or persons over age 65 are more susceptible to the cold. You may want to stay with friends, relatives, or in a shelter if you can't keep your home warm.
- Consider installing ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI) for electrical outlets in areas that might be affected by melting snow or ice. This will help prevent electrocutions and electrical shock injuries. Portable GFCIs that do not require tools for installation can also be purchased for winter emergency supply kits.

If you use a standby generator, make sure it has a transfer safety switch or that your power is cut off at the breaker box before you operate it. This prevents electricity from traveling back through the power lines, or what is also known as "back feed." Back feed creates danger for anyone near power lines, particularly crews working to restore power. Be sure to let your electric utility know that you have a generator. For more information, visit [www.SafeElectricity.org](http://www.SafeElectricity.org). ■

*Safe Electricity is a public awareness program of the Energy Education Council, a non-profit organization allied with University of Illinois Extension and dedicated to electrical safety and energy efficiency education. Safe Electricity is supported by a coalition of hundreds of organizations, including electric utilities and other entities committed to promoting safe use of electricity. To learn more about the Council and its programs visit: [www.EnergyEdCouncil.org](http://www.EnergyEdCouncil.org).*



**Save the Date for the 75th Annual Meeting!**

The 75th Annual Meeting will be held on Saturday, March 26, this year at the Richland Center High School. This is both a new day and a new location for the meeting, so make sure you mark your calendars to keep the date open for this important celebration.

**New Date!**

**New Location!**



## **Richland Electric Cooperative Recognized for ACRE Participation**

Richland Electric Cooperative (REC) was recently recognized for earning 100 percent board and management participation in the Action Committee for Rural Electrification (ACRE). The award was presented at the recent WECA Annual Meeting in La Crosse.

ACRE is the political action organization for electric cooperatives such as REC that raises funds for use in state and national election campaigns, supporting candidates who back the goals of the rural electrification program. Co-op directors and staff contribute to ACRE annually, and if a cooperative achieves substantial participation it is recognized with a certificate for earning honor roll status.

Shown accepting the award is REC Board Vice-President Chris Ottesen, flanked by Glenn English, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (left), and Bob Kretzschmar, a Bayfield Electric Co-op director who is Wisconsin's ACRE chairman. ■



# Laugh Lines

## **Ole's New Year Resolutions**

- Procrastinate less. Starting tomorrow.
- Get in a whole NEW rut!
- Create loose ends.

\* \* \*

Lena was taking an afternoon nap on New Year's Eve before the night's big festivities. After she woke up, she confided to her husband Ole, "I just dreamt that you gave me a diamond ring for a New Year's present. What do you think it all means?"

"Aah, you'll know tonight," answered Ole, smiling broadly.

At midnight, as the New Year was chiming in, Ole approached Lena and handed her a small package. Delighted and excited, she opened it quickly. There in her hand rested a book entitled: "The meaning of dreams."

\* \* \*

After enjoying all the great feasts of Thanksgiving and Christmas, Lena felt like her body had gotten totally out of shape so for her New Year's resolution, she said she was going to join a fitness club. So Lena took an aerobics class for senior citizens. The night of the first class, Lena bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down, and perspired for an hour. However, by the time she got her leotard on, the class was over.



## Richland Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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