

Why it is Crucial to Conserve Electricity this Week

Upshur Rural Electric Cooperative

The extreme cold and winter weather condition through Thursday creates possible threats to our power grids in East Texas with supply and demand. Working at full production capacity will also affect the cost of producing electricity.

URECC does not produce electricity for its members, it purchases the power and brings it to URECC members via transmission lines from the power producers. This is the purpose for an electric cooperative, making it possible for those that live in rural areas to have electricity, just as those in towns and cities.

The producers of electricity produce a certain amount of power daily. In addition to the daily produced power, they have a limited amount of power in reserve banks.

The cold weather temperatures of this week are going to create an extremely high demand for power, as heating systems and water heaters will demand almost nonstop power to keep members warm in their homes. The temperatures this week are some of the lowest Texas has seen in its history and keeping Texas warm may require more electricity than what is produced, PLUS the electricity that is in the reserves. This can cause blackouts if the electric grid is overloaded by demand. Blackouts are basically periods where customers without power until the providers can produce enough power to catch up with the demand.

Many sources are used to produce electricity. Of course, with days of overcast sky and frozen conditions, solar and wind will be at minimum production. This leaves production to coal, hydroelectric dams, and primarily natural gas, which is at an extremely high rate of cost currently. With producers making as much electricity as they can to supply the demand, they are also using much more natural gas. The price of this natural gas used will be incorporated into production costs, making the cost of electricity more expensive to produce. URECC then has to pay a higher rate for the power for its members, then the member's bill is more. Basically, rates fluctuate from day to day all due to the price of natural gas. Fortunately for cooperative members, co-ops are non-profit, so members are only paying the cost of the electricity plus a small percentage to buy poles, lines, trucks, hire linemen and staff, etc. Any and all profits left over after operating expenses are returned to the members. Cost being more expensive when demands are high to produce more power, (like this week) is why you will often hear URECC representatives advise to conserve power during certain parts of the day, or certain days as a whole.

All Texans are strongly encouraged to conserve electricity to the extreme so there will be enough power for everyone and avoid blackouts; unplug unused appliances that pull power,

avoid using the dish washer and doing laundry, and lowering the thermostat to 68 degrees. All of these things will help conserve power so as not to overload the grid in demand.

*Many Texans will see news information, warnings and recommendations from the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), which oversees the retail electric grid in Texas. URECC and some other cooperatives are not a part of ERCOT, but are a part of another organization, the SOUTHWEST POWER POOL.