



October 2023

Playing it Safe Online

By Anne Prince, NRECA

In today's world, most of us don't leave the front door unlocked. We protect our homes, loved ones and valuables from intruders with locks, alarms and other security measures. Cybersecurity is no different. It's the practice of protecting other valuables such as your identity, banking and health records and other sensitive information from digital attacks and theft.

In addition to pumpkin-spice lattes, crisper air and Halloween festivities, October is the time of year we recognize Cybersecurity Awareness Month.

Given our increased reliance on internet-connected devices and gadgets, this month, we'd like to share a few cybersecurity tips.

According to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA), an agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for strengthening cybersecurity and infrastructure protection, these are the four best ways to keep you and your family safe online.

- 1. Implement multi-factor authentication** (also known as two-step verification) on your accounts. The additional layer of protection makes it much harder for criminals to access your information. Even if a hacker obtains your password, they may be unable to access your accounts if multi-step verification is enabled.
- 2. Update your software.** This is one of the easiest ways to protect your personal data. When downloading a software update, make sure it's coming straight from the company that created

it. Beware of fake pop-ups that request urgent downloads. Better yet, turn on automatic updates.

- 3. Think before you click.** Most successful cyber attacks start with a phishing email. Don't take the bait when cyber criminals go phishing. Avoid emails (or texts) that look too good to be true, oddly urgent, poorly crafted or include unusual requests.
- 4. Create strong passwords,** using long, unique and complex words or phrases. Consider using a password manager to save time, work across all devices, protect your identity and notify you of potential phishing websites.

For the young people in your household

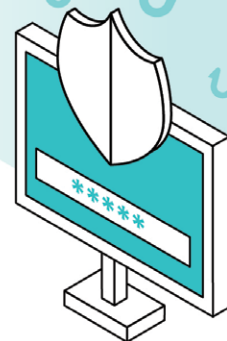
Just as you would talk with your children about safety in the physical world, discuss ways to stay safe online. Help them understand the public nature of the internet. Young people need to know early on, that what is shared online stays online and is difficult (if not impossible) to take back. Just as you would guard your money or valuables, children need to learn to guard their personal information, especially on social networks. As a parent or guardian, help your children learn about and use the privacy and security settings on social networks and gaming sites.

See Yourself in Cyber.

October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month

Improve your cyber hygiene by doing these four things:

1. Enable multi-factor authentication
2. Use strong passwords and a password manager
3. Update software regularly
4. Recognize and report phishing attacks

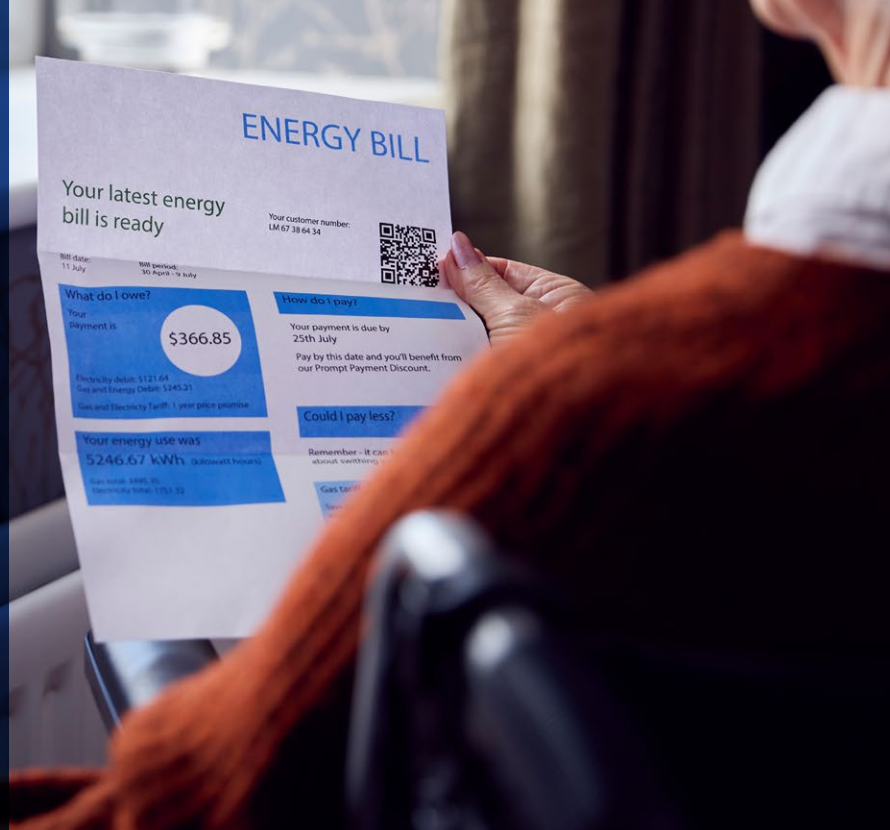


Keeping the electric grid and your data secure

We're doing our share on the cyber front. Part of offering excellent service is keeping that service secure and reliable. For South Central Electric, reliability means repairing wear-and-tear, upgrading our equipment to withstand storms and severe weather and using technology and best practices to keep our system secure from cybersecurity issues.

While we can't stop a storm or predict every disruption, as a co-op, we do everything we can to keep the lights on and our members protected. Because if we all do our part, our interconnected world will be safer and more secure for everyone.

Cold Weather Rule Outlines Process to Avoid Winter Disconnection & Loss of Electricity



The state's Cold Weather Rule guides utilities on winter disconnections as long as customers follow these main guidelines.

Residential Customer Notice

An electric cooperative must not disconnect and must reconnect the utility service of a home between October 1 and April 30 if the disconnection affects the primary heat source for the residential unit **and all of the following conditions are met:**

1. The household income of the customer is at or below 50 percent of the state median household income. The electric cooperative may verify income on forms it provides or obtain verification of income from the local energy assistance provider. A customer meets the income requirements of this clause if the customer receives any public assistance, including energy assistance that uses an income eligibility threshold set at or below 50 percent of the state median household income;
2. A customer enters into and makes reasonably timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household; and
3. A customer receives referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation or other programs likely to reduce the customer's energy bills. In addition, an electric cooperative must, between

August 15 and October 1 of each year, notify all residential customers of these provisions.

Before disconnecting service to a residential customer between October 1 and April 30, an electric cooperative must provide:

1. A notice of the proposed disconnection;
2. A statement with the customer's rights and responsibilities;
3. A list of local energy assistance providers;
4. Forms on which to declare an inability to pay; and
5. A statement explaining available time-payment plans and other options to secure continued utility service.

Emergency Energy Assistance Phone Numbers

Des Moines Valley Health & Human Services (Cottonwood County)	831-1891
Des Moines Valley Health & Human Services (Jackson County).....	847-4000
Jackson County Sheriff's Department.....	847-4420
Martin County Human Services.....	238-4757
Martin County Sheriff's Department	238-4481
MN Dept. of Energy Services (Ask for fuel assistance).....	1-800-657-3805
Minnesota Valley Action Council	1-800-767-7139
Brown County	354-3138
Martin County	238-1663
Watonwan County	375-5748
Salvation Army's Heat Share (Jackson & Martin Co.)	238-9797
Watonwan County Human Services.....	375-3294
United Community Action Partnership (Jackson & Cottonwood Co.)	1-800-992-1710

If you live in an area that is not listed, call your electric co-op for details.

Local Organizations Can Apply for Funds



Are you a local organization that helps improve the lives of the residents of Watonwan, Cottonwood and Martin counties? Your organization can apply for funding from the South Central Electric Association Trust.

The South Central Electric Association Trust distributes funds contributed by South Central Electric members through its Operation Round Up® program. The independent Trust Board, which consists of South Central Electric members, evaluates local funding requests and distributes the funds. The South Central Electric Trust has provided over \$80,000 to local organizations and student

scholarships since the program began in 2015.

The Trust Board is seeking applications for its fall round of funding. Local organizations that improve the lives of area seniors, educate, provide emergency response, community service and other charitable programs may be eligible for funds. The deadline for submitting applications is October 27, 2023. You can download the application from South Central Electric's Operation Round Up page under the Community tab on our website: www.southcentralelectric.com or call South Central Electric at 375-3164 to request an application.

SCEA WATER HEATER PROGRAM

SCEA's peak shave water heater program provides members with a Marathon water heater at a discounted price for participating in the load management program.

The cost for water heaters is **\$750**. This is a great value for members. SCEA pays the cost of the electrician to wire the water heater and radio control. The member would pay any costs incurred by a plumber.



ALERT TODAY, ALIVE TOMORROW: HEADS UP FOR FARM SAFETY



Stay safe around downed power lines. Consider all lines, equipment and conductors to be live and dangerous.



If you are inside farm machinery that makes contact with a downed power line, know what to do!

If you can drive safely away from the power source without bringing down the utility pole and lines, travel at least 40 ft. before exiting.

If you are unable to drive the machinery due to injury, obstacles or it is inoperable, do NOT exit. Call for help and warn anyone nearby NOT to approach.

If the vehicle is on fire, or you must exit for other safety reasons, follow these steps:

1. Jump clear of the vehicle. Do not let any part of your body or clothes touch the ground and the machinery at the same time.
2. Land with feet together and hop away in small steps to minimize the path of electric current and avoid electric shock.
3. Keep going until you are at least 40 ft. away.
4. Call for help. Make sure no one gets within 40 ft. of the downed line.
5. Do not re-enter the area or vehicle until emergency responders and your electric co-op crews determine it is safe.

Operations Report

Jeff Benson, Operations Manager

South Central Electric line crews and contractors continue to make progress on the work plan. Crews have been replacing aging line and poles with underground or new overhead. This includes work to replace rejected poles or bad underground. Some of the underground on our system was installed in the late 60's and 70's.

In Kimball Township, Jackson County, we replaced approximately eight miles of aging single-phase overhead with single-phase underground. Some of the poles and line replaced in the area were original.

In Cottonwood County most of the work has been in Ann and Midway Townships. In Ann Township we rebuilt single-phase overhead line with new overhead. In areas that had a large number of rejected poles, new underground was installed (approximately six miles). In Midway Township we replaced two miles of bad three-phase underground with new three-phase underground.

In Madelia Township, Watonwan

County, we rebuilt two miles of three-phase overhead with new three-phase overhead.

Important Reminder: We are still experiencing supply chain issues. Our vendors are telling us it could be up to one year from the time we order to get high voltage cable. This is also the case for some three-phase pad mount transformers and rubber goods for underground terminations. If you are thinking of upgrading your service or adding a new service talk to your electrician and us for availability of material. If you fail to contact us, we may not have the material for the completion of your project.

If you request a new service from us, you will be billed the monthly service charge once we complete our work. This would be whether your electrician has the service energized or not. We are required to maintain that service to the National Electrical Safety Code if it is energized or not. It is important to coordinate with your electrician and us on projects.



Official monthly newsletter

South Central Electric

71176 Tiell Dr., PO Box 150
St. James, MN 56081-0150
(507) 375-3164

Outages: (888) 805-7232

E-mail address:

sce@southcentralelectric.com

Web:

www.southcentralelectric.com

Office hours:

7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Ron Horman, General Manager

Board of Directors

President, Ron Jorgenson
Vice President, Michael Miest
Secretary, Brad Asendorf
Treasurer, Matt Peters
Brent Imker, Director
Mark Sandberg, Director
Bill Kunz, Director

The Board meets the fourth Tuesday of the month at South Central Electric's building at 71176 Tiell Dr., St. James, MN.

Please see our website for a summary of the board meetings.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

By the Community
CO-OPS
For the Community

October is National Co-op Month.
Electric co-ops are proud to power more than 20 million American homes, businesses, farms and schools in 48 states.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE!

www.southcentralelectric.com

FOLLOW US on Facebook!