

How to keep food safe when the power is out

Wind, lightning and even squirrels can cause a power outage. We know outages of any length is frustrating, especially when your fridge is stocked.

Here are safety tips to keep in mind.

Before an outage

Keep an emergency supply kit on hand. Be sure to include nonperishable food items like bottled water, powdered milk, canned goods, cereal and protein bars.

If you have advance warning an outage is possible, fill a cooler with ice — just in case the outage spans several hours.

During an outage

If an outage occurs, do not open the refrigerator or freezer unless absolutely necessary. An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for about 24 hours and a full freezer for about 48 hours. If it looks like the power outage will last longer than four hours, move perishable items to ice-filled cooler.

After an outage

If refrigerated foods have been exposed to temperatures higher than 40 degrees for more than two hours, the American Red Cross recommends discarding them.

While most perishable foods should be thrown out, there are items safe to eat after a two-hour exposure to 40+ degrees:

- Hard cheeses properly wrapped;
- Butter/margarine properly wrapped;
- Taco, BBQ and soy sauces, peanut butter, jelly, mustard, ketchup and relish.

Always smell and inspect foods before consuming. When in doubt, throw it out.

To learn more about food safety after an emergency, visit www.ready.gov/food.

RATE INCREASE

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budget this year. The most recent increase was \$19.8 million, which is why we must take the extraordinary action of raising our PCA \$19.60 per 1,000 kWh. Even with this rate increase, we project to end the year with a \$4.6 million budget deficit.”

Davis said about 70 percent of the fuel used to generate power in Florida is natural gas, and all utilities are struggling with soaring fuel costs. The co-op’s October PCA increase is the sixth in the last year. Florida Power and Light, Duke Energy, Gainesville Regional Utilities and others have also raised its rates this year due to natural gas prices, and plan to again in 2023.

“Our staff and the Board do not take these increases lightly,” Davis said. “We will all continue to look for ways to lessen the impact on our members. As soon as natural gas prices go down, we will lower our rates.”

The co-op understands members are suffering from higher electric bills and increasing financial demands in all parts of their lives. Clay Electric offers free energy surveys to help members find ways to lower their usage and bills, and provides several energy tips, tools and programs at www.ClayElectric.com. The co-op also works with many organizations in North Florida who provide utility bill payment assistance to members. A list organizations are available at www.clayelectric.com/payment-assistance.

Clay Electric has a new PrePaid billing program to help members who are often behind on their payments or do not want a set due date. PrePaid gives members the power to pay for electricity on their own schedule — daily, weekly, monthly, or whenever is right for them. It allows members to purchase electricity on a pay-as-you-go basis without deposits, late fees or reconnection fees.

More information on the PrePaid program is available at www.clayelectric.com/prepaid-program.

The Clay Electric Cooperative, Inc. _____

Power Line

October 2022

Soaring gas prices punch co-op again

Never-before-seen generation costs cause electric bills to climb further

Facing a nearly \$20 million budget shortfall for the fourth quarter due to a volatile natural gas market, Clay Electric has to impose a substantial rate increase.

Beginning with October billing cycles, the Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) is increasing \$19.60 per 1,000 kWh of energy a member consumes. Members who use the industry standard household average of 1,000 kWh of power will now pay \$159.50.

The PCA increases or decreases each month depending on the costs to generate power. Current and forecast natural gas prices are quadruple what they were in 2020, and about triple from 2021 due to domestic conditions and international events. Overall demand for natural gas this year has exceeded supply, in part due to low coal inventories, extreme summer weather and low storage inventories.

“Clay Electric has never seen increases in power costs of this magnitude,” said General Manager/CEO Ricky Davis. “These increases have put our energy costs \$65 million over

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Clay Electric Cooperative was rated by our customers

**#1 in Customer Satisfaction
with Residential Electric Service
Among Cooperatives**

For J.D. Power 2021 award information, visit jdpower.com/awards

Report from
the manager

Ricky Davis

General Manager/CEO



Safeguard yourself online

In today's hyper-fast digital world, cyberattacks are unfortunately nothing new. Cyber criminals can attack on a multitude of levels, from large-scale attacks targeting utilities to smaller phishing attacks aimed to gain an individual's personal information.

October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month, but good cyber hygiene should be practiced year-round. This year's theme is "See Yourself in Cyber" — because we all play a part in cybersecurity. When we hear about massive data breaches, it can feel overwhelming and lead us to think we're powerless as individuals to stop cyber criminals.

The truth is, there are several practical steps we can take to safeguard our devices and data. Here are four easy ways to boost your cyber hygiene:

Enable multi-factor authentication

Also known as two-step verification, multi-factor authentication adds a second step when logging into an account (to prove you're really you), which greatly increases the security of the account.

This second step could include an extra PIN, answering an extra security question, a code received via email or a secure token. Regardless of the type of authentication, this additional step makes it twice as hard for cyber criminals to access your account. Not every account offers multi-factor authentication, but it's becoming increasingly popular and should be utilized when available.

Power Line is an informational publication of Clay Electric Cooperative, Inc. It is distributed monthly with members' statements. If you have questions or comments about Power Line, write Justin Caudell at P.O. Box 308, Keystone Heights, FL 32656; or email: Jcaudell@clayelectric.com. Clay Electric Cooperative's Board of Trustees will meet at noon Thursday, Oct. 27 and Tuesday, Nov. 15 in Keystone Heights.

Archive copies of the Power Line are available online at www.clayelectric.com/communications or by request.

Use strong passwords, a password manager

Remember, passwords are the "keys" to your personal home online. Your passwords should always be long, unique and complex.

Create passwords using at least 12 characters, never reuse passwords for multiple accounts and use a combination of upper- and lower-case letters, numbers and special characters. If you have a lot of accounts, consider using a password manager to store them easily and securely in one place.

Update software

It may seem obvious, but regularly updating software is one of the easiest ways to keep your personal information secure. Most companies provide automatic updates and will send reminders so you can easily install the update.

If you're not receiving automatic software updates, set a reminder to do so quarterly. Be aware that some cyber criminals will send fake updates; these typically appear as a pop-up window when visiting a website. Use good judgement and always think before you click.

Recognize and report phishing attacks

Don't take the bait when cyber criminals go phishing. The signs of a phishing attack can be subtle, so take the extra time to thoroughly inspect emails.

Most phishing emails include offers that are too good to be true, an urgent or alarming tone, misspellings and poorly-crafted language, ambiguous greetings, strange requests or an email address that doesn't match the company it's coming from. Most platforms like Outlook, Gmail and Mac Mail allow users to report phishing emails. If you suspect a phishing attempt, take an extra minute to report it.

Cyber criminals are here to stay, but when we all take a risk-based approach to our cyber behavior, we're creating a safer internet for all.

Visit www.staysafeonline.org for additional cybersecurity tips.

Please make room for roadside crews

When the power goes out, so do Clay Electric's line crews. Lineworkers are the first to respond after an outage occurs, and they work tirelessly to restore power.

If you're traveling and see one of our crews on the side of the road, we kindly ask that you move over if possible and give them a little extra space to work. We deeply care about the safety of all, and this extra precaution ensures just that.

In 2014, utility crews became protected by the Florida Move Over Act. Under the law, motorists are required to:

- Approach law enforcement patrol cars, emergency vehicles, utility service vehicles, sanitation vehicles and tow trucks/wreckers with caution.
- Change lanes away from these vehicles if traveling on a multi-lane roadway and you are able to move over safely; OR
- Slow down to a speed that is 20 mph less than the posted speed limit when a clearly identified emergency or work-crew vehicle is parked and crews are working.

