

Natural gas safety tips for winter weather

As temperatures drop this winter, households will increase their use of natural gas to keep their homes warm and comfortable. Natural gas is one of the safest sources of energy, but it's important to recognize a potential natural gas leak and know what to do if you suspect a leak.

How can I recognize a natural gas leak?

- **By smell:** Natural gas is colorless and odorless, but gas providers add a chemical that makes it smell like rotten eggs so any leaks can be easily detected.
- **By sound:** A hissing or roaring sound coming from a natural gas line might be a sign of a leak.
- **By sight:** If you see unexplained dead grass, natural gas might be leaking. Dirt or debris blowing in the air and water bubbling in a puddle, pond, or creek are other signs.

What should I do if I suspect a leak?

If you smell a faint gas odor:

- Make sure all gas appliances and burners on your stove are turned off completely.
- Open one or more windows and wait a few minutes for the gas odor to dissipate before investigating further.
- Check the pilot lights on your gas furnace, water heater, stove, and oven.
- Don't try to relight a gas appliance while you can still smell gas.
- If you need assistance relighting the pilot light, call a heating or plumbing contractor.

If you smell a strong odor:

- Leave the area immediately.
- Do not use the telephone or cell phone until you reach a safe location away from the suspected leak. Then call Rock Energy at 866-752-4550 to report the location.



As you're shoveling sidewalks and driveways this winter, remember to check your natural gas meter and pipes for drifted snow, top, which can cause problems. When exposing the meter and pipes, avoid using a snow blower. Instead, gently remove snow and ice from the area. Also remember to clear snow away from furnace intake and exhaust pipes.

- Do not light a match or turn on or off any switches, flashlights, garage door openers, or other appliances because an electric arc might ignite the gas.

How can I get more information?

If you have any questions about natural gas safety, we would be happy to provide you with further information. Just call us at 866-752-4550 or e-mail questions@rock.coop.



Rock Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



More Power to You MAY YOUR HOLIDAY SEASON BE *Merry and Bright*

Shane L. Larson,
Chief Executive
Officer

The holidays are a time of year that many of us eagerly anticipate. The season is marked by special foods, seasonal decorations, and lots of festivities. We cherish carrying on old family traditions and enjoy creating new ones.

However, given the hustle and bustle of the season, the holidays also can offer an opportunity to slow down and reflect. All of us at Rock Energy Cooperative are grateful for you, the members of the co-op. While our main focus is providing safe, reliable, and affordable energy, we also want to give back. We want to help our members and the communities they live in thrive.

Rock Cooperative Care is one of the ways we help. This is our energy assis-

tance program that benefits co-op members who might otherwise fall through the cracks because their incomes are too high to qualify for federal programs but too low to make ends meet.

We launched Rock Cooperative Care in 2010 to help members going through tough times. Since then, more than \$275,000 has been awarded to members who might otherwise fall through the cracks because their incomes are too high to qualify for federal assistance but too low to make ends make. If you think you might qualify for assistance, check out the income guidelines on page 20B.

At Rock Energy, we do many things to be prepared for emergencies. Most of the time, bad weather or equipment failures test our preparedness. This past spring, we had a different kind of emergency: we had a fellow employee

who became seriously ill and required lifesaving measures in our office. (See article on page 20C).

As you will read in the article, our employees receive CPR and first-aid training. As you can imagine, this makes sense, particularly for our crews out in the field. However, in this instance, it was an office employee who fell ill.

I am so very glad that our employees not only had certified CPR training, but most importantly they were able to execute that training during a very difficult situation. It's one thing to render aid to a stranger, but it is quite another helping a co-worker, a friend.

Elise, the employee in the piece, was brave enough to share her story so that perhaps others may be as prepared as her fellow workers were on that warm spring

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ROCK COOPERATIVE CARE OFFERS ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Some Rock Energy Cooperative members need a little help paying their energy bills. They might earn too much to qualify for state and federal energy assistance, or they might need some extra money to supplement the other programs.

Either way, Rock Cooperative Care is available to help. Since 2010, more than \$275,000 has been distributed to help members.

A one-time grant of up to \$500 is available to help residential members who are struggling to pay their energy bills but do not meet more stringent state and federal requirements.

Check the chart below to see if your household qualifies for assistance. For example, a four-person household would be eligible if the total annual income is \$77,250 or less.

The Salvation Army office administers the Rock Cooperative Care program. If you meet the eligibility requirements, call either of these offices during regular business hours to schedule an appointment: Janesville, 608-757-8300, extension 26, or Rockford, 815-972-1135. Be sure to point out that you would like to schedule an appointment to apply for the Rock Cooperative Care program.

Rock Cooperative Care Income Guidelines for the 2019-2020 Heating Season*

Family Size	150% of Poverty Level (eligible for up to a \$500 grant)		200% of Poverty Level (eligible for up to a \$350 grant)		300% of Poverty Level (eligible for up to a \$250 grant)	
	30-Day Income	Annual Income	30-Day Income	Annual Income	30-Day Income	Annual Income
1	\$1,561	\$18,735	\$2,082	\$24,980	\$3,123	\$37,470
2	\$2,114	\$25,365	\$2,818	\$33,820	\$4,228	\$50,730
3	\$2,666	\$31,995	\$3,555	\$42,660	\$5,333	\$63,990
4	\$3,219	\$38,625	\$4,292	\$51,500	\$6,438	\$77,250
5	\$3,771	\$45,255	\$5,028	\$60,340	\$7,543	\$90,510
6	\$4,324	\$51,885	\$5,765	\$69,180	\$8,648	\$103,770
7	\$4,876	\$58,515	\$6,502	\$78,020	\$9,753	\$117,030
8	\$5,429	\$65,145	\$7,238	\$86,860	\$10,858	\$130,290

*Figures are based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines for 2019-2020.

HELP ALSO AVAILABLE THROUGH STATE, FEDERAL PROGRAMS

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) also helps eligible low-income households pay for winter energy services. The program's heat and electric assistance is a one-time benefit payment per heating season. The amount depends on household size, income, and energy costs.

You are eligible for heating assistance through LIHEAP if your household's combined income is at or below the levels shown on the accompanying chart.

For more information and application details, please contact your local office:

- Winnebago County (South Beloit, Rockton, and Roscoe residents only): 815-389-0914 or 815-624-7788, Rockton Township, 1315 N. Blackhawk Blvd., Rockton.
- Boone County: 815-544-3144, United Way of Boone County, 220 W. Locust St., Belvidere.
- Stephenson County: 815-232-3141 or 800-883-1111, Northwestern Illinois Community Action Agency, 27 S. State Ave., Freeport.
- McHenry County: 815-338-7752, McHenry County Housing Authority, 1108 N. Seminary Ave., Woodstock.

ILLINOIS LIHEAP INCOME GUIDELINES for the 2019-2020 Heating Season

Household Size	30-Day Household Income	Annual Household Income
1	\$1,561	\$18,735
2	\$2,114	\$25,365
3	\$2,666	\$31,995
4	\$3,219	\$38,625
5	\$3,771	\$45,255
6	\$4,324	\$51,885
7	\$4,876	\$58,515
8	\$5,429	\$65,145

CPR TRAINING SAVES CO-WORKER'S LIFE

Fire chief praises quick action of Rock Energy employees

Elise Ehrensing was in the right place at the right time when her heart stopped beating.

The right place was Rock Energy Cooperative's office in South Beloit, where employees have been trained in CPR and first aid annually for at least the past 30 years. The timing was right because about a month earlier she had been promoted from part-time member services representative to full-time status.

"Had I not joined Rock as a full-time employee, I wouldn't have been at the office because I didn't work on Wednesdays," Elise said. "Who knows where I would have been? I might have been at home by myself or out running errands when this occurred."

But fortunately, on that Wednesday afternoon in April, she and Stephanie Cammelot, consumer accounting supervisor, were meeting with a member. Elise was explaining a co-op program when Stephanie noticed her co-worker was having difficulty finding the right words and seemed short of breath. Suddenly, Elise stopped talking and collapsed.

At that moment, Stephanie sprang into action. She quickly called 911 from the phone in the meeting room and then yelled to her co-workers for help. Many in the office had just completed their CPR training the week before and knew exactly what to do: start chest compressions and get the first-aid kit and AED (automatic external defibrillator). Knowing that rescue help was on the way, one employee volunteered to wait by the side of the road to direct the ambulance into the right driveway.

While Stephanie and Sharon Janes, manager of administrative services, took turns doing chest compressions, April Nichols, district office supervisor, positioned the AED pads so the machine could analyze Elise's heart and direct when to provide a shock. Other co-workers stood ready to relieve Stephanie and Sharon if they grew too tired to continue CPR.

Neither Stephanie nor Sharon had ad-

ministered CPR before, and both said it was much more difficult to work on a real person, especially someone you know, compared to the training dummy. The AED provided verbal prompts that continually told them to push harder, even though they were using their entire body weight on the chest compressions.

South Beloit rescue personnel soon arrived and continued working on Elise before transporting her to the hospital.

"When we arrived on scene, she was not breathing and her heart was not functioning," said South Beloit Fire Chief Michael Davenport, who praised the quick action of Rock Energy employees. "You guys activated 911. You activated the AED. You started CPR. You did everything exactly the way it needed to be done. It's truly because of the early CPR and early defibrillation that was done by the employees at the office that she was able to survive and also survive with no deficits.

"You guys do such a wonderful job there at the facility by making sure your employees have the necessary training that they need and that you continue on with that training on a yearly basis. It's extremely important when you have a shop or a business to have basic first-aid and CPR training because when these emergencies happen it increases the survival rate. I feel we're very fortunate to have a company here in South Beloit that takes CPR and first-aid training as seriously as you guys do."

Elise, who is 32, said her doctor told her that one of two things might have caused her heart to stop beating. One is long QT syndrome, a heart rhythm condition that causes fast, chaotic heartbeats and can lead to death. She is awaiting



Elise Ehrensing, front center, is surrounded by some of the people who helped her, from left, South Beloit Fire Chief Michael Davenport, Sharon Janes, Stephanie Cammelot, April Nichols, and South Beloit firefighter Gary Brown, who was the first paramedic to arrive on the scene.

the results of genetic tests to see if she has that syndrome. The other possibility is that her heart had an electric conduction issue.

"The doctor told me an electric conduction issue with the heart can happen to any person at any time," Elise said. "Your heart gets out of rhythm. Normally it can get itself back into the right rhythm. Mine simply did not."

To prevent that from happening again, Elise underwent surgery to have an ICD (implantable cardioverter defibrillator) inserted. When an ICD detects irregular heart rhythms, it sends a strong electrical impulse that shocks the heart out of the dangerous rhythm and allows normal rhythms to resume. The device also serves as a pacemaker, which stimulates the heart if an abnormally slow heart rate is detected.

It's been about seven months since the device was inserted, and thankfully no issues have been documented with Elise's heart during that time.

When Elise participated in the first-aid and CPR course at Rock Energy a week before her heart stopped beating that day, she had no idea that her co-workers would soon use their training to save her life.

"The doctor told my family I was

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Rock Energy line workers do more than keep electricity flowing. This summer, a crew working in rural Rock County was approached by a woman who needed help for her husband who was having an asthma attack in their car. The workers reacted quickly, pulled him out of the car, started chest compressions, and activated the AED (automatic external defibrillator). They continued CPR until rescue workers arrived. Crew members pictured with the AED from their truck are, from left, Journeyman Linemen Billy Beggs and Justin Busfield and Apprentice Lineman Brody Back. All co-op vehicles are equipped with AEDs and first-aid kits.

CPR Training Saves (Continued from page 20C)

clinically dead,” she said. “He also expressed just how critical this situation was by informing me that the average survival rate of those who go into cardiac arrest outside of a hospital setting is only about 5 percent.

“I am very thankful to everyone that they jumped into action so quickly and got help on the way as fast as they did because who knows what would have happened. Had they not been in that training, had Rock Energy not provided this training, I may have suffered permanent damage from this event or it’s very possible I would not even be here today.

“I really feel blessed that I have the position I do, to work at the place I’m at, and to have a company that cares enough for their employees to provide this training and equipment.”

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



Rock Energy Cooperative offices will be closed on Tuesday, Dec. 24, and Wednesday, Dec. 25, in observance of Christmas and Tuesday, Dec. 31, and Wednesday, Jan. 1, for the New Year’s holiday. Members can make payments in the drop boxes at both offices throughout the holiday weekend and at the new payment kiosk outside our South Beloit office, 15229 Willowbrook Road. Even though our offices are closed, standby crews are always available 24 hours a day. If you need to report a power outage, please call 866-752-4550.

Shane Larson, CEO

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Barbara Uebelacker, Editor

More Power to You (Continued from page 20A)

day. Elise is a terrific employee and an even better person. We are so thankful that she not only survived, but that she is thriving in all facets of her life.

If you haven’t taken a CPR class, please do yourselves, your family, and perhaps even a stranger, a huge favor: Take a CPR class and then keep your training up to date each year. While most situations are not life or death, it’s always best to be prepared, because you never know.

All of us at Rock Energy sincerely hope you and your family have a wonderful and safe holiday season. As you decorate your home, please keep safety in mind. Make sure your holiday lights are in good working order, don’t overload circuits, and never use frayed or worn extension cords.

It truly is a privilege to serve your energy needs during the holidays and throughout the year. If we can do anything to improve our service, please let us know.

SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED TO HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Rock Energy Cooperative again is offering scholarships of \$500 to graduating high school seniors who enroll at an accredited school.

Students whose parents or guardians are members of Rock Energy are eligible to apply. In other words, you can apply if your household receives electricity and/or natural gas from the co-op.

Our independent scholarship committee will judge applicants based on general merit, cooperation, leadership abilities, financial need, and class ranking.

Since 1989, Rock Energy has awarded more than \$107,000 in financial aid to deserving students.

Online applications are available at www.rock.coop. Just go to the Community & Youth tab and click on Scholarships. The deadline for submitting applications is Jan. 10. If you have any questions, please contact Barbara Uebelacker, communications director, at 866-752-4550 or barbu@rock.coop.

In addition, scholarships of \$2,000 will be awarded through the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives (IEC) Memorial Scholarship Program. These scholarships are available to high school seniors who are the sons or daughters of an Illinois electric cooperative member receiving service from the co-op.

Applications must be completed online at www.rock.coop. Just go to the Community & Youth tab and click on Scholarships. The deadline is Dec. 31.



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