

# Natural Gas Q&A

Rock Energy Cooperative operates about 175 miles of natural gas pipeline in northern Illinois with nearly 9,000 services. Our distribution system is regularly monitored and inspected for corrosion and leaks to ensure safe and reliable service. Please review this safety information so you can help us prevent pipeline damage, learn how to recognize a natural gas emergency, and take the appropriate action if an accident occurs.

## What is natural gas?

Natural gas is an economical and reliable source of energy that is completely safe when used properly. It is formed when layers of buried plants and animals are exposed to intense heat and pressure over millions of years. Because natural gas is lighter than air, it rises and dissipates into the atmosphere if it escapes from a pipeline. Underground, however, it may follow the path of least resistance, accumulating in a confined space or traveling to an ignition source. Natural gas is easily ignited by heat, sparks, or flames and can cause explosions.

## How is it transported?

Pipelines are the safest and most economical method of transporting natural gas, according to the National Transportation Safety Board. Because pipelines are buried underground, warning signs are used to indicate their presence along the right-of-way. The signs are clearly marked with the operator's name and emergency phone number. The pipeline right-of-way must remain free of structures, vegetation, and any other obstructions. Maintaining a right-of-way free of encroachments is essential to ensuring the safety and integrity of pipelines.

## How can I prevent pipeline damage?

Damage from digging is the most common cause of underground natural gas leaks. Even a small scratch in the pipeline coating may result in corrosion that could lead to a leak. Always call 811 before you dig or excavate to avoid hitting a natural gas pipeline or other buried utility line. Illinois law requires people to call at least two business days before any digging project. Utilities then will send a representative to the site so all underground lines can be marked. The call and service are absolutely free. Remember that Rock Energy Cooperative maintains buried gas pipes up to your meter. All pipes beyond that are the member's responsibility and should be periodically inspected for corrosion and leaks.



## How can I recognize a leak?



**By smell:** Gas providers add a chemical that makes natural gas smell like rotten eggs so any leaks can be easily detected.



**By sound:** An unusual hissing, roaring, or whistling sound along a natural gas line or coming from an appliance might signify a leak.



**By sight:** Unexplained dead grass, bubbling water, and blowing dirt near a meter or along the pipeline route are signs of a leak.

## What should I do if I suspect a leak?

### If you smell a faint odor:

- ✓ Make sure all gas appliances and burners on your stove are turned off completely. If the odor is eliminated when you turn off an appliance, call a repair person because the problem most likely is isolated to that one appliance. Rock Energy provides natural gas to your home or business but does not have a service department that repairs malfunctioning appliances.
- ✓ Open one or more windows and wait a few minutes for the 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 a phone until you're safely away from the suspected leak. Then call Rock Energy Cooperative at 866-752-4550 or contact your gas provider.
- ✓ 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. We also encourage you to visit these websites to get more information about pipeline safety.



**Rock Energy:** [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop)

**Call 811:** [www.call811.com](http://www.call811.com)

**Diggers Hotline:** [www.diggershotline.com](http://www.diggershotline.com)

**JULIE (Joint Utility Locating Information for Excavators):** [www.illinois1call.com](http://www.illinois1call.com)

**National Pipeline Mapping System:** [www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov](http://www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov)





## More Power to You WE'RE MORE PLUGGED IN, BUT USING LESS ELECTRICITY

Shane L. Larson,  
Chief Executive Officer

Think about all the things in your home that are plugged in right now. Then try to remember what it was like 25 years ago. If your home is anything like mine, I bet there's quite a difference. With more items in our homes using electricity, our total household energy consumption must have increased, right?

Conventional wisdom tells you that must be true, but statistics prove otherwise. The average Wisconsin household used 679 kilowatt-hours of electricity per month in 1990, but that figure dropped to 668 in 2015.

A closer look at the stats shows the average monthly use peaked in 2002 and then started a steady decline in 2011. (See graphic.) The increased energy efficiency of appliances, electronics, and lighting has offset the growing number of items in our homes requiring electricity, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Let's look at each of these factors.

### Energy-efficient appliances

The major appliances in your home have become much more energy efficient through the years, starting in 1992 when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Energy launched their Energy Star program. When buying a new appliance, always look for the yellow EnergyGuide labels. These products deliver the same or better performance as comparable models while using less energy and saving money.

Many folks wonder if it's wise to pay more for an energy-efficient appliance when a cheaper model will work just as well. You only have to do the math to realize that the energy savings will more than offset the extra cost. For example, the EPA estimates that an Energy Star-labeled refrigerator costs about \$30 extra, but that will be recovered by energy cost savings in less than three years.

Considering these major appliances are expected to last 10 to 20 years, spending a little extra cash now can save you money in the long run.

If you buy a new energy-efficient refrigerator, resist the urge to move the energy hog you're replacing to the garage or basement. The only way to save energy costs is to get rid of it. Focus on Energy, an energy-efficiency program in Wisconsin, offers a recycling program that pays \$35 to state residents for old refrigerators. Details can be found at [www.focusonenergy.com](http://www.focusonenergy.com).

### Efficient lighting

Lightbulbs have made an amazing transformation in the past 10 years. Under the federal Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, lightbulbs must be 70 percent more efficient by 2020.

Before 1990, most household lights were incandescent. If you've ever touched one of these bulbs, you'll immediately understand why they are so inefficient. They're extremely hot. Incandescent bulbs convert only 20 percent of the energy they use into light. The remaining is lost as heat, which certainly isn't the intended use of lightbulbs.

Compact fluorescent lights even-

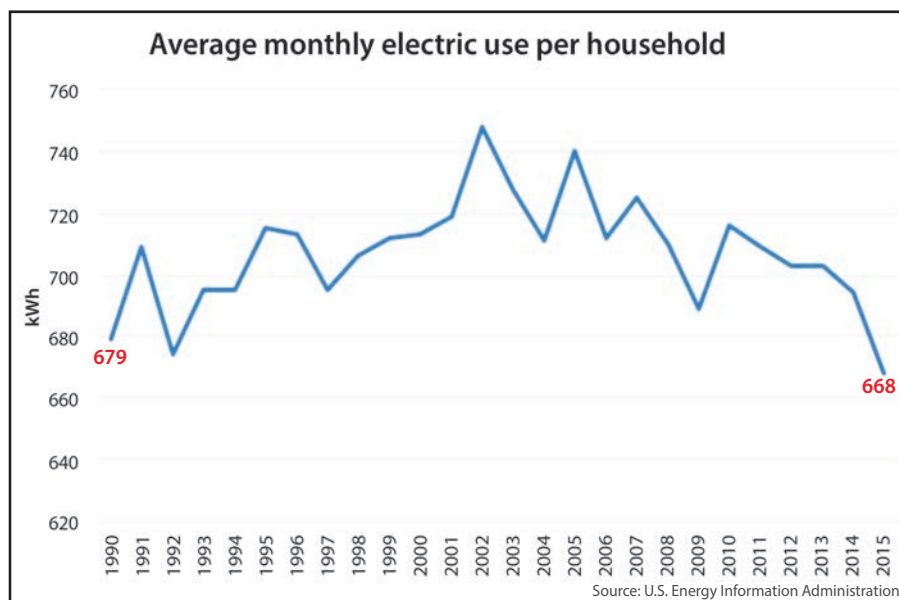
tually replaced the incandescent bulbs and resulted in significant energy savings, using about 75 percent less energy. But CFLs have their drawbacks. It takes a few moments for them to warm up and reach full brightness. They also contain a small amount of mercury.

The latest technology available for home lighting is light-emitting diode bulbs. These LEDs are not only more efficient than CFL and incandescent bulbs, they also can last years, or even decades, longer than their counterparts. The price tag was their biggest drawback until recently, but the cost has dropped significantly as more products enter the market.

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that replacing the five most frequently used incandescent bulbs with Energy Star-certified LEDs can save you \$75 per year. But buyer beware. Be sure to look for the Energy Star label because the marketplace contains LED products that are cheaper but produce low light levels and don't last as long.

### Consumer electronics

We're definitely a plugged-in society. Appliances and electronics account for 60 percent of the residential electricity ►





used, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That number has tripled in the past 30 years.

Americans own about 25 electronic devices and homes with internet service have an average of seven connected devices, the consumer electronics industry estimates. Most of these devices are using a constant stream of power even when not in use.

Walk through your home at night, and you'll see the red and green lights of appliances and the glow of digital clocks. Sometimes called "energy vampires," these devices use more electricity than you might think. They are responsible for 5 percent of all the energy used in the United States and cost consumers more than \$3 billion every year.

The U.S. Department of Energy offers some simple ways to cut this energy use. One of the easiest is to unplug your mobile phone charger after the phone has full power. When your phone is fully charged and still connected, 2.24 watts of electricity are being used. Even after you disconnect your phone, the idle charger draws .26 watts. See the box on this page for other energy-saving tips.

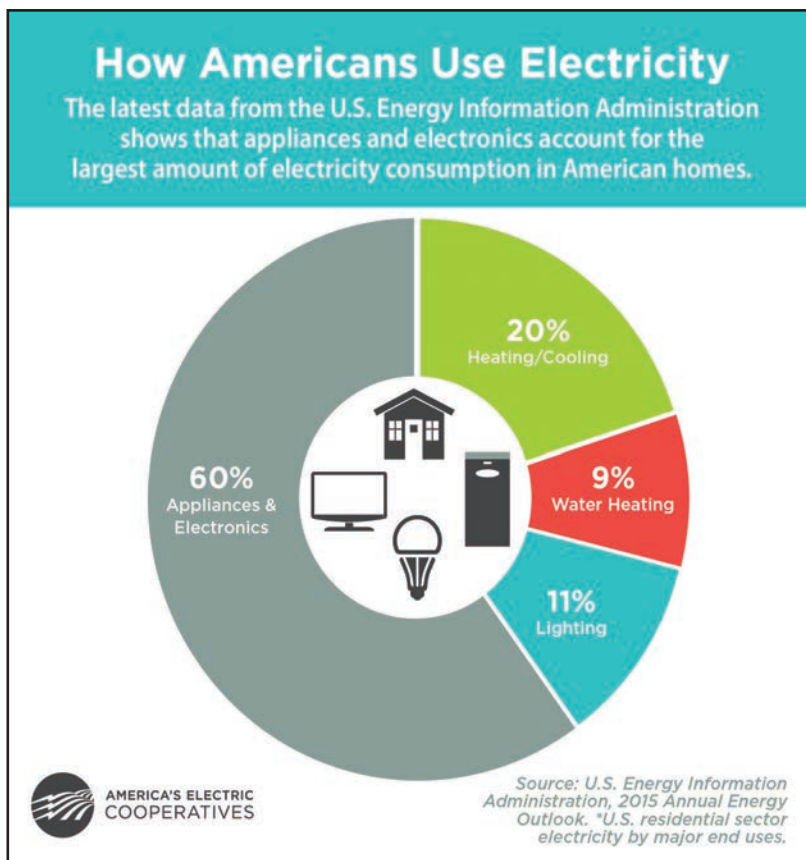
With more items plugged in, it seems counterintuitive that our homes are using less power. The concern for utilities is that the average home's energy consumption has decreased, but the fixed cost of maintaining the electric grid has not. Traditionally, utilities have rolled some of the fixed costs into the per kilowatt-hour energy charge. Now that the average home's energy consumption has decreased, utilities across the nation are adjusting rates to move the monthly charge closer to the actual fixed cost of maintaining the system that carries electricity to your home. Even if we never move a single kilowatt over the wires, we still have the expense of keeping the facilities ready and able to carry that energy.

I hope you'll use some of the tips in this column to save both energy and money. It's a privilege to serve your energy needs. Please let us know if we can do anything to improve our service.

## Eliminate Energy Vampires

Use these tips from energy.gov to reduce the hidden costs caused by energy vampires in your home. Energy vampires suck power from your electronic devices when you're not using them.

- **Unplug. Unplug. Unplug.** This won't work for your cable box or wireless router, which always need power. But if you have an extra TV or another electronic device that you don't use often, consider unplugging it completely until the next time you use it. This applies to phone chargers too. As soon as your phone has full power, unplug the charger from the wall.
- **Plug electronics into power strips,** which let you toggle the power flow on and off. This means you can control the power use of clusters of devices so that they're not consuming electricity when you're not home. Using a light switch that turns power outlets on and off, if you have one, accomplishes the same end with even less effort. An advanced power strip makes it even easier by turning off idle electronics without any additional steps from you.
- **Curb idle time.** Simply setting your computer to sleep mode or stopping a game and powering down your video game console instead of leaving it paused for a prolonged period could lead to bigger savings.
- **Make smart upgrades.** When it comes time to send your old electronics and appliances to the graveyard, consider replacing them with Energy Star devices. They have a lower standby consumption than your average device and use less energy all around. You can use this energy use calculator at [www.rock.coop/content/energy-use-calculator](http://www.rock.coop/content/energy-use-calculator) to estimate how much energy it takes to power your electronics and appliances throughout the year and identify even more savings opportunities.



# UTILITIES UNITED

## AGAINST SCAMS

### Utilities raise awareness about scams

When a scammer called Florida pet clinic operator Cindy Evers last year and demanded immediate payment on an overdue electric bill, it sounded real.

“They knew my account number and gave me a figure that I owed that’s close to what I usually pay on my electric bill,” Evers said. She paid, even though, in the back of her mind, she knew her payment wasn’t late.

“I have pets under sedation, and I’m taking care of animals. I think I just panicked, thinking they were going to shut my electricity off. I did what they told me to do.”

Evers lost \$900 because the call was a scam. The scam that duped Evers has been plaguing utility consumers across North America for several years, robbing them of millions.

Now, utilities are fighting back. Recently, more than 80 utilities and energy industry organizations from across the United States and Canada joined forces to recognize the first-

ever North American Utilities United Against Scams Day on November 16, 2016.

Energy co-ops have increased their communication efforts, warning members about the scam, how it works, and what people should do and not do, if they are ever targeted.

Rock Energy Cooperative issued its latest warning in November after a member reported a telephone scam. The caller posed as a utility employee and threatened to disconnect service unless an immediate payment was made.

The scam goes something like this: A customer gets a call from an 800-number that looks like a valid utility company phone number. Widely available spoofing software allows crooks to display what appears to be an official number on caller IDs. The caller threatens to cut off power if the customer doesn’t pay.

But here’s the giveaway: The crook will demand payment via a prepaid debit card or money order. And the caller will ask for it within a specified time frame—often an hour or less.

The scammer may even quote an amount that sounds like your typical monthly bill. That way, the threat has even more credibility.

Scammers might direct the customer to a specific store nearby that sells the prepaid cards and instruct the customer to put money on the card and provide the card number to the scammer. Some scammers have even been bold enough to contact potential victims in person, coming to the member’s house.

Here are some tips on how to protect yourself:

- Do not assume the name and number on your caller ID are legitimate. Caller IDs can be spoofed.
- Never share your personal information, including date of birth, Social Security number, or banking account information.
- Never wire money to someone you don’t know.
- Do not click links or call numbers in unexpected emails or texts—especially those asking for your account information.
- Utilities will NOT require their customers to purchase prepaid debit cards or money orders to avoid an immediate disconnection.
- If you receive a call that sounds like it may be a scam, or if you believe the call is a scam, hang up, call the police and report the incident to your local utility.
- Alert your family members and friends. Share the scammers’ tactics described in this article or those you have heard about. You can also help raise awareness and warn others by reposting scam awareness information on social media; use the hashtag #stopscams.





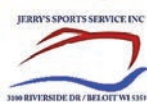
## Get Connected

Check out these great deals offered with your Co-op Connections Card.



**Jerry's Sport Service, 3100 Riverside Drive, Beloit – 800-743-4309 – [www.jerrysboats.com](http://www.jerrysboats.com)**

Boat, engine, and trailer sales, fishing equipment, piers, docks. Conveniently located right on the Rock



River. For 35 years we have been putting our customers first, doing all we can to ensure every detail is managed to your satisfaction. Whether buying or selling, upgrading or downsizing, going faster or slower, we have a boat for you, with the largest selection of boats in the Midwest. Great deals await, and trade-ins are always welcome. Featuring Lund and Polar Kraft fishing boats, Yar Craft boats, San Pan and Parti Kraft pontoon boats, Hurricane and Princecraft deck boats. **10% Off Parts, Accessories, Service**

**YMCA of Northern Rock County, 221 Dodge St., Janesville, 608-754-9622, and 1360 Parkview Drive, Milton, 608-868-9622 – [www.ymcajanesville.org](http://www.ymcajanesville.org)**

Fitness center. No contracts or cancellation fees; two pools and friendly atmosphere. Free child watch. Youth fitness classes, exercise classes, and indoor cycling. Building strong kids, strong families, and strong communities. **Free Enrollment (\$75 value)**



### Healthy Savings Discounts

The same program that offers discounts at local merchants and has saved Rock Energy members more than \$131,000 on prescriptions also offers significant savings on dental, vision, hearing, lab and imaging services, and chiropractic work. To locate participating providers in your area, call 800-800-7616 or go to [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop), click on the Co-op Connections Card, and look under the Healthy Savings tab. Be sure to have your Co-op Connections Card handy.



### Current Deals

For a complete listing of current deals, visit [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop) and click on the Co-op Connections Card.

## YOUTH PROGRAMS BUILD STRONG CITIZENS

Rock Energy Cooperative offers two opportunities for high school students to learn more about the political process and develop leadership skills.

The co-op will sponsor two high school juniors on the 2017 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. The June 10–16 trip includes meetings with congressional representatives and tours of historic sites. More than 1,000 students from host cooperatives across the nation participate in the tour every year.

Another program is open to current high school freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The Wisconsin Energy Cooperative Association's Youth Leadership Congress will take place July 26–28 at UW–River Falls. The program introduces students to cooperative business basics, demonstrates the value of cooperation in everyday life, and offers sessions to help develop leadership skills.

Applicants for both programs must be children of Rock Energy members and reside in the co-op's service territory. The deadline to apply for the Washington trip is Feb. 28, and applications for the UW–River Falls event must be received by March 17.

Instead of using paper forms as in past years, Rock Energy now is accepting online applications. Just go to [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop) and click on the Community & Youth tab.

For more information, visit [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop) or call Barbara Uebelacker, communications specialist, at 866-752-4550 or email her at [BarbU@rock.coop](mailto:BarbU@rock.coop).

## 81st Annual Meeting Monday, March 27 Eclipse Center, Beloit



Be sure to mark your calendar and join us for the meeting and dinner.

Look for complete details in next month's magazine.

### Shane Larson, CEO

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### Barbara Uebelacker, Editor



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COOPERATIVE**  
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