

# Natural Gas Q&A

**R**ock 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

# TEMPERATURE EXTREMES BALANCE OUT TO CREATE AVERAGE MONTH

Shane L. Larson,  
Chief Executive Officer

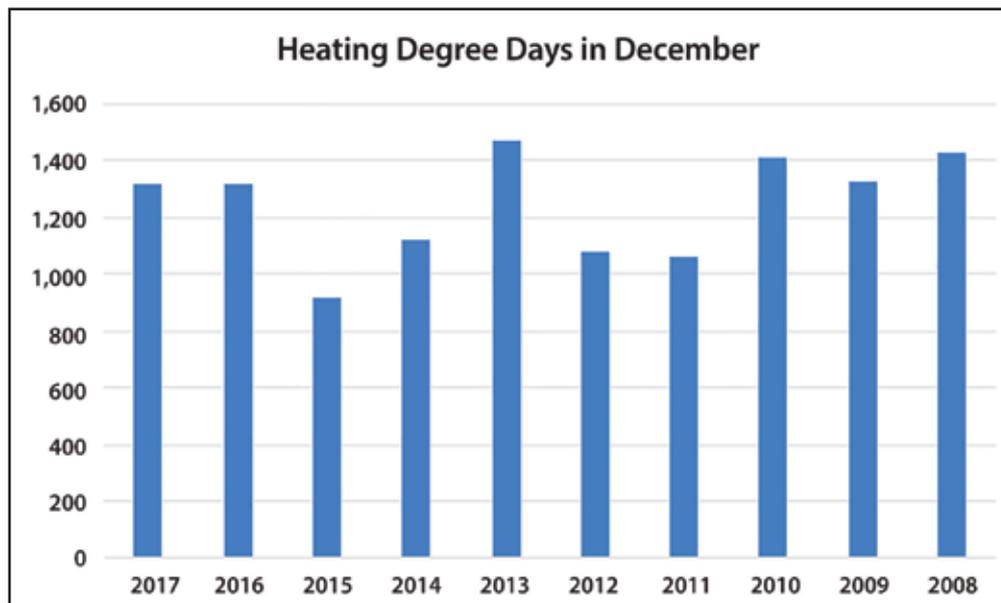
If you remember the brutal cold weather during the last week of 2017 and first week of 2018, you might be reluctant to open your energy bill when it comes.

From Christmas Day through Jan. 6, the average temperature in the Madison area was about 1, according to the National Weather Service. If you factor in the wind chill, it seemed much, much colder. In fact, it was the second coldest period for those dates in recorded history.

What you might not remember though is the unseasonably warm weather during the early part of December. The mercury soared to 62 degrees in Janesville on Dec. 4, and the temperature was over 50 during the first three days of the month.

The temperature extremes during the month balanced each other out and resulted in a fairly typical December. The chart on this page shows heating degree days, an indicator of household energy consumption, for the past 10 Decembers. The 2017 number of 1,317 is in line with the 10-year average of 1,244.

Your bill for December energy use likely will be similar to the one you received a year ago as long as your heating habits stayed consistent. Charts on the back of your statement make it easy to compare by showing your energy use for the previous month, current month, and same month last year.



But you don't need to wait until your statement comes to compare your energy use. SmartHub, our online account management system, provides that information on a daily basis. You can access SmartHub from your computer by visiting our website, [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop), or from your smart phone by downloading a mobile app. You can see your energy use on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, compare statistics, print charts, and pay your bill.

We offer a budget billing plan for members who want to even out their annual energy costs and consistently pay the same amount each month. This makes budgeting your money easier by avoiding higher bills during heating and cooling seasons. To help ensure that what you pay continues to track your true energy use, we recalculate your budget payment twice a year. If you're interested in learning more about this payment option, just call us at 866-752-4550.

As I'm writing this in early January, it's impossible to predict what the remaining winter months will bring. The January thaw could continue, or February could bring more frigid weather. We'll have to wait and see.

Whatever happens, there are several ways to control your energy use. In our January newsletter, we printed a graphic showing 10 quick tips to avoid high winter bills. These are

good suggestions and are worth repeating so we're reprinting them on page 20D.

One thing the graphic doesn't mention is the high cost of using portable space heaters. A small, 1,500-watt heater can cost about \$100 a month to operate if used all day every day. If you want to warm a small area quickly, turn on your space heater for a brief period, or better yet, grab a blanket.

As always, we truly appreciate the opportunity to be your energy provider and welcome your ideas about how we can improve our service.



## 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 2018 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. The June 8–15 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 25–27 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 April 13.

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, call Barbara Uebelacker, communications director, at 866-752-4550 or email her at [BarbU@rock.coop](mailto:BarbU@rock.coop).



Students participating in the 2017 Youth Leadership Congress learned about the value of cooperation.

## KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE FROM ELECTRICAL FIRES

Your lights turn on in an instant and your plug slides into outlets without sparks or shocks. You can’t see it, and typically don’t think much about it. However, the electricity that we take for granted every day requires attention to potential hazards and taking steps to keep everyone safe.

Safe Electricity offers these tips to help keep your home safe from electrical problems and fires:

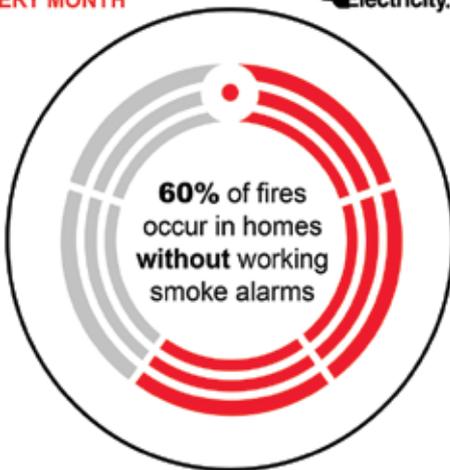
- Have all work done by a qualified electrician.
- Get regular check-ups for older homes, which have older wiring and are often designed for fewer appliances and electronics. Have the electrical system checked every five to 10 years, depending on the age of your home. If your home is older than 30 years, make sure the wiring meets updated National Electrical Code standards.
- Watch for warning signs such as hot or discolored switch plates, cords, or plugs; dimming or flickering lights; buzzing or sizzling sounds. If you smell a burning odor, check it

immediately and unplug electric items in that area.

- Immediately repair loose outlets, and discard or replace cracked, cut, or broken insulation on electric cords.
- Keep cords out of walkways and high-traffic areas so they don’t get stepped on and damaged, and cause a tripping hazard.
- Use extension cords temporarily, not as permanent wiring. Too many extension cords in one area creates a risk of overheating or overloading circuits.
- Never use cords or appliances that have exposed, damaged, or faulty wiring. Have them repaired or replaced.
- Avoid using nails or staples to secure electric cords in place. When an electrical cord is punctured, it increases the likelihood of electric shock and fire.
- When you replace light bulbs, ensure that you match the recommended wattage for your lamp or other light fixtures. Using an incorrect wattage increases the likelihood for electrical fires.

**TEST** smoke alarms  
**EVERY MONTH**

Safe  
Electricity.org



research collected from the Red Cross

# 82<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL MEETING



**Monday, March 26**  
**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.



MY CO-OP





# 10 Quick Tips to Avoid High Winter Bills

Looking to lower your bills this winter? Use the 10 tips below to conserve energy.

- 1  Seal air leaks and insulate well to prevent heat from escaping and cold air from entering your home.
- 2  Reduce waste heat by installing a programmable thermostat.
- 3  Turn off lights when not in use.
- 4  Lower your water heater temperature. The Dept. of Energy recommends using the warm setting (120 degrees) during fall and winter months.
- 5  Unplug electronics like kitchen appliances and TVs when you're away.
- 6  Open blinds and curtains during the day to allow sunlight in to warm your home.
- 7  Close blinds and curtains at night to keep cold, drafty air out.
- 8  Use power strips for multiple appliances, and turn off the main switch when you're away from home.
- 9  Wash clothes in cold water, and use cold-water detergent whenever possible.
- 10  Replace incandescent light bulbs with LEDs, which use at least 75 percent less energy.

Source: U.S. Dept. of Energy



## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Consider insulating your hot water pipes. Doing so can reduce heat loss, allow you to lower the temperature setting, and save an additional 3 to 4 percent per year on water heating.

Source: [energy.gov](http://energy.gov)



## ELECTRICITY THEFT: NOT WORTH THE RISK

Every year, energy cooperatives across the country cope with thieves—folks who deliberately tamper with their meter to steal power.

Not only is this practice extremely dangerous, it's a serious crime that could result in hefty fines and jail time. Power surging through a compromised meter can cause an electrical catastrophe, according to the Cooperative Research Network, a division of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

A short circuit could produce an arc flash bright enough to cause blindness and powerful enough to launch fragments of shrapnel-like, red-hot debris. Serious injury or death from electrocution, explosion, or fire often results from meter tampering.

Electricity theft is not a victimless crime. Rock Energy Cooperative loses revenue and expends resources to investigate meter tampering. These costs are then passed on to the entire membership.

National estimates vary, but *The Washington Post* cited revenue protection officials who claim between \$1 billion and \$10 billion worth of electricity is stolen from utilities annually.

Since everyone pays for lost power, please let us know if you suspect meter tampering. Call 866-752-4550 to report possible theft of service. All information can be given anonymously.

### DO NOT TAMPER WITH YOUR ELECTRIC METER

Meter tampering can result in electric shock, is illegal, and increases electricity rates for other co-op members.



-  Never break a meter seal.
-  Never open a meter base.
-  Never remove a meter or alter an entrance cable in any manner.

If you know or suspect that someone has tampered with their meter, please contact us immediately.

### Shane Larson, CEO

P.O. Box 1758, 2815 Kennedy Rd., Janesville, WI 53547  
P.O. Box 126, 15229 Willowbrook Rd., South Beloit, IL 61080  
608-752-4550 • 866-752-4550

### Barbara Uebelacker, Editor



**ROCK ENERGY COOPERATIVE**  
Empowering Members Since 1936