

The Current

A Publication of Cotton Electric Cooperative Inc.

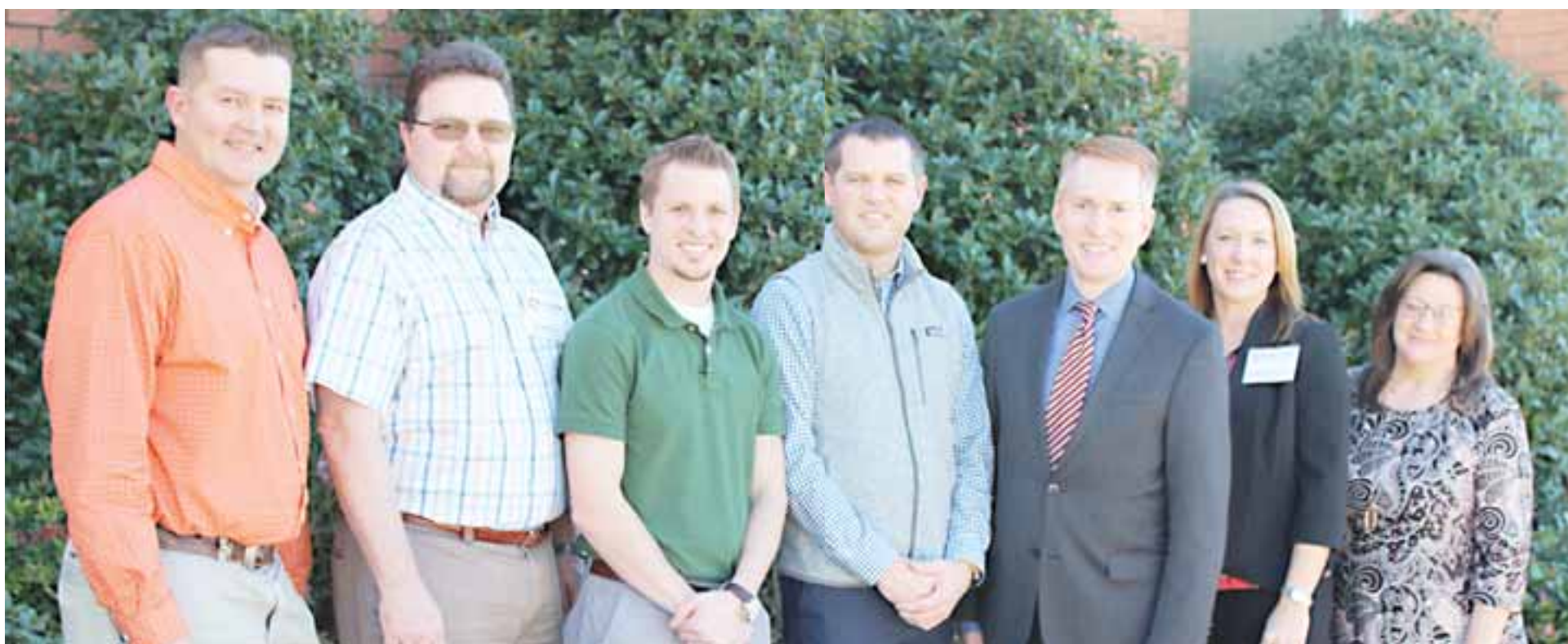
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

“The Current - Informing Our Members Since 1957”

VOLUME 63

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NUMBER 6



Sen. James Lankford listened to concerns when he visited with co-op employees at Cotton Electric headquarters this past summer. Pictured from left, Michael Ottinger, Jeff Simpson, Shane Bowers, Bryce Hooper, Sen. James Lankford, Jennifer Meason and Cindy Benefield.

Local lawmakers play key role to help rural communities

Washington politics have become so polarized that it can be tough for Democrats and Republicans to come together to tackle big challenges. But that's exactly what happened recently on Capitol Hill thanks to dedicated lawmakers like Rep. Tom Cole and Sens. James Lankford and Jim Inhofe.

They, along with other members of Oklahoma's congressional delegation, listened to thousands of electric cooperative stakeholders and fought tirelessly to add important legislation to the 2020 spending bill. The bill was signed into law by the President in December and included a provision known as the RURAL Act, which solved an issue for electric co-ops and America's rural communities.

Electric co-ops work to secure government grants to help pay for numerous activities that benefit the communities they serve. These include grants for storm recovery, broadband deployment, renewable energy and economic development.

In order to maintain their tax-exempt status, electric co-ops can receive no more than 15 percent of their income from non-member sources. Historically, government grants to co-ops were counted as contributions to capital. But due to a glitch in the 2017 tax law, government grants were reclassified as income, pushing some co-ops beyond the 15 percent threshold and jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.

The tax problem left co-ops with an

unfair choice: Do they take the money they need to turn the lights back on for their members as quickly as possible after a disaster? Do they accept the broadband grants to help close the digital divide between rural and urban America? Or do they turn down those grants so they wouldn't have to spend their members' money paying taxes rather than improving service?

Thanks to Congress, electric co-ops across Oklahoma don't have to make those tradeoffs. This is good news for both co-ops and their members because some co-ops would have had to raise their electric rates to pay new taxes.

We at Cotton Electric Cooperative are extremely grateful to Oklahoma's

congressional delegation for their support of the RURAL Act. In standing up for our local communities, they proved that Congress still works for the people. Notably, the legislation drew the bipartisan support of more than 300 lawmakers in the House and more than half of the Senate before it was passed. That's a rarity in Washington these days.

In today's fast-paced society, pausing to give thanks is done with increasing rarity. That's unfortunate.

Thank you, Rep. Cole and Sens. Lankford and Inhofe, for looking out for rural communities across Oklahoma and for working with us to solve this problem.

Source: NRECA

Oklahoma cooperatives co-sponsor 2020 SKIE Awards

By Danielle Quickle

Cotton Electric is excited to promote the 2020 SKIE (Supporting K20 Innovative Educators) awards, sponsored by Oklahoma Electric Cooperatives and the K20 Center for Community and Education Renewal.

We know there are teachers in our community who go above and beyond for their students. The SKIE awards celebrate educators or teams of educators across the state who have demonstrated the ability to link student learning with the innovative use of technology and the K20 IDEALS. Oklahoma educators who have forward-thinking ideas and techniques for their classroom could win \$1,000 thanks to your nomination.

Cotton Electric member Chrisie Young, Kindergarten teacher at Horace Mann Elementary in Duncan, was named the 2019 SKIE Award recipient for the Southwest Oklahoma Region. Young, in her 11th year of teaching, received an award, cash prize and recognition at the annual K20 Innovative Learning Institute in Norman this past fall.

"It was very nice to be recognized and reassured by someone outside of my building that what I am doing in my classroom is right and important," Young said. "There were six regional winners for the whole

state and I am very proud of that accomplishment."

Young's career path took her from the boardroom to the classroom when she left a career in business management and found herself exactly where she wants to be.

"Teaching is not about getting rich; it is truly about living a life of service to children," Young said.

She has used her leadership skills to guide projects integrating parents and students of all ability levels. Young believes that teaching is a learning experience and she said she learns more from her students each year than they could ever learn from her.

"It's not about the final product. It's about the journey to get there," she said. "I believe every child has the potential to bring something unique and special to the world. By allowing students to bring their own stories, experiences and ideas into the classroom, we provide them with opportunities to work together, to learn from each other and to respect each other's differences."

Young encourages her fellow Cotton Electric members to nominate educators in the community they feel are worthy of this recognition.

"If your child has an amazing teacher, celebrate them! If you have an amazing co-worker, celebrate them! If you know an amazing teacher, celebrate



them," Young said. "Teachers do such important work, they should be acknowledged and respected for it."

To make a nomination, visit https://survey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eQET-mhMLBuZMitT.

Deadline for submissions is March 1.

Chrisie Young received the 2019 SKIE award for the southwest Oklahoma region

Power Cost Adjustment Calculated

The power cost adjustment now being applied to bills mailed after Feb. 1, 2020, is (\$0.00433) per kWh.

On a member's average bill of 1,300 kilowatt hours (kWh), this will amount to a credit of \$5.63 on the February bill.

January 2020 Temperature Extremes

Day	High	Low	Avg.	Day	High	Low	Avg.
1	56	25	41	16	45	33	39
2	63	41	52	17	45	37	41
3	60	32	46	18	52	27	40
4	6+	39	53	19	52	22	37
5	63	26	45	20	57	23	40
6	61	28	45	21	47	28	38
7	64	23	44	22	44	39	42
8	66	20	43	23	56	33	45
9	72	51	62	24	58	30	44
10	74	34	54	25	66	32	49
11	44	27	36	26	67	36	52
12	62	28	45	27	69	30	50
13	64	31	48	28	51	37	44
14	69	38	54	29	43	35	39
15	62	38	50	30	40	37	39
				31	56	28	42

Source: srh.noaa.gov/om/

Average Daily High: 58 Average Daily Low: 32

Did You Know?

Daylight Saving Time begins at 2 a.m. Sunday, March 8. Turn clocks forward one hour.

The next issue of The Current should arrive in mailboxes on March 16, 2020.

Contact Us

Do you have a story idea for The Current or do you need to place an ad? If so, let us know.

We can be reached at 580-875-3351 or by email at TheCurrent@cottonelectric.com.

You can also drop us a line at Cotton Electric Current, 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572.

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More news at cottonelectric.com

From the CEO Members impact future of rural Oklahoma

2020 is a banner year as we participate in the decennial census and exercise our right to vote. Your participation in both is key to the future of rural Oklahoma.



Jennifer Meason, CEO

House and it's vital that every Oklahoman is counted in order to increase our chance at gaining that seat back.

The Census also determines the population count for state legislative redistricting. We need to make sure all of the residents in our rural communities are counted to ensure our voices are heard and the needs of rural Oklahomans are addressed.

For the first time, the census will be accessible online. Invitations to respond to the census will begin in mid-March. You also have the option to complete it by phone or by mail and, if necessary, census takers will visit households that haven't responded.

In 2010, Oklahoma had one of the lowest census participation rates. This time around, let's make sure that Oklahomans count. You can learn more on Page 6.

2020 Elections

2020 could be the year that we see unprecedented turnout at the polls, which means it is more important than ever for co-op members to en-



gage on issues that matter most to our communities. With all the noise of a presidential election, we need to work harder to remind our elected officials that rural issues matter.

To ensure that all electric co-op members exercise their civic duty, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) created the Co-ops Vote program in 2016. This national, non-partisan initiative remains quite simple at its core: to ensure that members are registered to vote, go to the polls for every election, and ensure that rural issues remain part of the national discussion.

By participating in the Co-ops Vote program, co-op members send

a resounding message that all candidates – at all levels – need to put rural America's concerns front and center in order to earn our vote. We've proven that with millions of electric co-op members speaking out with one voice, we can have a major impact in making our top issues part of the national conversation. You can learn more at www.vote.coop.

I encourage everyone to join America's electric cooperatives in these national efforts. Let's make sure our voices count in the 2020 census and get to the polls at every election.

Your voice and vote make a difference.

2020 Census

Did you know that the 2020 Census directs how \$675 billion in federal funding is distributed to states and communities each year for roads, schools, hospitals and more? In fact, communities receive an estimated \$1,700 per year per person counted.

The census also impacts our representation in the U.S. House. Every 10 years, the results of the census are used to reapportion the U.S. House of Representatives, determining how many seats each state gets. Oklahoma was adversely affected after the 2000 census when we lost a seat in the U.S.

Did You Know?

Electric cooperatives have retired \$17 billion to members since 1988 – \$1.2 billion in 2018 alone. Because electric co-ops operate at cost, any excess revenues (called margins) are allocated and retired to members in the form of capital credits.

Source: National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation

\$17 BILLION SINCE 1988

\$1.2 BILLION IN 2018

Cotton Electric has retired more than \$8 million to members since 1960



Co-op offers summer opportunity for eighth-graders

Cotton Electric Cooperative has a summer opportunity available for eighth-graders whose parents or guardians are Cotton Electric members. This contest requires a short paragraph about why the entrant would like to attend the 2020 Youth Power Energy Camp from May 26-29 at Canyon Camp in Red Rock Canyon, southeast of Hinton.

Information packets with contest rules and regulations, entry forms, cooperative informa-

tion and basic details of the contest have been distributed to schools in Cotton Electric's service territory. The registration deadline for entering is March 9, 2020.

For information about the contest, visit the Youth Programs page of our website under the Members Services tab or contact the Marketing department at 580-875-3351 or by email at info@cottonelectric.com.

Pay online!

Pay your bill online at CottonElectric.com. Click **View/Pay My Bill** under the **Residential** tab.



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Are you using your fireplace efficiently? Remember to turn down the thermostat when burning a fire, and close the damper when a fire is not burning.

Source: energy.gov

The Current

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By Cotton Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Jennifer MeasonCEO
Bryce Hooper..... Vice President of Marketing
Karen Kaley.....Marketing & Communications
Danielle Quickle..... Editor
Kaila Williams..... Display Advertising

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MISSION STATEMENT
Our mission is to be the leader in providing the most reliable and innovative electric system, with affordable rates, through the positive, enthusiastic and professional use of its resources and people.

December 2019 Operating Stats

	2019	2018
Total Amount Billed/Accrued	\$4,888,439	\$4,928,245
Cost of Purchased Power	3,963,631	4,017,554
Taxes	103,957	94,877
Total Operating Expense Per Mile	1,112	1,086
Average Farm and Residential Bill	125	124
Average Farm and Residential kWh	1,088	964
Total Meters Billed (farm, residential)	18,478	18,407
Miles Energized	5,200	5,167
Density Per Mile	3.55	3.56
New Service Connects YTD	345	278
Services Retired	136	116

Community Spotlight

If you would like your community event listed in the March issue, please submit information by March 4 by calling 580-875-4255 or send an email to TheCurrent@CottonElectric.com.

Chamber hosts annual banquet

Walters Chamber of Commerce hosts their annual banquet at 7 p.m. Feb. 20 at the Cotton Electric community building.

Grab your boots and hat and prepare for a fun-filled western night. Awards will be given to the Citizen of the Year and to best dressed man, woman and couple.

Tickets may be purchased for \$15 from any board member, online at WaltersChamber.com or at the door.

Predator Hunt begins Feb. 21

Cache Valley Lodge #530 is hosting their 3rd annual Predator Hunt fundraiser Feb. 21-Feb. 22 in Walters.

A chili supper, registration, rules reading and Calcutta will begin at 6 p.m. Feb. 21 at the Cotton Electric community building. Three-man teams can register for \$100.

A custom buckle and prize money will be awarded to first place. Trophies and prize money will be award to second- and third-place teams.

For an additional \$20, teams may enter side-pots which include Big Dog, Big Cat, Big Hog and Mystery Critter. Winners of each category receive 100 percent of the pot.

For information, contact Aaron Blades at 940-631-2234.

Coggins Clinic set for March 7

Duncan Lake Horse Club is having its annual Coggins Clinic from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. March 7 at Duncan Lake Pavilion. In addition to Coggins testing, other vaccines will be offered, including Eastern/Western, tetanus, rabies, West Nile and flu/rhino.

Coggins testing will be \$25 per horse. The clinic, conducted by Dr. Connie McLemore of Countryside Veterinary, is open to the public with no limit on the number of horses. Rain date will be March 14.

Other DLHC activities that day for members include the annual Chili Cook Off at 6 p.m. at the Pavilion. New members are encouraged to attend these events.

For information, call 580-475-7190.

AARP offers free tax assistance

AARP offers free tax assistance and preparation for taxpayers with low-to-moderate income on a first-come, first-served basis through the tax due date of April 15 at several locations in the Cotton Electric service area.

No appointment is necessary, but certain documents are. Taxpayers should take last year's income tax return, all W-2 and 1099 forms, information about any other income, adjustment and deduction documents, Social Security cards for each person on a return, and property taxes if he or she plans to itemize.

Trained IRS volunteers will be available from 8:30-11 a.m. Mondays and Thursdays, and from noon to 3 p.m. Wednesdays at the Center for Creative Living, 3501 Dr. Elsie Hamm Drive, Lawton.

Volunteers will be on hand from 4 to 7 p.m. Mondays, 1 to 5 p.m. Wednesdays and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursdays at Lawton Public Library, 110 SW 4th Street.

The free service is available in Duncan from 8:30 to 11 a.m. Mondays,

Tuesdays and Wednesdays at Red River Technology Center, 3300 W Bois D' Arc Ave.

CU screens 'Do the Right Thing'

Magic Lantern Film Society of Cameron University screens DVD presentations of classic films each month in the CETES Conference Center, Room A. Most screenings begin at 7:30 p.m.

The Feb. 21 offering will be "Do the Right Thing," a 1989 drama comedy film directed by Spike Lee.

Salvatore "Sal" Fragione is the Italian owner of a pizzeria in Brooklyn. A neighborhood local, Buggin' Out, becomes upset when he sees that the pizzeria's Wall of Fame exhibits only Italian actors.

Buggin' Out believes a pizzeria in a black neighborhood should showcase black actors, but Sal disagrees. The wall becomes a symbol of racism and hate to Buggin' Out and to other people in the neighborhood, and tensions rise.

With Danny Aiello and Giancarlo Esposito in the lead roles, the cast includes Rosie Perez, Samuel L. Jackson and director Spike Lee as Mookie.

There is no admission charge, but donations are accepted.

For information about the society, or to see a schedule and synopsis of films, visit Cameron.edu/magiclantern.

DLT presents classic romance

Duncan Little Theatre presents "7 Brides for 7 Brothers" at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 28 and 29 and March 1, 6 and 7 at the Simmons Center in Duncan.

Based on the 1954 film set in the 1850s, Milly, a pretty young cook, marries Adam, a grizzled woodsman, after a brief courtship. When the two return to Adam's farm, Milly is shocked to meet his six ill-mannered brothers, all of whom live in his cabin.

She promptly begins teaching the brothers proper behavior, and most importantly, how to court a woman. But after the brothers kidnap six local girls during a town barn-raising, a group of indignant villagers tries to track them down.

Tickets may be purchased at the door or online by visiting DuncanLittleTheatre.com.

LCT begins 2020 season

Lawton Community Theatre presents "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" Feb. 28 - Mar. 8, at John Denney Playhouse, 1316 NW Bell Avenue.

Performances will be at 8 p.m., except those on Sundays, which are at 2 p.m.

Fifteen-year-old Christopher has an extraordinary brain - he has never ventured alone beyond the end of his road. It's seven minutes after midnight, and Christopher stands beside his neighbor's dead dog, Wellington, who has been speared with a garden fork.

Finding himself under suspicion, he is determined to solve the mystery of who murdered Wellington, and carefully records each fact of the crime. His detective work, forbidden by his father, takes him on a thrilling journey that upturns his world.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a play by Simon Stephens and is based on the novel by Mark Haddon.

Visit LawtonCommunityTheatre.com for tickets and general information.

More Community Spotlight on Page 5

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Cotton Electric members Allan and Janna Barrington submitted this photo of their grandson, Asa, giving sweet kisses to his mini Hereford, Foxy Cow Love.

Enter your "best shot" in our Photo of the Month contest. Theme for March is Livestock. Entries can be emailed to TheCurrent@CottonElectric.com or mailed to The Current, 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572. Winners will receive a Cotton Electric prize package of CEC goodies.

Annual Car Cruise begins March 20

Car enthusiasts of all types gather for the Friday Night Car Cruise around downtown Duncan. First car cruise of 2020 is set for March 20, from 6-10 p.m. Registration is \$10 per vehicle and includes a goody bag. License and insurance are required.

Enjoy the parade of drivers showing off their souped-up cars as they cruise down Main Street at this fun and free

community event. There will be food trucks, a free movie and live music. Be sure to check out the Main Street merchants who will be open late with discounts and door prizes.

For information or to learn how to volunteer, call 580-252-8696 or visit the Main Street Duncan Facebook page.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

COTTON
ELECTRIC CO-OP

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

At Cotton Electric, we're proud to be a part of it, bringing people together by providing energy for all the things you love.

Upcoming Deadlines for The Current

March	
Ad Sales	Feb. 28
Classified	Mar. 4
Publish Date	Mar. 16

April	
Ad Sales	Mar. 27
Classified	Apr. 1
Publish Date	Apr. 13

May	
Ad Sales	Apr. 24
Classified	Apr. 29
Publish Date	May 11



Helpful ways to show your appliances some love

February may be the shortest month, but it is packed with special days, from Groundhog Day to Valentine's Day to the Super Bowl. February is also the month of love; a time to shower loved ones with affection, maybe some chocolates or a romantic gift to show how much you care.



Heath Morgan,
Energy Efficiency
Coordinator

Leap year gives us an extra day to fit in all the festivities. While you make plans, don't forget to set aside time to pay some much-needed attention to your home's appliances.

We spend a lot of time focusing on air conditioners and heaters, but don't forget about the other appliances in your home. Major appliances play a huge role in our daily lives and, as long as they are working properly, we don't give them the attention they need. Your refrigerator, washer, dryer, dishwasher and stove are used daily in most households. Take time to make sure they are serviced and cleaned properly to ensure they operate at peak efficiency.

First, decide if you feel comfortable tackling these tasks on your own or if you would rather leave them to professionals. Either way, start with your owner's manuals. Most offer some DIY steps for servicing or recommend service intervals and list important safety precautions associated with your appliance. If you can't find yours, most manuals can be found online with a simple search of your appliance's model number.

Refrigerator

Can you remember the last time you cleaned behind the fridge or deep-cleaned inside? Start by pulling your refrigerator out from the wall and unplugging it. Use a vacuum or compressed air to clean the coils and any covers or grills that air flows through. Normally, these coils are located on the back or underneath. Once you are rid of dust, dirt and debris from the coils, be sure to sweep and mop the area.

Your refrigerator doors are equipped with rubber

gaskets to seal in cold air. Check your gaskets for any tears or loose spots. Check for a good seal all the way around. Clean gaskets with mild soap and warm water. The warm water will help the gasket to reshape to provide a better seal. Any pinch points or places your gasket slides, like the hinge side of the door, can be lubricated with petroleum jelly or a gasket lubricant. Apply a small amount to the gasket and the surface it slides across. This will keep the gasket from binding up, which can affect how well it seals.

Empty and clean the inside of your refrigerator. A little soapy water or a 50/50 mixture of water and white vinegar works great. Remove shelves and bins so you can clean all of the exposed surfaces. Replace that box of baking soda that has been in the back for who knows how long. Baking soda helps to absorb odors and remove excess humidity.

Oven/Stovetop

Most modern ovens have a built-in self-cleaning feature, so let your appliance do the work. Most cleaning cycles take 3-4 hours and will produce a fair amount of heat in the kitchen, so plan accordingly. This is something to do on a colder day when you are stuck inside. The heat produced will give your heating system a little break. After the self-cleaning cycle, allow plenty of time for your oven to cool before doing any further cleaning. The self-cleaning feature cleans only the inside so you will have to manually clean the door seal and hinge areas. You may need to use oven cleaner to spot clean any baked-on spills.

For your stovetop, soap and hot water can be used to clean knobs, drip pans and don't forget the aluminum filter for your vent hood. Be sure the power is off before removing any burners or drip trays.

Dishwasher

It's a little counterintuitive to think that an appliance that cleans needs to be cleaned, but it's a task that should be performed once a month. Water deposits, soap residue and food particles can build up quickly. Newer dishwashers usually have a screen filter basket located in the bottom inside. Remove, empty and replace the basket. Next, run a cleaning

cycle without dishes. This is just a hot water cycle with a dishwasher cleaning tablet instead of soap. Vinegar and baking soda may be used in place of a tablet. This will require two hot water cycles, unless you want to turn your dishwasher into the volcano from the science fair.

For the first cycle, place a dishwasher-safe container on the top shelf, face up, holding two cups of vinegar. This allows the vinegar to splash out during the cycle. The vinegar should remove water deposits and dishwashing soap residue. For the second step, pour about a cup of baking soda in the bottom of the dishwasher and run another hot water cycle. Baking soda acts as a mildly abrasive cleaner to help remove residue.

Clothes Washer

The inside of your washing machine needs to be cleaned regularly, too. Detergents and oil-based fabric softeners can leave a considerable amount of residue. Cleaning a clothes washer is similar to cleaning a dishwasher. Add washing machine cleaning tablets to a large load hot water cycle or use vinegar. For front load washers, pay attention to gaskets inside the door as well as the door seal. To prevent damage to your pump, most front load washers have a built-in filter to empty regularly. Refer to your owner's manual for instructions.

Dryer

The dryer may be one appliance where the pros need to be involved. Short of cleaning the lint trap between loads and occasionally rinsing the filter screen with water, there isn't much cleaning that can be done without taking the dryer apart. Specialty tools may be required to thoroughly clean your dryer vent to make sure lint isn't building up. This lint can cause part failure or become a fire hazard. Longer drying times or excessive heat near the dryer are good indications that the vent is becoming restricted.

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580-252-2205
www.dehartair.com

30% Tax Credit Lowers After December 31, 2019 To 26%.

Serving the heating, cooling and overall home comfort needs of our friends and neighbors here in Duncan and Chickasha has been a family affair for four generations. DeHart has got your needs covered — from air conditioning repair and installation, to designing and installing a geothermal system for energy savings, we are the local experts. We can even help you settle the debate over central air vs mini split, and which will be better for your home or business! Stay more comfortable in your Oklahoma home or commercial property without breaking the bank on your monthly energy bills — call DeHart for all your HVAC repair needs.

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Cyber criminals using messaging attacks on victims

One of the most common ways cyber attackers attempt to trick or fool people is by scamming them with phone calls or in email attacks, known as phishing. However, as technology continues to advance, bad guys are always trying new methods. These new methods include tricking people with messaging technologies such as text messaging, iMessage/Facetime, WhatsApp, Slack or Skype. Here are some simple steps to protect yourself and help you learn how to spot and stop these common attacks.



What are messaging attacks?

Messaging attacks, often called smishing, are when cyber attackers use SMS, texting or messaging technologies to reach out to you and try to trick you into taking action you should not take. Perhaps they want to fool you into clicking on a malicious link, or get you to call a phone number so they can get your banking information.

Just like in traditional phishing email attacks, bad guys often play on your emotion to act. However, what makes messaging attacks so dangerous is that they often feel far more informational or personal than email, making it more likely you may fall victim.

ing it more likely you may fall victim.

In addition, with messaging attacks there is less information and fewer clues for you to pick up on that something is wrong or suspicious. When you receive a message that seems odd or suspicious, start by asking yourself if this message makes sense and why you are receiving it. Here are some of the most common clues of an attack:

- A tremendous sense of urgency, when someone is attempting to rush you into taking an action.
- If the message is asking for personal information, passwords or other sensitive information you wouldn't normally give out.

- If the message sounds too good to be true, it most likely is. It is hard to win the lottery, especially one you never entered.

- If the message appears to come from a co-worker or friend, but the wording does not sound like them, it might not be. Their information may have been compromised and taken over by a hacker. Always call your friend or co-worker if you receive something from them that you were not expecting.

- If the message triggers you to have a strong reaction be sure to wait a moment and give yourself a chance to calm down and think it through

before responding. As we mentioned before, hackers will try to get an emotional reaction from you.

Sometimes bad guys will combine email and messaging attacks. For example, a cyber attacker will send you an urgent email pretending to be someone you know and ask for your cell phone number. Then they can send repeated text messages, pressuring you to take action. For example, a common attack urges its victims to "check out" a video or picture that "you won't believe." It appeals to your sense of curiosity.

If you get a message from an official organization that alarms you, check with them directly. For example, if you get an email or phone call from Cotton Electric demanding immediate payment or your electricity will be cut off, call us directly at 580-875-3351 to report it. Cotton Electric will never demand immediate payment. Bear in mind that most government agencies, such as tax or law enforcement, will not contact you via text message.

When it comes to messaging attacks, you are your own best defense.

Source: SANS Awareness

Community Spotlight

Lodge hosts local fundraiser

The Masonic Lodge in Elgin is hosting a fundraiser at 5 p.m. March 7 at the Medicine Park Music Hall. Funds raised will benefit local charitable endeavors such as food banks, youth leadership and families in need.

With the purchase of a \$40 ticket, guests will receive a steak dinner with all the fixings, live entertainment from Southern Highway Band and the chance to participate in both a silent and live auction.

For tickets and information, contact any Pilot Lodge member or call 580-591-2623.

Home and Garden show begins Mar. 20

Find practical home improvement ideas and visit professional home and garden service providers during Lawton Home Builders 56th annual Home and Garden Show. Drop by the Cotton Electric booth to get energy efficiency tips or ask questions about the co-op.

Doors will be open from 5 to 8 p.m. March 20, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. March 21, and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 22 in the Great Plains Coliseum and Annex. Admission is free.

Waurika Rattlesnake Hunt set for April

Mark your calendars for the Waurika Rattlesnake Hunt set for April 9-12 in downtown Waurika. The event features carnival rides, games, food vendors, a flea market, thrill show and caravan hunting of diamondback rattlesnakes.

Prizes will be awarded for longest snake captured, the most rattles and more. Witness the thrill and excitement as snake handlers perform with live rattlesnakes. Daring guests can have their picture taken with a live diamondback rattlesnake or try eating some deep-fried rattlesnake meat.

For information, visit the Annual Waurika Rattlesnake Festival Hunt Facebook page.

Market returns to winter hours

Lawton Farmers Market, an initiative of the Southwest Oklahoma Growers Association, returns for winter months in the Cameron University Animal Sciences building at the Agriculture Facility from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. each Saturday, running through the beginning of May 2020.

Shoppers will find a variety of choices at the winter market, including winter produce, sprouts, micro-greens, meat, eggs, honey, nuts, and handmade

and artisan items. The building is located on Southwest 38th Street and is south of Dr. Elsie Hamm Drive and the railroad crossing. Parking is available on the south side of the building.

For more information about the market or becoming a vendor at the market, visit LawtonFarmersMarket.com or send an email to lawtonfarmersmarket@yahoo.com.

Nutrition Center open weekdays

Marlow Nutrition Center is open to the public from 11 a.m. to noon Monday through Friday at Redbud park in Marlow. Nutritious meals are served on site or as carry-out, \$2 for guests 60-years-old and older or \$5.85 for guests younger than 60 years. To place carry-out orders or for further details, contact Cheris at 580-658-5773.

Blessings Boutique open monthly

Marlow First United Methodist Church opens its Blessings Boutique every first and third Tuesday of the month. Clothing donations drop-off days are Tuesdays, or donors can call the church at 580-658-2765 to make other arrangements.

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Avoid These Estate Planning Mistakes

You save and invest to meet a variety of goals during your lifetime: college for your children, long vacations, a comfortable retirement, and so on. But you probably also want to leave something behind – to your loved ones and, possibly, to the charitable organizations you support. To do so, you'll need to develop a comprehensive estate plan,



but to make that plan work, you must avoid some common mistakes. Here are a few of these pitfalls you'll want to avoid:
• Not writing a will – If you were to die "intestate" – without a last will and testament – the state in which you live would determine how your property was distributed. And the state's decisions may not match what you had in mind at all. Furthermore, a will is where you would name guardians for your minor children.
• Not going beyond a will – While a will is an essential component of estate planning, it's often not enough. You may need to create other

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documents, such as a living trust, which, among other benefits, enables your estate to avoid probate, a time-consuming and public process that can lead to disputes among your heirs and others. And a living trust lets you place highly specific conditions on how and when you want your assets distributed. You might also consider other legal documents, including a power of attorney, which allows you to appoint a person or organization to handle your affairs if you can't do so yourself, and a health care directive, which lets you name someone to make health care decisions on your behalf, should you become physically

or mentally incapacitated.

• Choosing the wrong executor – An executor is responsible for distributing property to your beneficiaries and paying off any debts and taxes your estate may owe, among other tasks. Because the role of executor is so important, you need to choose someone who is reliable, competent and trustworthy. It's certainly possible to find such an individual in your own family, but many people choose someone who is either conflicted, too busy or simply not up to the task. If you have doubts about picking a good executor, you may want to turn to a trust company. The costs likely will be higher than if you

chose a family member, but the results may be much better.
• Not naming proper beneficiaries – Many of your assets – 401(k), IRA, life insurance and so on – require you to name a beneficiary. These beneficiary designations are powerful, often superseding the instructions in your will. If circumstances change in your life, such as new children, or divorce or remarriage, you may well want to change beneficiaries. It's easy to do – but it's also easy to overlook.
• Not updating ownership of assets – A change in your family situation or changes in the laws governing income and estate taxes could require you to update ownership

designations of financial assets. And here's perhaps the biggest mistake of all: not understanding what's in your estate plan. You need to work closely with your tax, legal and financial professionals to create a plan you fully comprehend and can communicate effectively to your loved ones. Surprises are often pleasant in many areas of life – but estate planning is not one of them.
 This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones, Member SIPC



CENSUS 101: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The 2020 Census is closer than you think!
Here's a quick refresher of what it is and why it's essential that everyone is counted.

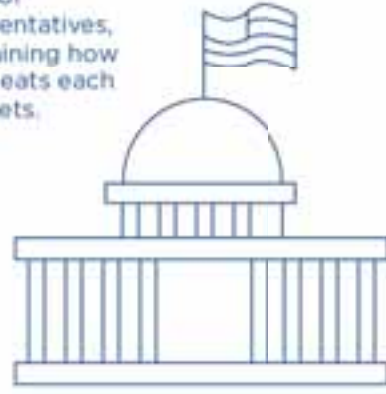
Everyone counts.

The census counts every person living in the United States once, only once, and in the right place.



It's about fair representation.

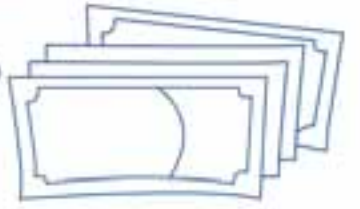
Every 10 years, the results of the census are used to reapportion the House of Representatives, determining how many seats each state gets.



It's about \$675 billion.

The distribution of more than \$675 billion in federal funds, grants, and support to states, counties, and communities are based on census data.

That money is spent on schools, hospitals, roads, public works, and other vital programs.



It's in the Constitution.

The U.S. Constitution mandates that everyone in the country be counted every 10 years. The first census was in 1790.

Taking part is your civic duty.

Completing the census is mandatory: It's a way to participate in our democracy and say "I COUNT!"



It's about redistricting.

After each decade's census, state officials redraw the boundaries of the congressional and state legislative districts in their states to account for population shifts.

Co-op encourages participation in 2020 Census

Did you know the third United States President, Thomas Jefferson, directed the nation's first Census in 1790? Fifty years later, in 1840, the Census Act authorized the establishment of a centralized Census Office and, in 1902, the office became a permanent organization within the Department of Interior.

Today, the U.S. Constitution requires that everyone in the country be counted every 10 years. The Census is administered by the U.S. Census Bureau, a non-partisan government agency. Oklahoma's electric cooperatives understand the importance of the U.S. Census and encourages every co-op member to participate.

What is the Census?

The 2020 Census counts every person living in the 50 states, District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories. However, the Census does much more than count heads. It provides a picture of the nation that helps determine where to build new schools, hospitals, and businesses; how federal funding is distributed; and how congressional seats are apportioned.

The Census also helps to evaluate how communities have changed over time. An accurate count is vital. The year of 2020 will bring a unique change to the census as it is the first time the U.S. Census

Bureau will accept responses online.

Other options will continue to be offered such as responding by phone, by mail or even in person, if needed.

Why is the Census Important?

Participating in the census is a civic duty. It's a way to contribute to the democracy and say, "I count." Every 10 years, the results of the census are used to reapportion the U.S. House of Representatives by determining how many seats each state gets. It's also a way to determine how federal funds and grants are dispersed to support states, counties and communities which benefit schools, hospitals, roads and public works.

Local governments use the census data for public safety and emergency preparedness plans. Businesses consult the data to decide where to build factories, offices and stores for creating jobs and fostering economic development. What's more, real estate developers use data from the Census to build new homes and revitalize old neighborhoods. Local residents evaluate the data to support community initiatives involving legislation, quality of life initiatives, and consumer advocacy efforts.

How do I complete the Census?

For the first time, the Census will be accessible on-

line and available in English as well as in 12 additional languages. Invitations to respond to the Census will begin in mid-March. The online questionnaire will follow latest web accessibility guidelines and a video in American Sign Language will be available.

The Census can also be completed by phone in English and in 12 additional languages. The official Census Day is April 1, 2020. By then, every household should receive an invitation. By mid-April, a paper questionnaire will be mailed to every household that has not yet responded online or by phone. If necessary, participants can also respond in person beginning in mid-May.

Census takers will visit all households that have not yet responded. Strict federal law protects Census responses. It is against the law for any Census Bureau employee to disclose or publish any Census information that identifies an individual or business. The Census Bureau will never ask for your Social Security number, bank or credit card account numbers, money or donations, or anything on behalf of a political party.

To make sure you and everyone you know is counted, visit www.2020census.gov.

Source: OAEC

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• 11 1/2 ac, with home, 300575 Old Hwy 7, Velma-\$170,000
• 80 ac, North of Chattanooga on Hwy 115-\$128,000
• 272 ac, 3 miles NE of Faxon. Cultivation, improved grasses, cross fenced, barns, pens, good water. - \$598,000
• 160 ac, Tillman Cty- Excellent grass quarter/improved bermuda, cross fenced, flow thru ponds, good pens. -\$222,000
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• 251 ac, 1/2 mile West of 81 on Paul Road-\$577,400
• 119 ac, Cow Creek, Stephens-Jefferson Cty Line-Call for details UNDER CONTRACT!
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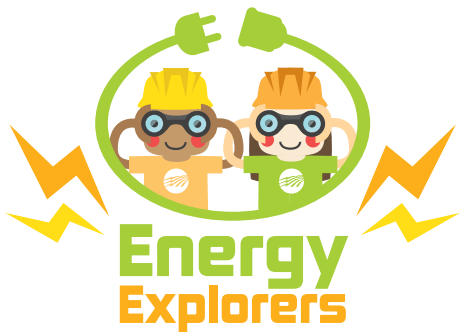
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• 170104 Cole Creek Dr. 2.5 miles East on Camelback. Custom 4 bedroom, 3 1/2 bath home sitting on just over an acre. Absolutely stunning Executive home. 30x40 shop. \$545,000
• 409 Nth I St. 3 bedroom, 2 bath, 2 car garage brick home near fire station, school and water park. \$55,000
• 2012 W. Beech 3 or 4 bedroom, 2 bath in excellent location. \$64,900
• 2300 Fairway Dr Gorgeous home that backs up to the 16th green at Duncan Golf and Country Club. Approx. 3,700 sq ft 2 story home with Florida rooms both upstairs and downstairs, full wet bar for entertaining guests and outdoor hot tub with Pergola \$247,500 UNDER CONTRACT
• 915 N. 13th-Duncan, 3 bed-2 bath doll house, corner lot- \$86,000
• Cole Creek Addition, 3 Executive home building sites available in beautiful Cole Creek addition. 2.5 miles East on Camelback.
• 1710 Parkwood-Duncan, 3 bed-2 bath, immaculate, move in ready. Storm shelter. Reduced \$154,000
• 2 Acre tract County Road 1610 Marlow, OK • 6 Acre tract County Road 1610 Marlow, OK
• 318 Nth G 2 bed, 1 1/2 bath home that is completely remodeled. New tile, new kitchen counters. Has cellar & workshop, garage w/opener & carport. \$65,380 UNDER CONTRACT!
• 50x150 lot at the corner of 5th & Hackberry
• 150x150 lot between 3rd & 4th on Hackberry
Jefferson County Listings
• 6474 E 1950 Rd Approx. 13.85 acres. Small silo, water well with solar panel, small pond.
• 6699 E 1950 Rd 3 or 4 bedroom, 1 1/2 bath brick home sitting on one acre. Home is remodeled with new tile and granite kitchen counter tops. Beautiful sunroom. Deck with hot tub. Loading shed.

TEXT TAMMY 580.786.6450 FOR DETAILS



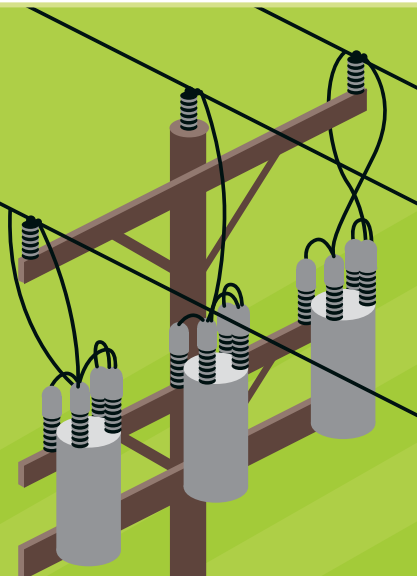
ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT WORD SCRAMBLE



Electric co-ops use a variety of equipment to make sure you and your family receive reliable electricity. Can you unscramble the equipment terms below?

Use the provided clues for help, and double check your work in the answer key below.

- ORNSTAMREFR** _____
These can look like large metal cans on top of utility poles or big green boxes on the ground. They are used to reduce the voltage of electricity, making it safe for use in your home.
- OERPW NSLIE** _____
These can hang overhead or be placed underground. They carry electricity from where it's generated to homes and businesses in your community.
- OUTASBSNTI** _____
This is an electrical facility that contains equipment for controlling the flow of electricity.
- RCTLECIE ERMTE** _____
These devices are typically found outside the home and measure the amount of electricity you use.
- CBUTKE KTURC** _____
Lineworkers use these types of vehicles to reach power lines and poles when making repairs and updates to the electrical system.



Answer Key: 1. TRANSFORMER 2. POWER LINES 3. SUBSTATION
4. ELECTRIC METER 5. BUCKET TRUCK

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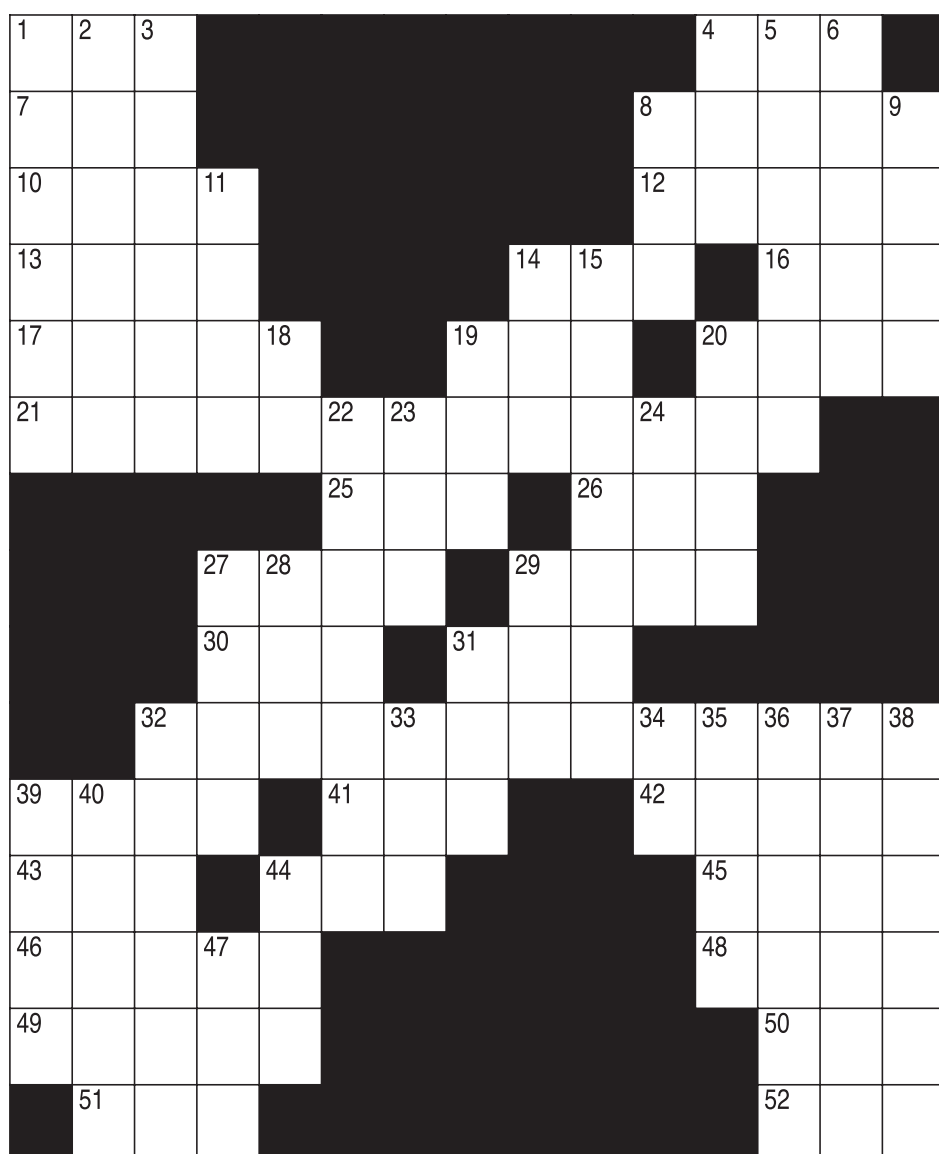


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ACROSS

- Expression of disgust
- A place to unwind
- A type of cooking range
- Grasp tightly
- Sea eagles
- Carb dish
- Late-night host
- Revolutions per minute
- Indicates odd or erroneous
- FDR's military chief of staff
- Swiss river
- Norwegian district and river
- A form of motivation
- Car mechanics group
- Once a must-have home theater accessory
- Broken branch
- Apple and pumpkin are two
- Skeletal muscle
- Small Eurasian deer
- Tight-lipped fellow
- Comes after a cut
- A place one lives
- Cognizant of
- Albanian monetary unit
- Carrot's partner
- Famed garden
- Chilean seaport
- Days (Spanish)
- Sudden anxiety
- 100 square meters
- A type of beer
- French/Belgian river



DOWN

- Spanish dish
- Concurs
- ___ and her sisters
- Patti Hearst's captors
- Used to refer to cited works
- A state of excited movement
- Advertising term (abbr.)
- Nocturnal S. American rodent
- New York art district
- Bravo! Bravo!
- Pre-release viewing
- Northwestern Canadian territory (abbr.)
- Consumed
- Falters
- Radioactive form of an element
- Catch a wrongdoer
- Breeze through
- Thick piece of something
- Yellowish-brown color
- "The Raven" poet
- Rural free delivery (abbr.)
- Creating
- Supervises flying
- Northwestern state
- Was obligated to repay
- Diverging in lines from a common center
- Bleak
- We all have them
- Hit with the palm of one's hand
- Sea that's part of the western Pacific
- Political action committee
- Famed Spanish soldier El ___

Winter months pose increased potential for safety hazards

By Abby Berry

It's no surprise that winter months bring increased potential for fire risks and electrical safety hazards. This makes sense because, during the coldest months, consumers are using additional electrical devices and appliances, like space heaters, electric blankets and portable generators.

The National Fire Protection Association estimates that 47,700 home fires occur each year in the U.S. due to electrical failure or malfunction. These fires result in 418 deaths, 1,570 injuries and \$1.4 billion in property damage annually. This winter, safeguard your loved ones and your home with these electrical safety tips from the Electrical Safety Foundation International.

1. Don't overload outlets. Overloaded outlets are a major cause of residential fires. Avoid using extension cords or multi-outlet converters for appliance connections—they should be plugged directly into a wall outlet. If you're relying heavily on extension cords in general, you may need additional outlets to address your needs. Contact a qualified electrician to in-

spect your home and add new outlets.

2. Never leave space heaters unattended. If you're using a space heater, turn it off before leaving the room. Better yet, unplug them. Make sure heaters are placed at least three feet away from flammable items. It should also be noted that space heaters take a toll on your energy bills. If you're using them throughout your home, it may be time to upgrade your home heating system.

3. Inspect heating pads and electric blankets. These items cause nearly 500 fires every year. Electric blankets that are more than 10 years old create additional risks for a fire hazard. Inspect your electric blankets and heating pads – look for dark, charred or frayed spots, and make sure the electrical cord is not damaged. Do not place any items on top of a heating pad or electric blanket, and never fold them when in use.

4. Use portable generators safely. Unfortunately, winter storms can cause prolonged power outages, which means many consumers will use portable generators to power their homes. Never connect a standby generator

GENERATOR SAFETY TIPS

Never connect a standby generator into your home's electrical system. There are only two safe ways to connect a standby generator to your equipment.

Stationary Generator:

An approved generator transfer switch, which keeps your house circuits separate from the electric co-op, should be installed by a professional.

Portable Generator:

Plug appliances directly into the outlet provided on the generator.

Set up and run your generator in a well-ventilated area outside the home. Make sure it's out and away from your garage, doors, windows and vents. The carbon monoxide generated is deadly.

Use a heavy-duty extension cord to connect electric appliances to the outlet on the generator.

Start the generator first before connecting appliances.



Source: SafeElectricity.org

into your home's electrical system. For portable generators, plug appliances directly into the outlet provided on the generator. Start the generator first, before you plug in appliances. Run it

in a well-ventilated area outside your home. The carbon monoxide it generates is deadly, so keep it away from your garage, doors, windows and vents.

Source: NRECA

WHY IS MY POWER OUT?

A storm or a squirrel may be to blame



When the power goes out, we work hard to resume service as quickly and safely as possible.

Here are some common reasons the power goes out:

- STORMS:** Mother Nature can interfere with power delivery.
- TREES AND VEGETATION:** This is why we work so hard to keep power lines clear.
- ANIMALS:** Curious animals can cause damage, especially squirrels.
- ACCIDENTS:** Run-ins with a utility pole or other equipment can cause an outage.
- PUBLIC DAMAGE:** Unsafe digging, equipment or line damage, vandalism or theft can all interfere.
- OVERLOAD:** This happens when demand spikes, like on a hot summer day.
- EQUIPMENT ISSUES:** We maintain and inspect equipment regularly, but sometimes malfunctions occur.

Thank you for your patience during outages.



Co-op works to restore power

While Cotton Electric does everything we can to reduce the possibility of outages to your home or business, they do occur. There are a variety of reasons power outages can occur, including severe storms causing mass destruction, tree limbs coming into contact with power lines, vehicles crashing into utility poles, and animals such as squirrels causing short circuits while climbing electrical equipment.

Whatever the reason, rest assured we are working as fast as we can to get your power restored quickly and safely. While each utility has its own system for restoring power during an outage, many of the following steps will be similar across all organizations.

The number one focus of Cotton Electric is public safety. This means crews will clear lines and equipment that could pose safety hazards to the public. Next, it will turn its attention to power generation facilities that generate the actual electricity that powers your home or business. After that come transmission line and substation equipment repairs. Then, your utility will focus on feeder lines that can serve one to 3,000 members, tap lines that provide power to 20 to 30 homes or businesses, and then connections to individual members.

During this process, utilities will generally first make repairs to facilities that are critical to public health and safety—like hospitals, police and fire stations, water treatment plants, and communication systems. How long it takes to get your power restored depends on the extent of the storm's destruction, the number

Safe Electricity Storm Safety Kit

- Drinking water & food
- Blankets, pillows, & clothing
- Basic first-aid supplies
- Prescriptions
- Basic toiletries
- Flashlights
- Battery-operated radio
- Battery-operated clock
- Extra supply of batteries
- Phone
- Cash and credit cards
- Emergency numbers
- Important documents (in a waterproof container)
- Toys, books, & games
- Baby supplies
- Pet supplies

of outages, and when it becomes safe for utility personnel to get to the damaged areas.

Whether long or short, it pays to know what to do when the power goes out so you can keep your family safe. Safe Electricity suggests you:

• Call Cotton Electric immediately at 580-875-3351 to report the outage.

• Have a storm kit (with items like flashlights, battery-operated radio, batteries, and first-aid supplies) prepared for use during power outages.

• Turn off electrical appliances and unplug major electronics, including computers and televisions. Leave one light on to indicate that power has been restored. Wait a few minutes and then turn on other appliances and equipment—one at a time.

For more information visit SafeElectricity.org.

Source: Safe Electricity



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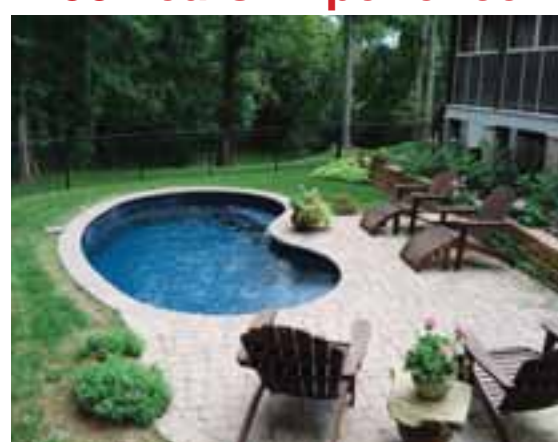
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Cotton Electric Services, Inc. tests personal protective equipment for electric distributors across the nation. Pictured from left, Brady Staap, Shelly Sehrt, CEO Jennifer Meason, Angie Garza, Tracy Lindsey, Eric Woods, Jake Lawler, Ryan Noland and Vice President Bryce Hooper.

CESI works to get linemen home safely

By Danielle Quickle

Safety is the first priority at Cotton Electric Cooperative and the primary reason the Cotton Electric Services, Inc. (CESI) test lab exists.

Established in 1984, CESI is a for-profit subsidiary of Cotton Electric. It specializes in testing, repairing and selling personal protective equipment (PPE) to electric distributors across the country and even internationally. Seven full-time and three part-time employees use state-of-the-art cleaning and dielectric testing procedures to ensure PPE is up to national standards.

“The most important thing is to keep the linemen safe and make sure they go home to their families at the end of the day,” CESI Supervisor Eric Woods said.

National requirements recommend testing PPE at the minimum of every six months. Cotton Electric linemen, and most CESI customers, exceed this recommendation by having equipment tested every 30 days.

CESI tests items used by line workers daily, such as new and used gloves, blankets, sleeves, line hose, hot sticks, jumpers, grounding chains, hoods, bell and elbow covers and other protective

equipment. The CESI staff cleans and scrutinizes each item for visual signs of wear and tear before subjecting them to electrical testing.

“It is a long process, one pair of gloves takes about an hour to test,” Woods said. “We have to test every single item that comes through our door because our equipment might be the difference between life and death for a lineman.”

Lab technicians include Angie Garza, Ryan Noland, Jake Lawler, Shelly Sehrt, and Brady Staap.

The testing facility has exceeded the strictest standards established by North American Independent Laboratories (NAIL) and maintains their NAIL certification with an audit every three years.

If items are not up to standards and have to be discarded, CESI serves as a supplier for replacement PPE. An on-site warehouse holds an extensive inventory of products in an effort to provide customers with materials they need at an affordable cost.

CESI is the only testing lab in Oklahoma and serves around 350 customers stretched all the way from California to Florida and up to New York.

“We offer a route service to try



The staff cleans and scrutinizes each item for visual signs of wear and tear before subjecting them to electrical testing.

and stay competitive in other areas,” Woods said. “We have two routes, east and west, that cover about 3,000 miles.”

2019 was a record-breaking year for CESI. New sales totaled \$1,915,480.49 and re-testing items that came through the door tallied up

to \$371,700.30. CESI Representative Tracy Lindsey keeps track of service orders, among other things, and reported the lab re-testing 68,295 gloves and 14,300 sleeves in 2019.

“It is beneficial to the co-op to have a successful subsidiary, which in turn is beneficial to members,” Woods said.

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Ways to keep children safe from electrical hazards

At times, keeping toddlers safe seems to be one of those things that is easier said than done. They are curious about the world around them and are constantly learning new things. To help keep them safe at home, it is important to check for and repair any potential electrical issues. Safe Electricity has tips to help you protect toddlers from electrical accidents in your home.

Cracked outlet covers and discolored outlets and switches are indications of electrical problems. These problems can lead to fires and electric shocks. Contact a professional to have your home inspected and repaired.

Another step toward preventing accidents with toddlers in the home is to install tamper resistant outlets (TROs). Small fingers can easily fit into sockets, and curious children may poke objects into outlets. A TRO has a shutter system that only accepts electric plugs.

Because multiple outlets can be found in almost every room of the av-

erage household, the cost of replacing these outlets can add up, but that extra cost is well worth a child's safety. Other low-cost alternatives include outlet caps and sliding covers, but they are not fail-proof.

Here are some additional tips from Safe Electricity that can help reduce electrical safety hazards in your home and put your mind at ease:

- Repair or dispose of damaged electronics and cords.
- Put cords out of sight so that children are not tempted to play with them.
- Use ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protection to prevent shocks. GFCIs detect and prevent dangerous situations where an electric shock could occur. You should have GFCIs anywhere that water and electricity may meet—such as bathrooms, kitchens, and basements.
- Have a fire extinguisher that is rated for electrical fires. Know where it is located and how to use it.
- Have smoke alarms, and be sure

TEACH KIDS about SAFETY

A yearly average of **2400** children suffer severe shock from electrical outlets.

research collected from the National Fire Protection Association

Safe Electricity

their batteries work.

- Be prepared for power outages. Have an emergency kit on hand. It should include items such as flashlights, batteries, first aid kit, water, and non-perishable food.
- Have a list of phone numbers that

includes your electric utility.

Taking action to prevent electrical issues in the home will enhance your home and family's safety. For more tips on electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org.

Source: Safe Electricity

Home Electrical Inspection: Pass or Fail?

Would your home pass an electrical inspection? Local electrical codes vary, so check with your qualified electrician, but here are **five things** your home should have:

- Wiring should be sound (not overcrowded or knob-and-tube wiring used in old homes).
- Ceiling fixtures should be controlled by a wall switch and not just a pull chain.
- Outlets near water should have GFCIs (ground fault circuit interrupters).
- Your refrigerator, microwave and garbage disposal should each have its own circuit.
- Your island should have its own outlet.

Learn more at SafeElectricity.org



Officials warn of dangerous outlet challenge

By Alec Snyder

Authorities in Massachusetts are warning of an electrical "outlet challenge" video on TikTok after three incidents sparked concern, including two in schools.

The video on the social media platform involves using part of a phone charger, a wall outlet and a penny to cause sparks, electrical system damage and possibly fire, said Massachusetts Fire Marshal Peter J. Ostroskey in a letter alerting fire departments and educators.

In Plymouth North High School on Tuesday, firefighters found two scorched outlets and a cellphone charger with a penny fused to the prongs, Plymouth Fire Chief Edward Bradley said.

School Superintendent Gary Maestas said there were no injuries or significant damage.

"We are working with the Plymouth Police and Fire Departments to fully understand the scope of this issue and pursue charges to the fullest extent of the law," said Maestas in a statement posted to Twitter.

Two 15-year-old male students face charges of attempted arson and malicious damage to property under \$1,200, according to Plymouth police.

Bradley told CNN that he believes it's only a matter of time before someone gets hurt.

"I don't think students comprehend the

reality that they can be electrocuted and killed, or start a fire," said Bradley. "Parents need to talk to their children and tell them if you see this stuff, don't try to imitate it."

At Westford Academy on Friday, a spark ignited an outlet and generated smoke, setting off the school's fire alarm, according to Westford Fire Department Spokesman Donald Parsons.

"This was a very serious incident that could have caused a lot more damage," said Westford Academy Principal James Antonelli in a statement to parents. "The student involved has been identified and the Westford Academy administration is taking appropriate action at this time."

The student is also facing charges, including arson and malicious damage to property, said Westford Police Department Capt. Victor Neal.

Another incident was reported in Holden, after a concerned mother sent a photo of a scorched electric socket to a news outlet, said Ostroskey.

He is encouraging school officials and parents to look for signs of foul play, like scorched outlets, and to have conversations about fire and electrical safety with tweens and teenagers.

Story and photo provided by CNN

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From left, Josh Torkelson, Ian Leroux and Konner Hulbert serve as builders and programmers on the Lawton Academy of Art and Science robotics team. They are seen here posing with their robot, GLEN.

Robotics students challenged to make linemen's jobs safer

By Danielle Quickle

"We learned about how dangerous their job actually is. I always knew who linemen were, but I never really comprehended what all they go through until now," Ian Leroux said.

Leroux and fellow freshmen Josh Torkelson and Konner Hulbert serve as builders and programmers on the Lawton Academy of Art and Science (LAAS) robotics team. They represented southwest Oklahoma at the BEST (Boosting Engineering, Science, and Technology) Robotics state and regional competitions this past fall.

LAAS has been competing in robotics for 15 years and it is something everyone gets involved in.

"The whole school participates in robotics because it is a great learning experience," Michelle Smith said. The LAAS principal and robotics coach went on to explain, "Robotics helps students to think critically and understand that your first attempt is not always your best, your first is just your first."

For 2019, BEST Robotics challenged schools across the country to create an all-purpose robotics system to help repair the electrical grid after a catastrophe strikes.

"There are several organizations in Oklahoma that have robotics but BEST is different in that it brings real world problems to question and challenges us to address them," Torkelson said.

In the past, LAAS robotics has put

out fires, cleared garbage from oceans and built a Mars rover. However, LAAS took this past year's theme personally.

"One of our students lost their father while he was working as a lineman last year. So, this really hit home for us," Smith said. "We realize how important it is to keep linemen safe."

In only six weeks, LAAS designed, produced and marketed their robot, named GLEN, for competition. GLEN stands for Global Linemen Engineering Network. GLEN is able to repair aerial high voltage and residential lines and buried cables, transport and replace line insulators and transformers, clear and remove debris and operate autonomously in dangerous and high interference areas.

"We are very passionate about not replacing linemen with robots," Smith said. "Our goal is to assist them and make their jobs easier and safer."

The teams were judged in five categories during the competition: Design and appearance of the robot; how well it performed in the game; details of their engineering notebook; marketing and spirit; and sportsmanship.

Each fall, more than 18,000 students from more than 850 schools across the country participate in BEST Robotics.

"We don't go out there and root against other teams," Smith said. "It is just like watching a sporting event, except everyone is cheering robotics."

LAAS received first place overall for their performance in each category at



All high school and junior high students participate in robotics at LAAS.

the state competition in Alva, advancing them to the regional competition in Denver, Co.

"By the end of the competition, we have all learned something about the environment and how we can use robotics to help," Smith said.

LAAS is a private school aimed at gifted and talented education. Students come from all over southwest Oklahoma to receive a specialized education.

"Students do not have to be gifted and talented to come here, they just have to be highly driven," Smith said. "Not only are they given high level classes, they are being trained to be leaders."

Many graduates of LAAS have entered career fields related to the expe-

riences they have had with robotics.

"BEST robotics has helped me with choosing my career path," Hulbert said. "It has shown me that I want to pursue engineering."

To see everything the robotics team has done this past year, visit their student-made website at LawtonAcademyRobotics.com. The 2020 BEST robotics season will kick-off mid-September.

Editor's note: We were made aware of this story by Cotton Electric member Lisa Rockwood who has a daughter on the robotics team. If you have a story idea for The Current, please let us know by emailing TheCurrent@CottonElectric.com or by calling 580-875-4255.

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Creamy Couscous with Broccoli, Tomatoes and Cheese

Recipe courtesy of culinary dietitian Marcia Stanley, MS, RDN
 Prep time: 15 minutes
 Cook time: 5 minutes
 Servings: 6

- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 cups broccoli florets
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 3 cups fat-free, 2% or whole milk
- 1 1/2 cups plain couscous (wheat pasta)
- 1 cup finely shredded Parmesan cheese
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 1/2 cups seeded and chopped tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons slivered fresh basil leaves

In large nonstick skillet over medium heat, cook onion in butter 2 minutes. Add broccoli, garlic and pepper. Cook and stir 2 minutes.
 Stir milk into broccoli mixture. Bring to boil. Stir in couscous. Remove from heat. Cover and let stand 5 minutes.
 Gently stir Parmesan cheese into couscous mixture. Spread on serving platter. Sprinkle with cheddar cheese. Top with tomatoes and fresh basil leaves.

All-Day Nutrition

Dairy-inspired, plant-based dishes to serve from morning to night

FAMILY FEATURES

From cereal and milk to yogurt and fruit to broccoli and cheese, combining dairy with plant-based foods creates a superfood power couple that can help ensure you and your family are getting the nutrients you need any time of day.

With the rise in popularity of plant-based diets, dairy can help optimize nutrient absorption from plant foods and provide additional nutrients like high-quality protein, calcium, vitamin D and vitamin B12. You can create delicious meals with the nutrition you need while enjoying the best of plants and dairy.

Combining dairy and plant-based foods can be easier with these dairy-powered recipes from Milk Means More. They are ideal for creating a nutritious and delicious plan for every meal throughout the day. Start with a Blueberry Apple Crisp Smoothie Bowl in the morning then build out your lunch or dinner plans around an appetizer like this traditional Middle Eastern Labneh Spread with grilled pita bread and assorted veggies. For the main course, try Lentil Tacos with Tangy Guacamole and a classic Moroccan staple, Creamy Couscous with Broccoli, Tomatoes and Cheese, on the side.

Find more recipes that combine the goodness of dairy and plant-based foods at milkmeansmore.org.



Lentil Tacos with Tangy Guacamole

Recipe courtesy of culinary dietitian Marcia Stanley, MS, RDN
 Prep time: 40 minutes
 Servings: 6

- Tangy Guacamole:**
- 1 medium ripe avocado, pitted, peeled and chopped
 - 1 tablespoon orange, lime or lemon juice
 - 1/4 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
 - 1 clove garlic, minced
 - 1/2 cup plain, fat-free Greek yogurt

- Lentil Tacos:**
- 2 1/3 cups water
 - 1 cup dry brown lentils, rinsed and drained
 - 1/2 cup finely chopped onion
 - 2 teaspoons chili powder
 - 2 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt

- 1 1/2 cups seeded and chopped tomatoes, divided
- 1 1/4 cups (5 ounces) shredded cheddar cheese, divided
- 12 yellow corn taco shells

To make Tangy Guacamole: In small bowl, mash avocado, juice, hot pepper sauce and garlic. Stir in yogurt. Cover and refrigerate until serving time.

To make Lentil Tacos: Heat oven to 400 F.

In medium saucepan over medium-high heat, combine water, lentils, onion, chili powder, garlic and salt. Bring to boil. Reduce heat. Cover and gently boil 12-15 minutes, or until lentils are just tender. Uncover and boil 5-15 minutes, or until most liquid evaporates.

Remove lentils from heat. Stir in 1 cup tomatoes and 3/4 cup cheese. Spoon into taco shells. Stand filled tacos in 13-by-9-by-2-inch baking dish. Sprinkle tacos with remaining tomatoes and cheese. Loosely cover dish with foil. Bake 3-5 minutes, or until cheese melts.

Stir guacamole. Serve with warm tacos.

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Labneh Spread

Recipe courtesy of Jenn Fillenworth, MS, RDN of Jenny with the Good Eats
Prep time: 5 minutes
Servings: 6

- 12 ounces whole milk Greek yogurt
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 pinch sea salt, for garnish
- fresh herbs, for garnish
- pita bread, grilled
- assorted seasonal vegetables

In bowl, mix Greek yogurt, salt and lemon juice.

Transfer mixture to fine mesh strainer lined with cheesecloth.

Wrap mixture in cheesecloth and strain over bowl in refrigerator 24-48 hours. Strain longer to make thicker.

Once thickened as desired, remove from cheesecloth and top spread with olive oil, sea salt and fresh herbs.

Serve with grilled pita bread and assorted seasonal vegetables.



Blueberry Apple Crisp Smoothie Bowl

Recipe courtesy of Rachel Gurk of Rachel Cooks
Prep time: 5 minutes
Servings: 1

- 1 cup frozen blueberries
- 2 cups apples, roughly chopped, reserving 2 tablespoons for topping
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 cup plain, non-fat Greek yogurt
- 1 cup spinach
- pure maple syrup, to taste
- ice cubes (optional)

Toppings:

- 2 tablespoons oats
- 1 teaspoon pure maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon pecans, chopped
- 2 tablespoons reserved chopped apple
- fresh blueberries

In blender, blend blueberries, apples, cinnamon, yogurt and spinach until smooth. Taste and add maple syrup, to taste. If thicker mixture is desired, add ice cubes.

Pour into bowl. Mix oats with maple syrup. Top smoothie mixture with oats, pecans, apples and blueberries.

Key diet and lifestyle changes improve heart health

February is Heart Month. It's a great time to start a diet and conduct a lifestyle check-in to see if there are any habits you could adopt or modify to keep your heart healthy.

Heart disease is a concern for all adults, young and old. If you don't have any signs of heart disease, think about preventing it. If you have heart disease, diet and lifestyle modifications are important along with medication.

Eating more fruits and vegetables is a key dietary strategy for everyone. Fruits and vegetables are good sources of fiber, antioxidants and phytonutrients which are essential to keeping your heart healthy.

The type and amount is important - The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends eating 1.5 to 2 cups of fruit and 2.5 to 3 cups of vegetables per day. An easy reference for "a cup" is an



Kim Bandelier, MPH, RD, LD



amount that looks like the size of your fist.

If you want to keep it simple - incorporate fruits and vegetables into every

meal and snack. Fresh and frozen without sauce are the best choices. Canned fruits and vegetables can be good choices if they are in their own juices and low in sodium. Starchy vegetables should be enjoyed in moderation and baked rather than fried. Don't let a day or a meal go by without including a variety of fruits and vegetables.

Eating more unsaturated fat is essential for heart health. Gone are the days where the amount of fat is more important than the type of fat. Foods that are high in omega 3 fatty acids are especially important.

Omega 3 fatty acids play a role in healthy veins and arteries and also help reduce chronic inflammation which contributes to plaque buildup. There are three main omega 3 fatty acids - EPA, DHA, and ALA. Foods that are high in omega 3 fatty acids include

fatty fish such as salmon and trout, nuts and seeds, plant oils, and fortified foods.


If your daily diet does not include some of these foods it's time to make a change. If you already have signs of heart disease, your healthcare provider may recommend additional supplementation.

Other diet and lifestyle changes for heart health include eating less added sugar, getting enough protein, exercise, reducing stress, eliminating tobacco use, losing weight, preventing the onset of type 2 diabetes or managing the disease if you already have it.

Work with your healthcare team to prioritize the changes you need to make. If you are not ready to have that conversation with your physician, eating more fruits, vegetables and unsaturated fats is a good place to start.

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