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Test Your AC Before It's Too Hot

Summers can be long and hot, and can seem a lot longer and hotter if your air conditioning system isn't functioning properly. March and April are great months to test your air conditioning while the weather is mild.

If your system isn't working correctly, or at all, here are some common issues and how to fix them.

If your system isn't cooling properly, it could be a:

Dirty filter. A clogged filter restricts airflow, reducing the efficiency of your cooling system and even stopping its ability to effectively cool the air. Check your filter and replace it if it is dirty. Change it regularly according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Thermostat setting. Check your thermostat to make sure it is set to the appropriate temperature. If you have a programmable unit, program it according to your schedule to save energy while maintaining comfort.

Benton REA pays members up to \$175 for the purchase of a qualifying programmable smart thermostat. To apply, visit www.BentonREA.org/rebates.

Covered vent. Supply or return air vents covered with furniture or boxes can restrict or even stop airflow and throw the system out of balance.

Keep all vents clear.

Ductwork problem. Your ducts could leak air or be constricted. You can seal leaks in exposed ductwork with mastic tape, but work with a professional to seal your entire duct system. Benton REA incentivizes duct testing and sealing—as well as commissioning and controls—up to \$750.

Refrigerant leak. Your system refrigerant could be low or leaking. Contact a qualified professional to repair the leak and recharge the system.

If your system won't turn on, the problem could be:

Electric control failure. Compressor or fan controls may be worn out due to the system cycling on and off too frequently. Contact a qualified professional for this fix.

Thermostat issues. Your thermostat may need new batteries or need to be replaced entirely. Consider upgrading to a Wi-Fi-enabled thermostat. You can optimize savings and comfort and get remote control.

Drainage problems. Your system's condensate drain line can get clogged due to mold and mildew buildup. The system should shut down to prevent flooding, but may not.

To prevent water damage in your home, check the drain to ensure it is not clogged.



Test your air conditioning before summer. Install a programmable thermostat to save energy and money. PHOTO COURTESY OF TOUCHSTONE ENERGY COOPERATIVES

You can clear a clog with a wire brush or wet/dry vacuum, or contact a qualified professional.

If your cooling system is older or in need of serious repair, upgrade to a high-efficiency heat pump. You'll stay comfortable all year long, with lower energy bills.

Before purchasing a heat pump, talk to Benton REA's energy experts to ensure the unit is sized correctly for your home and qualifies for a rebate. Benton REA pays up to \$1,600 and offers low-interest loans on qualifying systems. Call 509-781-6751 for more information. ■

This article was provided by Touchstone Energy Cooperatives. www.TouchstoneEnergy.com

A Better Way to Pay Your Bills In Person

Don't forget—Benton REA has a new way to pay your bill in person, without making an extra stop at our office. Pay at our kiosk while shopping at Yoke's Fresh Market in West Richland or Lep-re-kon Harvest Foods in Prosser.

Our payment kiosks are fast, easy and convenient. ■



One of Benton REA's two payment kiosks is located near the pharmacy at Prosser's Lep-re-kon Harvest Foods. PHOTO BY ELECIA COPENHAVER

To Pay Your Benton REA or PowerNET Bill at a Kiosk

1. Enter your account number, name and phone number.
2. Pay with cash, check or card.
3. Leave with a receipt.

Benton REA Payment Kiosk Locations



Yoke's Fresh Market
1401 Bombing Range Road West Richland, WA



Lep-re-kon Harvest Foods
471 Wine Country Road Prosser, WA

Money Is Available to Help Pay Your Electric Bill

Benton REA members with a past-due electric bill and a household income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines qualify for help. On average, members receive more than \$200.

POWER TO CARE
APPLY TODAY

BentonREA.org/PowerToCare
509-786-2913

IS YOUR POWER OUT?

If your electricity is out for more than a few minutes:

- Check your breaker box to see if a circuit breaker has tripped.
- Check to see if your neighbors have power.
- Report Benton REA outages by calling 800-221-6987 or 509-786-1626 or use the SmartHub app.

COOPERATIVE INFORMATION

BENTON RURAL ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

Prosser Office
402 7th St. | P.O. Box 1150
Prosser, WA 99350
509-786-2913

Office Hours: Mon. - Fri., 7 a.m. - 5 p.m.

West Richland Office
6095 W. Van Giesen St.
West Richland, WA 99353
509-967-2921

Office Hours: Mon.- Fri., 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Toll Free: 800-221-6987
www.BentonREA.org

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MEMBER SERVICES

This newsletter is produced by the Benton REA Member Services and Economic Development Department:

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May Hays, Community Relations Coordinator
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Eric Miller, Energy Advisor

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

When was your cooling system last serviced? Most manufacturers recommend an annual tune up for your home's cooling system. March is a great time to schedule this service so you can beat the summer rush when the pros are busiest.

A qualified professional can check the amount of refrigerant, accuracy of the thermostat, condition of belts and motors and other factors that can greatly impact the efficiency of your system.

Source: Dept. of Energy



Dreaming of the Sun

Frequently Asked Questions About Producing Solar Energy at Home

As the days get longer, the sun is on our minds. You may be wondering if solar energy is right for you.

Here are answers to the frequently asked questions we receive from members considering a solar photovoltaic system investment.

How Much Electricity Can I Generate?

This depends on several factors. The first is the size of your system. You can determine how much electricity you want to produce, then size your system accordingly. You can start small and add on. A system that will generate 100% of your energy needs is expensive with the risk of producing more energy than you use and not getting your return on investment.

Second, it depends on your location. If you have a shade-free area from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., you'll be able to collect more sun and produce more energy than if your site is shaded.

Will Benton REA Buy Any Excess Energy I Produce?

Grid connected PV systems are connected to Benton REA's power lines. That means electricity can flow both ways—to your home from your cooperative, and from your PV system back to the electrical grid.

Particularly on sunny days when your energy use may be low, your system may produce excess energy that can flow back to the grid. This excess is measured at your electric

meter and held in a bank for you to use throughout the year. If you do not use all of it at the end of the year, Benton REA does not purchase the excess power you generated. This is why it is important to not oversize your solar PV system.

How Long Is the Payback Period?

The payback period can range from 10 to more than 30 years, depending on system costs, available rebates, tax credits and incentives, the amount of electricity produced and the retail price of electricity you purchase.

How Long Do Solar PV Systems Last?

Certified PV products and systems generally are reliable, with a life expectancy of about 30 years. Manufacturers test PV panels for hail impact, high wind, and freeze-thaw cycles to represent real-life situations.

Most manufacturers offer 20- to 25-year warranties for panels. Extended warranties may be available at an extra cost.

Little maintenance is required. Occasionally it may be necessary to rinse modules with water to remove dust and grime.

Other components such as inverters may have a shorter life. PV panels may outlast the roof they are attached to. Make sure your roof is in good shape or budget for replacement during the life of the system.

What Happens With a Solar PV System at Night and on Cloudy Days?

Battery-backed or grid-independent systems use on-site energy storage to store excess energy produced during the day for use at night or when the sun is not producing enough power. Choosing this option will add significant cost and maintenance to your system.

Most people opt for grid-connected systems for reduced cost and maintenance, plus high reliability. With this type of system, Benton REA continues to provide energy to you when you need it. Your PV system will produce energy, and even excess energy, on sunny days. You will continue to draw electricity from Benton REA at night and on cloudy days.

What Happens With a Solar PV System During Power Outages?

Most grid-connected PV systems shut down to prevent back-feeding electricity into de-energized power lines that may have fallen or that line crew members may be working on. It's important to have this shut-down feature to prevent injuries—and even death—to those working on the line.

Are There Incentives or Tax Credits for Installing Solar PV Systems?

Yes, but they are limited. A federal

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Solar

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tax credit of 26% is available. Be sure to consult with your financial and tax advisor as this may change annually.

As of March 1, 2022, the Washington State University Energy Program cap has been met for Benton REA members and there are no state incentive dollars left. Residential and commercial incentives are subject to change at any time. Contact Benton REA at 509-781-6752 for current program details.



How Do I Get Started?

Before choosing a solar system, be sure that your home is as energy efficient as possible. Investing in energy efficiency provides a faster return on your investment. Reducing your overall energy use may reduce the size of PV system you will need saving you money on both ends.

Make sure your roof is in tip-top shape. If yours is older, you may need to repair or replace it before installing solar. A solar PV system may last up to 30 years, so be sure your roof will last, too.

Research solar contractors thoroughly before investing in a system. Get at least three quotes

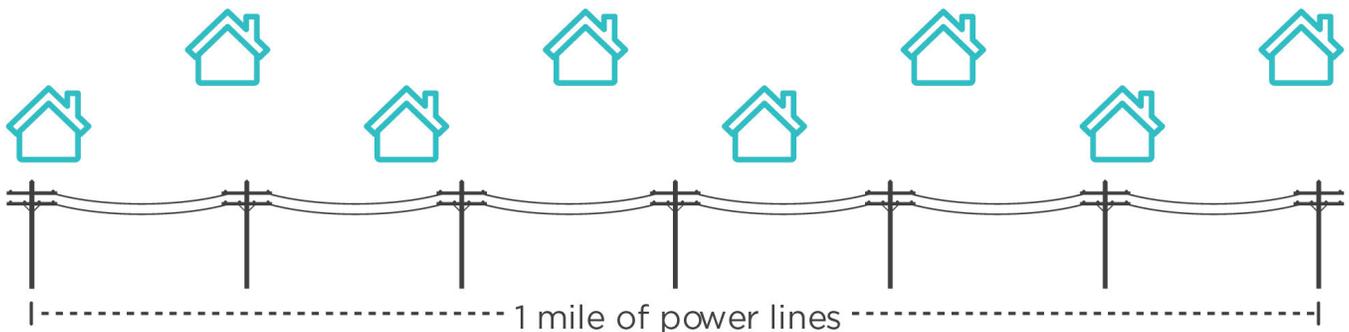
before choosing one. Work closely with Benton REA for advice and assistance on interconnecting with the grid. Request the history of your energy use to help you size your system and evaluate savings. Co-op staff has experience working with other member-owners and solar contractors. Call Benton REA at 509-781-6752. ■

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Electric co-ops maintain more miles of power lines per consumer than other electric utilities. Even though we power fewer consumers on our lines compared to other utilities, we'll always go the extra mile for you, the consumer-members we proudly serve.

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

Serve 8 consumer-members per mile of line



OTHER ELECTRIC UTILITIES

Serve 32 consumers per mile of line

