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February 2025

Magazine

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Published monthly by the Nebraska Rural Electric Association, 1244 K Street, Box 82048, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501, (402) 475-4988.

Advertising in the *Nebraska Magazine* does not imply endorsement for products by the Nebraska Rural Electric Association. Correspondence should be sent to Wayne Price, Editor, *Nebraska Magazine*, Box 82048, Lincoln, NE 68501.

The *Nebraska Magazine* is printed by the Aradius Group, 4700 F Street, Omaha, NE 68117. Form 3579 should be sent to *Nebraska Magazine*, Box 82048, Lincoln, NE 68501.

Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Neb. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Nebraska Magazine*, 1244 K Street, Box 82048, Lincoln, NE 68501.

Publication numbers are USPS 071-630 and ISSN 0193-4937.

Subscriber Services: Cost of subscription for consumers of participating member-systems is \$2.14 per year (17.8 cents per month), plus periodicals postage paid from equity accruing to the consumer. For nonmembers, a subscription is \$10 per year or \$20 for three years, plus local and state tax. Single copy, \$2.50.

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6 Breathe Easy

Furnace filters are vital components of any HVAC system, responsible for refining indoor air and maintaining proper airflow. When neglected, dirty filters force the system to work harder, increasing the risk of breakdowns and reducing the system's lifespan. Routine replacement or cleaning can prevent these issues.



11 Meet Your State Senator

The first session of the 109th Nebraska Legislature convened on Wednesday, January 8th in Lincoln. Seventeen new senators join the ranks of the one-house lawmaking body for the 90-day session. Stay in touch with your state senator using this helpful guide.

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The Nebraska State Library, located inside the Nebraska State Capitol, is the oldest public library in the state. The library features a painting, "Spirit of the Prairie" by Elisabeth Dolan. Photograph by Wayne Price



Wayne Price

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Flip the Switch: Bright Ideas for Saving Energy and Lowering Bills

Electricity powers nearly every aspect of our daily lives. Whether we're flipping on the lights, booting up the computer, cooking a family dinner, or binge-watching our favorite TV show, we rely on a steady flow of electricity to keep things running smoothly. But every click of a switch or hum of an appliance sends that electric meter outside spinning just a little faster—and pushes our monthly bills higher. The good news? A few simple steps can help us rein in energy use and lighten the load on our wallets.

When it comes to cutting energy costs, the terms “conservation” and “efficiency” often come up. While related, they're not the same thing.

Conservation is all about using less electricity. Think of it as the “turn it off” mantra: switching off lights when you leave a room, unplugging gadgets you're not using, and being mindful about how much power you're consuming.

Efficiency, on the other hand, focuses on doing more with less. It's about upgrading to tools and technologies that deliver the same benefits while consuming less electricity. Energy-efficient light bulbs, modern appliances, and better home insulation are great examples of efficiency in action.

Wondering how much electricity your home uses and where you might be wasting energy? A home energy audit can provide the answers. Many public power districts and electric cooperatives in Nebraska offer these audits for free. Think of it as a check-up for your house's energy health.

Armed with the results, you can tackle projects that boost efficiency: sealing drafty windows, upgrading to EnergyStar appliances, or adding insulation to your attic. These changes may seem small, but they can have a big collective impact. Not only will they trim your energy bill, but they'll also reduce the overall demand on the electric grid, helping to keep costs lower for everyone.

Adopting energy-efficient practices doesn't just benefit your household; it's a win for the environment and our energy systems. By managing load growth, energy efficiency helps delay the need for costly new power plants.

Incorporating conservation and efficiency into your daily routine doesn't have to be overwhelming. Start simple: swap out old light bulbs for LEDs, adjust your thermostat a degree or two, and turn off devices that don't need to be on. Each small action contributes to a larger goal—reducing electricity demand, saving money, and creating a more sustainable future.

Electricity consumption is bound to grow as our lives become more tech-driven. But by using energy wisely, we can slow that growth and ensure a brighter, more efficient future for everyone. So go ahead: flip the switch—to energy savings.



Brandon Lehman

Brandon Lehman is the General Manager of Perennial Public Power District headquartered in York, Neb.

The Public Power Advantage in Nebraska

When we think about public power it's easy to make a list of benefits or advantages stretching longer than the conductor between two transmission poles. One of the first benefits which comes to mind is local control. Public power districts are governed and guided by a board of directors who are elected within the service area of the district they represent. This is important because you may know a friend or neighbor who serves on the board who can give you a voice through the conversation you have with them. Or, if you don't have a connection with the board, you still have the privilege to speak at a public board meeting about your concerns or ideas about public power, which is granted by the Nebraska Open Meetings Act.

Another key benefit of public power is *affordable* power. Affordable power is what most everyone wants, and it is what we've come to expect in Nebraska. The U.S. Department of Energy defines "Energy Affordability" as the idea that customers should be able to pay for their home electricity use—lighting, heating, cooling, power appliances—while also paying for other basic living expenses, such as food and medication, without having to choose or feel overburdened.¹ So how do we rank against the rest of the country? According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Nebraska ranks in the top five states, and it's a tight race for the *lowest* average price of electricity for the end-use customer. So, what is it that makes us so affordable?

There are a couple of major factors that keep our power costs low. One factor is our location in the Midwest and being wholesale customers of either Nebraska Public Power District or Tri-State G&T Association. Both are market participants in the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) Integrated Marketplace. In simple terms, think of the SPP Marketplace as an auction block for electric power. It is the lowest cost power production that wins the bid to produce power for the next day. Every day, SPP members post their commitment to generate power for the next day and how much they plan to consume from the SPP grid. Nebraska's generating facilities are very competitive in the market, and this helps to keep the cost of providing energy low while keeping grid reliability strong.

The other factor that keeps us affordable is the absence of shareholders. Public power districts are not-for-profit and positive margins created by the generation and consumption of power are used to stabilize our rates and reinvested into the systems that serve us.

The list of benefits is longer but consider this last benefit. Public power offers local jobs for the community and the state. From Burt County PPD along the Missouri river to Roosevelt Public Power District near Scottsbluff, public power offers some of the best career opportunities for people that want to stay and serve in their community.

¹ <https://www.energy.gov/eere/reduced-energy-costs>

BREATHE EASY

The Importance of Air Filter Maintenance in Your Home



Home air filters, also known as furnace filters, are more than just an accessory to your HVAC system; they are its unsung heroes. These filters refine your home's air, ensuring a cleaner environment while keeping your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system running smoothly. Neglecting them, however, can lead to a cascade of issues, from overworked systems to costly repairs.

The Lifeline of Your HVAC System

Your HVAC system relies on air filters to maintain efficient airflow. When filters get dirty or clogged, the system must work overtime to circulate air, leading to potential wear and tear. Regularly replacing or cleaning these filters is one of the simplest ways to extend your HVAC system's life and avoid expensive breakdowns.

Pleated vs. Non-Pleated Filters

Air filters come in two primary types: pleated and non-pleated. Non-pleated filters, with their smooth, flat surface, provide basic air filtration. They're a functional choice but lack the trapping power of their pleated counterparts. Pleated filters, with ridges or channels, offer a larger surface area to capture dust, pollen, pet hair, smoke, and even bacteria.

The effectiveness of a filter is indicated by its Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV). A MERV rating between 5 and 11 signifies good filtration, while ratings of 13 or 14 indicate exceptional efficiency, capable of trapping finer particles like allergens and viruses. Remember, the higher the MERV, the better the filtration.

When and How to Replace Air Filters

Checking your air filters monthly is a simple but crucial habit. Factors like pet ownership, home size, and seasonal HVAC use can influence how often filters need replacement.

Non-Pleated Filters: Replace monthly.

Pleated Filters: Replace every three months, or every two months if you have pets or a large home.

Even if your filters don't appear dirty, replace them every three months to maintain optimal system performance. If you're prone to forgetfulness, set a monthly alert on your phone or download an app from your filter manufacturer. These apps can track usage and send timely reminders.



When you replace a filter, write the date on the side. Check the filter once a month, and replace it at least every three months.

Pro Tips for Filter Management

Buying air filters by the case (usually six to 12 at a time) can save money and effort. Store them near your furnace to make replacement quick and convenient.

If you're a pet owner, double your vigilance. Pet dander and hair are major culprits in clogging filters and can significantly impact indoor air quality. Start with bi-monthly replacements for a 1-inch pleated filter, and increase the frequency if necessary.

Don't Forget Professional Maintenance

Air filter replacement is only part of the equation. Annual professional servicing of your furnace ensures the entire system operates safely and efficiently. A technician will clean internal components, inspect the condensate line, and perform a combustion analysis to check for optimal O₂, CO, and CO₂ levels. Most importantly, they'll ensure your heat exchanger is intact, addressing a critical safety concern.

The Bottom Line

Maintaining clean air filters isn't just about prolonging your HVAC system's life; it's about fostering a healthier, more comfortable home. With a few simple habits—regular filter checks, timely replacements, and annual professional tune-ups—you can breathe easy knowing your system is in peak condition.

MarkeTech 2025

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GROW Nebraska® is thrilled to announce the return of MarkeTech, Nebraska's premier marketing and business building conference, on March 25-26, 2025, at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney. This action-packed day-and-a-half conference promises to equip attendees with cutting-edge strategies, actionable insights, and unparalleled networking opportunities.

Keynote Speaker: Chelsea Peitz (Arizona) Chelsea Peitz, was a featured speaker at the 2024 Social Media Market World Conference, an accomplished social sales coach, and nationally acclaimed keynote speaker, who will headline this year's event. Known for her expertise in humanizing brands through innovative social media strategies, Chelsea will inspire attendees to elevate their marketing game. A published author and industry leader, she's helped countless businesses connect authentically with their audiences in the digital age.

Featured Speakers You Can't Miss:

- **Nesha Brown (Louisiana):** Founder of Elevate Strategies, Nesha is a digital marketing powerhouse specializing in community engagement and small business growth. Her dynamic presentations empower entrepreneurs to leverage online tools effectively.
- **Adam Di Frisco (Illinois):** With years of experience in e-commerce and digital transformation, Adam has guided brands to optimize their online presence and drive revenue growth. His insights into the future of digital retail are not to be missed.
- **Sara Lohse (Texas):** A content marketing guru, Sara excels at simplifying complex marketing concepts into actionable steps. Her expertise in storytelling and brand strategy will inspire you to rethink how you communicate with your audience.
- **Christine Weeks (Nebraska):** As CEO of a successful advertising agency, Christine brings a wealth of experience in creative strategies that drive impactful campaigns. Her local insights and proven methods make



her a standout speaker for Nebraska businesses.

Why You Should Attend: MarkeTech 2025 is the ultimate event for business owners, marketers, entrepreneurs, and technology enthusiasts eager to stay ahead of the curve. You'll:

- Learn from top industry leaders with proven expertise.
- Discover actionable strategies to boost your business and brand.
- Network with like-minded professionals and potential collaborators.
- Explore cutting-edge tools and services in the exhibitor space.

This year's conference promises to deliver an energetic and engaging experience designed to help you unlock your full potential. Whether you're seeking inspiration, education, or connection, MarkeTech 2025 is where it all comes together.

Special Offer for Nebraska Rural Electric Magazine Readers! Save \$40.00 on registration or an exhibitor booth by using the code **TICKET25** for individual tickets or **BOOTH25** for exhibitor booths. Don't miss this chance to attend at a discounted rate and maximize your business's potential!

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GENERATOR Safety

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Safety first with 811

By Larry Oetken



Every excavation site tells a story, but some of these tales can turn into cautionary ones if safety isn't taken seriously. For professional excavators such as construction workers and contractors, ensuring safety is not just a box to check; it's a commitment that protects lives, property, and communities. Beneath the surface of every project lies a complex web of utility lines—electric, water, gas, and telecommunications. Striking these unseen lifelines can lead to costly delays, expensive repairs, community-wide service disruptions, and, most critically, serious injury or even death.

Fortunately, there's a simple step to avoid these risks: contacting 811. This free service acts as your first line

of defense against the hazards of digging. With one call or online request, 811 will notify the relevant utility companies to mark underground lines at your site, usually within just a few days. The process is straightforward, and the markings—a mix of flags and paint—follow a universal color code for easy identification: red for electric, orange for communications, blue for potable water, green for sewer and drainage, yellow for gas and petroleum, purple for reclaimed water, and white for the proposed excavation site.

In the end, excavation safety is about more than just avoiding accidents. It's about safeguarding your team, your project, and the community you serve. Make the call, follow the guidelines, and let's rewrite those cautionary tales into stories of success and safety.

Larry Oetken is the Director of Job Training & Safety for the Nebraska Rural Electric Association.

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Room Number 1404

Committees:

Banking, Commerce & Insurance
Judiciary



District 2 471-2613

Robert Clements, Elmwood

Room Number 1004

Committees:

Chair, Appropriations
Nebraska Retirement Systems



District 3 471-2627

Victor Rountree, Bellevue

Room Number 1000

Committees:

General Affairs
Judiciary
Urban Affairs



District 4 471-2621

R. Brad von Gillern, Elkhorn

Room Number 1116

Committees:

Chair, Revenue
Banking, Commerce & Insurance



District 5 471-2710

Margo Juarez, Omaha

Room Number 1528

Committees:

Education
Natural Resources
Nebraska Retirement Systems



District 6 471-2714

Machaela Cavanaugh, Omaha

Room Number 1115

Committees:

Appropriations



District 7 471-2721

Dunixi Guereca, Omaha

Room Number 1523

Committees:

Government, Military & Veterans
Affairs
Transportation & Telecommunications



District 8 471-2722

Megan Hunt, Omaha

Room Number 2107

Committees:

Education; Government, Military &
Veterans Affairs



District 9 471-2723

John Cavanaugh, Omaha

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Committees:
General Affairs
Government, Military & Veterans Affairs
Urban Affairs



District 10 471-2718

Wendy DeBoer, Bennington

Room Number 1114
Committees:
Judiciary
Transportation & Telecommunications
Rules



District 11 471-2612

Terrell McKinney, Omaha

Room Number 1212
Committees:
Chair, Urban Affairs
Business & Labor
Judiciary



District 12 471-2623

Merv Riepe, Ralston

Room Number 1015
Committees:
Banking, Commerce & Insurance
Health & Human Services



District 13 471-2727

Ashlei Spivey, Omaha

Room Number 1120
Committees:
Appropriations



District 14 471-2730

John Arch, La Vista

Room Number 2103
Speaker
Committees:
Executive Board of the Legislative
Council; Rules



District 15 471-2625

Dave Wordekemper, Fremont

Room Number 1110
Committees:
Banking, Commerce & Insurance;
Government, Military & Veterans
Affairs



District 16 471-2728

Ben Hansen, Blair

Room Number 2108
Committees:
Chair, Executive Board of the Legislative
Council; Agriculture; Business & Labor,
Health & Human Services; Rules



District 17 471-2716

Glen Meyer, Pender

Room Number 1309
Committees:
Education
Health & Human Services



District 18 471-2618

Christy Armendariz, Omaha

Room Number 1423
Committees:
Appropriations



District 19 471-2929

Robert Dover, Norfolk

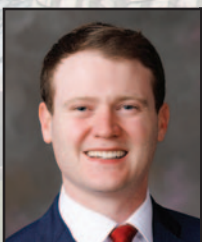
Room Number 2011
Committees:
Appropriations



District 20 471-2622

John Fredrickson, Omaha

Room Number 2015
Committees:
Health & Human Services
Transportation & Telecommunications



District 21 471-2673

Beau Ballard, Lincoln

Room Number 1101
Committees:
Chair, Nebraska Retirement Systems;
Health & Human Services
Transportation & Telecommunications



District 22 471-2715

Mike Moser, Columbus

Room Number 1202
Committees:
Chair, Transportation &
Telecommunications
Natural Resources



District 23 471-2719

Jared Storm, David City

Room Number 1124
Committees:
Agriculture
General Affairs
Judiciary



District 24 471-2756

Jana Hughes, Seward

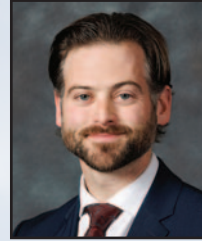
Room Number 1319
Committees:
Education
Natural Resources



District 25 471-2731

Carolyn Bosn, Lincoln

Room Number 1103
Committees:
Chair, Judiciary
Transportation & Telecommunications



District 26 471-2610

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Room Number 1016
Committees:
Banking, Commerce & Insurance
Revenue



District 27 471-2632

Jason Prokop, Lincoln

Room Number 1118
Committees:
Appropriations



District 28 471-2633

Jane Raybould, Lincoln

Room Number 10th Floor
Committees:
Agriculture
Business & Labor
Natural Resources



District 29 471-2734

Eliot Bostar, Lincoln

Room Number 1012
Committees:
Banking, Commerce & Insurance
Revenue
Rules



District 30 471-2620

Myron Dorn, Adams

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Committees:
Appropriations
Executive Board of the Legislative
Council



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Chair, Business and Labor
Agriculture
Revenue



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Transportation & Telecommunications



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Government, Military & Veterans
Affairs



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Committees:
Chair, Rules
Appropriations



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Dan Quick, Grand Island

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Health & Human Services
Urban Affairs



District 36 471-2642

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Committees:
Chair, General Affairs
Agriculture
Judiciary



District 37 471-2726

Stan Clouse, Kearney

Room Number 1206
Committees:
General Affairs
Urban Affairs
Natural Resources



District 38 471-2732

Dave Murman, Glenvil

Room Number 1107
Committees:
Chair, Education
Revenue



District 39 471-2885

Tony Sorrentino, Elkhorn

Room Number 1522
Committees:
Business & Labor
Nebraska Retirement Systems
Revenue; Urban Affairs



District 40 471-2801

Barry DeKay, Niobrara

Room Number 1022
Committees:
Chair, Agriculture
General Affairs
Natural Resources



District 41 471-2631

Daniel McKeon, Amherst

Room Number 1401
Committees:
Agriculture; Business & Labor;
Government, Military & Veterans
Affairs



District 42 471-2729

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Committees:
Chair, Banking, Commerce &
Insurance
Revenue



District 43 471-2628

Tanya Storer, Whitman

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Judiciary
Transportation & Telecommunications



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Agriculture
Business & Labor
Revenue; Rules



District 45 471-2615

Rita Sanders, Bellevue

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Veterans Affairs
Education



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Education
Natural Resources
Nebraska Retirement Systems



District 47 471-2616

Paul Strommen, Sidney

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Committees:
Appropriations



District 48 471-2802

Brian Hardin, Gering

Room Number 1402
Committees:
Chair, Health and Human Services
Banking, Commerce & Insurance
Nebraska Retirement Systems



District 49 471-2725

Bob Andersen, Omaha

Room Number 1021
Committees:
General Affairs
Urban Affairs
Government, Military & Veterans Affairs

Write to your State Senator

If you want to write your state senator during the 2025 session, please address correspondence to:

Senator (Last Name)
District # State Capitol
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Honoring a True Good Neighbor: Dave Behle

Every community has its unsung heroes—those who quietly dedicate their time, energy, and resources to making life better for others. The Good Neighbor Award was created to celebrate such individuals, recognizing their extraordinary contributions to their community, state, or beyond. Each year, the award shines a spotlight on those who go above and beyond in acts of service, life-saving efforts, disaster relief, and other remarkable demonstrations of humanitarianism. The 2024 Good Neighbor Award has been presented to a man whose impact is felt throughout Nebraska—Dave Behle.

Dave Behle, Key Accountants and Economic Development Specialist at Dawson Public Power District, embodies the spirit of this award through his relentless commitment to community growth, economic development, and fostering entrepreneurship. His efforts have touched countless lives, creating opportunities and strengthening the economic fabric of the state. Dave's work with the Nebraska Enterprise Fund is a shining example of his dedication. By facilitating a \$15 million USDA grant for loans supporting meat and poultry processing, Dave has played a crucial role in helping small businesses grow, launching new ventures, and enabling existing processors to expand their operations.

Beyond his professional role, Dave has an extraordinary talent for connecting people and resources. Whether linking customers to vital support or coaching young



Dawson PPD General Manager Gwen Kautz (left) and Nebraska Rural Electric Association General Manager Rick Nelson (right) present Dave Behle (center) with the 2024 Good Neighbor Award.

entrepreneurs, his influence is far-reaching. At the University of Nebraska Engler Program for entrepreneurship, Dave's mentorship is invaluable. As Brennan Costello, Chief Business Relations Officer of the program, noted, "Dave's dedication to fostering the growth of young entrepreneurs has been a significant positive impact on our program. He has generously volunteered his time as a judge, coach, and mentor, offering guidance and support to students. His willingness to share his expertise and network has been instrumental in helping students connect with Nebraska entrepreneurs."

Dave's contributions are as diverse as they are meaningful. He provides bio-security training for Dawson

PPD colleagues visiting animal agriculture sites, ensuring safety and awareness in an essential industry. Outside his professional commitments, Dave serves his community in myriad ways. He is an active member of his church, a dedicated supporter of Buffalo County 4-H, and a high school football official, demonstrating the same integrity and commitment on the field as he does in his other endeavors.

Family is very important to Dave and his wife Christie, who have four children and two grandchildren.

Behle's commitment to his community extends beyond his professional role, making him a role model and a worthy recipient of the Good Neighbor Award.

Shoveling snow might be a winter necessity, but it's also tough on your body. The effort can lead to cold stress, dehydration, injuries, or even heart attacks. That's where a snowblower comes in—it can make clearing driveways and sidewalks faster and far less strenuous. However, safety should always come first.

Gear Up for Safety

Before you start, make sure you're dressed for the job:

Eye protection: Safety glasses shield your eyes from flying debris.

Sturdy footwear: Insulated boots with rubber treads help prevent slips and keep your feet warm.

Stay Hands-Off

It's crucial to keep your hands well away from the snowblower's moving parts. Never try to clear a jam with your hands, no matter how small the obstruction may seem.

Keep a Steady Pace

Working at a brisk, consistent pace helps minimize the risk of snow sticking in the blower. Staying focused not only speeds up the process but also ensures you're aware of your surroundings and the machine's operation.

Fueling Done Right

Always add fuel to the snowblower when the engine is completely off. This prevents the risk of accidental fires or injuries.

What to Do If Your Snowblower Gets Clogged

Snow clogs happen, but clearing them safely is essential:

Turn it off: Power down the snowblower completely.

Disengage the clutch: This ensures the blades aren't in motion.

Wait five seconds: Give the impeller blades time to come to a full stop. Just because the machine is off doesn't mean it's safe to touch immediately.

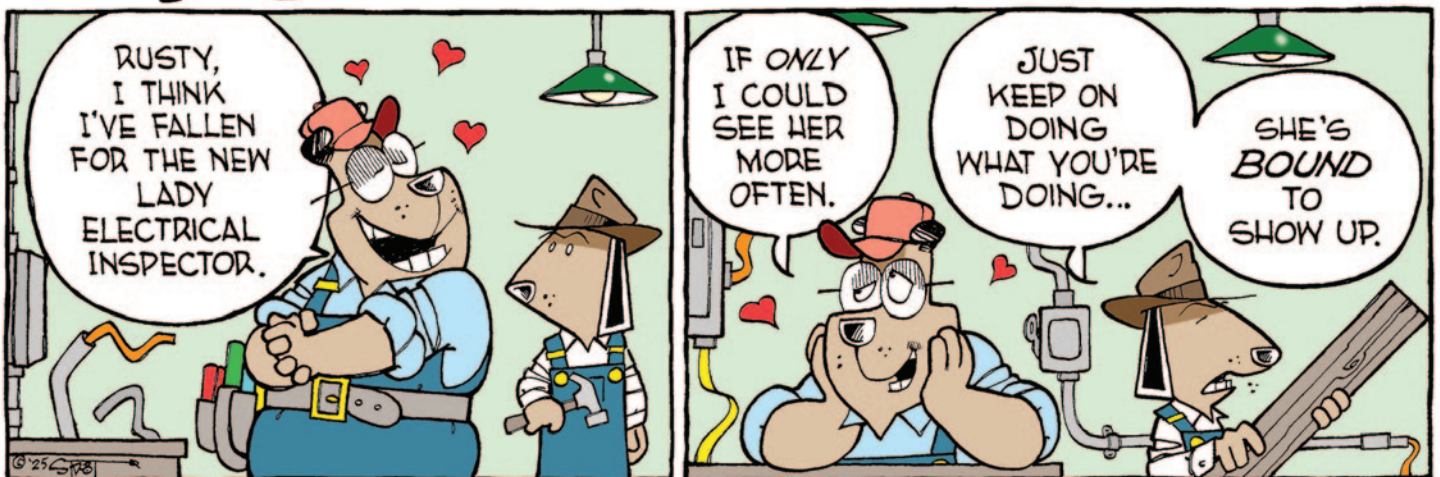
Use a stick or broom handle: Never, ever use your hands to clear a clog. Keep safety shields and devices in place for extra protection.

In Case of Injury

If an accident happens, seek medical attention right away. Quick action can make all the difference in preventing further damage.

A snowblower is a fantastic tool for winter maintenance, but like any machine, it requires caution and care. Follow these tips to clear your paths safely and enjoy the season with peace of mind.

Murphy



Maintaining a Reliable Electric Supply is No Easy Task

Reliable electric service to our homes and businesses is a luxury we often take for granted. Unfortunately, we may not think about how important a reliable energy supply is to us until we have to go without it, like during a severe storm. It is in these times that utility employees work tirelessly to restore electricity to your home or business.

Where does your electricity come from? Although some may answer “the light switch,” for Nebraska’s public power providers the answer is a complex system of transmission and distribution lines and a generation mix stemming from multiple resources.

Electricity travels from its point of generation through electrical lines at the speed of light into your home. As a result, when you flip that light switch the lights come on instantaneously. The state’s electric providers operate load control centers where they monitor electric demand and relay messages to power plants telling them to increase or decrease generation, to match consumer demand at any given moment.

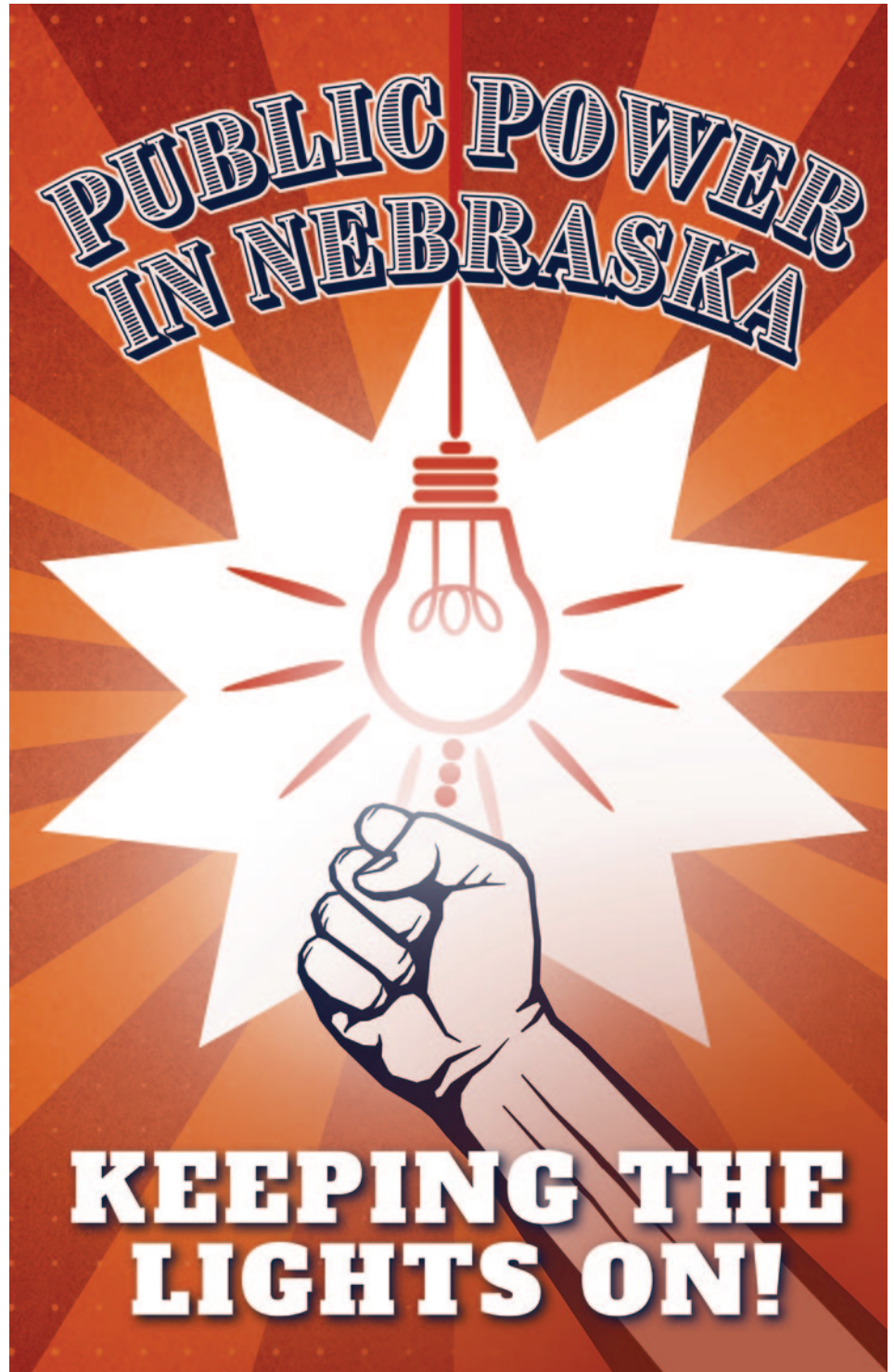
Currently, a technically feasible and economical means to store large amounts of electricity is not widely available. Battery storage capable of storing large amounts of electricity can be very costly. This means that in order for you to have power, a generator has to be running the moment you turn on your light switch.

This also means that reliable generation resources are necessary for reliable electric service.

Generation resources like, coal, nuclear, natural gas, or hydroelectric

power are baseload resources which run continuously and can be controlled to meet load demands. Variable resources like wind and solar, however, rely on environmental conditions which can be hard to reliably predict, especially in

Nebraska. As wind speeds vary or cloud cover changes, the electric output from these renewable generation resources can fluctuate dramatically and in an unpredictable manner. This complicates an already difficult load-balancing process.



When I was a little girl growing up, I remember my dad telling me that some nights were too cold to have a fire. That always seemed crazy to me, but like many other things he said, he was right.

A heat pump heated our home. We had an open fireplace that was more suited for ambiance than creating heat. When you have a fire, warm air rises and draws the smoke out through the chimney. This also draws the warm air out of the house. This invisible force is called the stack effect.

The impact is exacerbated in drafty homes. When the warm air escapes through the chimney, it is replaced by cool air leaking in through gaps and cracks in the home. The greater the difference between the indoor and outdoor temperatures, the greater the stack effect, hence Dad's rule of no fires on the coldest nights.

Wood fireplaces are not an efficient option to heat your home. Most of the heat goes out of the chimney. If you enjoy the comforting ambiance and curling up in front of the fireplace during the colder months, here are some tips to efficiently operate a fireplace in your home.

Because it is out of sight, it can be easy to forget to close the chimney damper. The damper should be open when you have a fire going or when any hot ashes are in the fireplace to ensure smoke and carbon monoxide don't come into your home. Once the fire and all ashes are fully extinguished, close the damper. Leaving the damper open allows warm air to escape, wasting energy. It's like leaving a window open when your heating system is turned on in the winter.

If your damper doesn't close properly or your chimney doesn't have one, purchase a product designed for the task. There are a variety of chimney plug sizes and styles available, including inflatable options designed to fit snugly in place. While you are at the hardware store, pick up some caulking and weatherstripping to seal air

leaks around windows, doors and pipes along exterior walls.

Fireplaces with gas logs are required to be installed with a mechanism that always keeps the damper open. This safety feature allows gases from the pilot light to escape. Glass doors can reduce the impact of air leakage in the winter and summer months. Consider installing

glass doors on open fireplaces and keep them closed to minimize drafts.

Sealed combustion gas fireplaces are fully enclosed systems that draw the air needed for combustion from the outside. When properly installed, you get the benefit of the warmth of the fire without the worry of heat loss from drafts. If you have gas logs and enjoy the ease of a gas fireplace, consider upgrading to a sealed combustion unit.

Turning the pilot light off in the summer can reduce wasted gas. If you plan to turn the pilot light off, follow the instructions in the owner's manual to avoid any potential safety issues. Woodstoves and pellet stoves are additional options that provide more heat than wood or gas fireplaces. Federal tax credits are available for high-efficiency biomass stoves. A

credit of 30% of the project cost—including the cost of installation up to a maximum of \$2,000—is available for products purchased and installed between Jan. 1, 2023, and Dec. 31, 2032. The unit must have a thermal efficiency rating of 75% or more. Visit www.energystar.gov for more information.

If you have a woodstove, fireplace or any fuel-burning appliance in your home, be sure to install and maintain smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can be harmful or even deadly if not detected.

Use my dad's sage advice and these tips to keep your home warm while gathering your loved ones around a glowing fire during the winter season.



High efficiency wood stoves can lower your heating costs and are eligible for federal tax credits.

Photograph by Miranda Boutelle, Pioneer Utility Resources

5 WAYS TO UPGRADE YOUR SLEEP AND IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

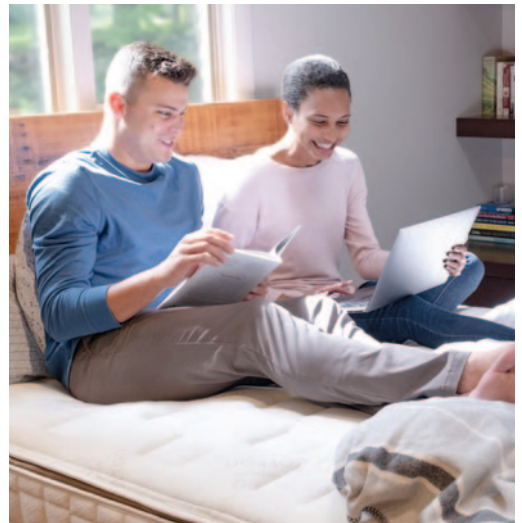
Good sleep isn't just about waking up feeling rested and ready for the day. Quality sleep, and plenty of it, is important for your overall health. While you sleep, your body naturally recharges itself, which puts you at lower risk for cardiovascular problems and chronic conditions like diabetes, as well as improving your immune system.

1 Reduce Light Exposure

Your body's natural circadian rhythms are closely aligned with light and dark. When your body senses light, it sends signals to your brain that it's time to be awake. Light also suppresses your body's production of melatonin, a hormone linked to sleep. Cutting back on bright lights and avoiding devices at least an hour before bed can tell your body it's time to wind down, and sleeping in a dark room promotes better rest.

2 Invest in the Right Mattress.

Your mattress plays a major role in your comfort through the night, so making sure it fits your needs is an important step toward getting better rest. Take control of your comfort with a quality mattress such as Naturepedic's EOS (Ergonomic Organic Sleep) mattress, which is handcrafted and made without polyurethane foam, formaldehyde, flame retardants or fiberglass. The breathable layers of certified organic cotton, wool and GOTS-approved latex ensure better temperature regulation while naturally contouring the body. An added feature is the ability to customize each side of the bed by opening the zippers and adjusting the layered components for the perfect comfort combination.



3 Find the Right Sheets

Sheets that are too stiff, scratchy or otherwise unpleasant make it nearly impossible to settle in for a good night's rest. Higher thread counts tend to be softer, higher quality sheets. However, you may need to experiment to find which material suits you best.

4 Set a Comfortable Temperature.

When you're too hot or cold, your mind tends to focus on those sensations rather than allowing you to slip into a slumber. Set your thermostat at a comfortable temperature, adding fans or adjusting the layers of bedding as necessary to achieve the perfect level of cozy comfort.

5 Use a Sound Machine.

If you're a light sleeper, noise can wreak havoc on your rest. Many people find sound machines offer two key benefits: They provide a soothing sound, such as rain or ocean waves, that allows you to relax and ease into slumber and constant background noise, so additional sounds are less disruptive.

HOMETOWN EATS

THE RAMBLER BAR & GRILL CRESTON, NEB.

Nestled on the main street of Creston, Nebraska—a cozy town with a population of just over 200—the Rambler Bar & Grill is the kind of place that captures the spirit of small-town hospitality while offering big-time flavors. Opened in May 2024 by Ethan and Angela Hathaway, the Rambler has quickly become a beloved gathering spot for locals and visitors alike.

Before it was the Rambler, the building was home to Alice's Cedar Inn, a fixture in Creston for 22 years. The Hathaways' decision to name their new venture the Rambler pays homage to the town's former high school mascot, a nod to community pride that resonates with their customers.

Angela Hathaway, the heart and soul of the Rambler, wears many hats. A former math teacher, she also ran a successful home-based bakery business before venturing into the restaurant world. Today, she manages the restaurant alongside a team of 12 employees, all while baking and selling her signature cookies. Her husband, Ethan, continues to work as a teacher in Leigh, Nebraska, balancing his day job with supporting the family business.

The Rambler Bar & Grill's menu is as diverse as its clientele, drawing diners from the surrounding towns. While there's something for everyone, a few items stand out as customer favorites. The Alaskan Pollock and Prime Rib are must-tries, while the hamburgers and fried chicken have earned their own loyal followings. "People love the fried chicken," Angela said.

But it's not just the food that keeps people coming back. The Rambler hosts a variety of holiday-themed events throughout the year, from a kid-friendly Halloween celebration to a festive "Christmas in Creston" fundraiser event. During the summer months, the beer garden



becomes a hot spot for relaxing evenings, and the restaurant's party room is a popular venue for birthdays, anniversaries, and other celebrations.

"We definitely bring in people from Creston as well as a lot of the local towns," she said. "We cater to the community around us. We try to keep a wide variety on our menu just to try to reach a lot of different people."

With its welcoming atmosphere, delicious food, and commitment to the community, The Rambler Bar & Grill is more than just a restaurant; it's a testament to the spirit of small-town living. Whether you're stopping by for a hearty meal, a festive event, or simply a taste of Creston's hospitality, The Rambler promises an experience that will keep you coming back for more.



Roasted Cauliflower and Potato Spinach Salad

- 1 small head cauliflower, cut into florets
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 2 teaspoons Italian seasoning, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, divided
- 1 pound fingerling potatoes, quartered
- 1 package (8 ounces) Fresh Express French Blue Cheese Salad Kit

Heat oven to 425 F.

In large bowl, toss cauliflower florets with 2 tablespoons olive oil. Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning and 1/4 teaspoon salt; mix well. Arrange in single layer on sheet pan.

Bake cauliflower 30-40 minutes, tossing once halfway through, until tender and lightly charred. Cool.

In bowl, toss potatoes with remaining olive oil. Sprinkle with remaining Italian seasoning and salt; mix well. Arrange in single layer on sheet pan.

Bake potatoes 20 minutes until tender and lightly browned. Cool.

Place greens from salad kit in large bowl; add roasted vegetables. Drizzle with dressing from salad kit; mix well. Top with croutons and blue cheese from salad kit.

Reader Submitted Recipes

Chocolate Pudding Cake

- 2 cups mini marshmallows
- 1 cup chopped walnuts
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup cocoa
- 2 cups hot water
- 1 package devil's food cake

In bottom of greased 9" X 13" pan, sprinkle marshmallows and walnuts. In a medium bowl, combine sugar, cocoa and hot water. Pour carefully over marshmallows and walnuts. Prepare cake mix as directed on box. Then gently spoon batter over mixture in pan. Bake 40 minutes in 350-degree oven or till toothpick comes out clean. The cake top will not be smooth. Cut into squares and serve warm, spooning pudding mixture from bottom of the pan over cake.

Bonnie Swendener, Mullen, Nebraska

Crockpot Spicy Ham & Beans, Jalapeno Cornbread and Honey Butter

Ham & Beans:

- 1 bag pinto beans, soaked in baking soda water overnight and rinsed
- 1 ham shank or package of ham hocks
- 1 chopped onion
- 1 chopped garlic clove
- 2 cans Rotel Fire Roasted Tomatoes and Green Chilies

Place all ingredients in crockpot and cover with water. Cook on low until meat comes off the bones. (I cook on low all day.)


Jalapeno Cornbread and Honey Butter:

- 1/4 cup flour
- 3/4 cup corn meal
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup milk or buttermilk
- 1/4 cup peanut or vegetable oil
- 1 egg
- 1 – 2 chopped and seeded jalapeno peppers

- 1 cup softened butter
- 1/2 cup honey



Mix dry ingredients. Add milk, oil and egg. Add jalapeno peppers. Mix till blended. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Bake in greased pan for 20 to 25 minutes. Mix softened butter and honey together until well blended. Serve cornbread warm, topped with honey butter.

Wendy Childers, Gurley, Nebraska



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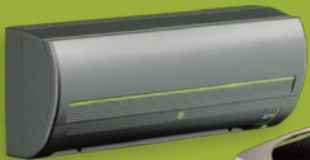


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