

August 2015 EnergyWiseSM Tip: Summer Peaks

Why does your electric bill seem to shoot up during the summer? Most people blame air-conditioning as the culprit. While it is true for average homeowner that cooling consumes the largest portion of energy during hot months, there is another reason why you have to reach deeper into your pocket to pay summer electric bills.

To support extra-high electricity usage on very hot days, your electric utility often requires supplemental electricity from additional generating facilities known as “peaker plants.” These plants, which usually do not operate 97 percent to 99 percent of the year, can be switched on quickly to satisfy peak power demand, experienced when homes and businesses are using air conditioning in addition to their regular electrical use. For most utilities in the U.S., these peak periods occur weekdays, between 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Unfortunately, electricity from peaker plants is more expensive than from traditional generation resources. Estimates show that 10 percent to 20 percent of the overall annual cost of providing electricity comes from supplying electrical demand during the 100 most-expensive hours of the year. In Nebraska these “peaks” usually occur during the summer; therefore, most Nebraska utilities bill their customers using a summer rate (June through September) and a winter rate (October through May). Summer rates are often designed 25 percent to 35 percent higher than winter rates to cover additional peaking power costs.

Is there anything you can do to reduce the impact of summer electrical use on your wallet? Absolutely, there is! The wholesale purchase price your utility must pay for the electricity you use is significantly impacted by what time of day you are using it. If it is during the peak period, your utility will pay more for additional energy resources needed. But if you can reduce your usage during these peaks or shift your usage to another time of day, your utility will pay less. Here are easy ways for you to help your electric utility and reduce your “peak” energy use:

- Your microwave uses about two-thirds less energy than your stove. Better yet, grill outside.
- Your dishwasher uses less water and energy than washing dishes by hand. Use the air-dry setting on your dishwasher to save even more.
- Fill your refrigerator. Filling your fridge with lots of food and beverages will keep it from warming up quickly when the door is open – causing it to run for a long time after the door is closed.
- Set your thermostat to 78°F when you are home and 85°F or off when you are away. Using ceiling or room fans allows you to set the thermostat higher because air movement will make the room feel cooler.
- Do your laundry by using the cold water setting on your washer. Line-dry clothes whenever you can.
- When you need to use the clothes dryer, run full loads, use the moisture-sensing setting, and clean the lint trap after each use.
- Unplug electronic devices and chargers when they are not in use. Turn computers and printers off at the power strip.
- Unplug and recycle that spare refrigerator in the garage if you do not really need it.

- Replace air conditioner filters. Dirty filters restrict airflow and can cause the system to run longer.
- Install and use window shading to reduce heat gain inside.
- Install patio covers, awnings, and solar window screens to shade your home.

Your local utility and Nebraska Public Power District want to help you make the most of your energy dollar this summer while keeping you cool. For more ideas on how you can make your home or business EnergyWiseSM, along with possible energy efficiency financial incentives, contact your local utility or visit www.nppd.com.