



United Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

United Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Guest Column



Surge protection 101

By Kristy Smith
 Marketing & Communications Supervisor

COULD you make it through your day without using a single electronic device or appliance? Not only have we come to rely on all sorts of devices for work, but also for every day living, so it's more vital than ever to protect them from power surges.

A power surge is an unexpected increase in voltage that can occur from a variety of sources. Regardless of the cause, power surges can damage electronic devices and equipment in your home.

Causes

One of the most common causes of a power surge is lightning. When it strikes an electric system, like United's distribution system, the excess current must be channeled somewhere. Lightning arrestors and various other pieces of equipment are placed on our system to do just that: form a path to ground to limit and drain excess current. This equipment works much like a pressure relief valve on a water heater. Homes do not typically have lightning arrestors, so your best bet is to unplug all unused devices and electronics during severe thunderstorms.

Another common cause of power surges is electrical overload. This happens when devices or appliances are plugged into an outlet that can't handle the required amount of current or when multiple devices are plugged into one outlet with an extension cord. Faulty wiring in a home can also cause power surges. Damaged or exposed wires can cause spikes in current, creating a potentially dangerous situation. If you notice signs of faulty wiring, such as visible burns on outlets, buzzing sounds from outlets, or frequently tripped circuit breakers, your home may be due for electrical wiring repairs and updates. It's time to call a qualified electrician to evaluate your home's circuits and electrical needs.

Surges can also occur after a power
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Rustic Views

The joy of dirty hands

By Glenn Schuckers

I THINK this month, June, marks the time of miracles. We have planted seeds and plants, and they should be up and growing by now. We have planted with hope and faith that our work will be rewarded with new growth. Now is the time to start caring for what we have planted.

I have made some adjustments to the soil in the lawn, dwarf orchard and corn field, as was recommended by the Penn State lab where I sent soil samples. I had a pleasant surprise when I looked at the results of the samples, especially owing to the price of things like fertilizer. Luckily, I had enough of everything the soil needed left from last year and did not have to buy anything. That is just another example of the value of getting soil samples.

I also learned when our landscaper rebuilt the lawn a few years ago that it had been destroyed by a weed called ground ivy, or “creeping Charlie,” which had taken over and killed most of the grass. He took a number of samples from where we planned to plant new grass and came back with the recommendations. The samples went to the Penn State lab in State College and showed some pretty severe deficiencies. I was not too surprised, knowing that the area where we had the lawns had been stripmined some 30 years before. And even though they had backfilled it with topsoil, the area had been a construction site while we built the house. Not only was the pH out of



balance, but the soil also needed minerals like magnesium, calcium and potash to sustain healthy grass.

That taught me that for a few dollars, I could save a lot by only using the minerals the soil needed. In past years, I had relied on the trusty 10-10-10 formula around everything. It sometimes worked, but in the past, I learned that a calcium deficiency had caused blossom end rot in tomatoes and brown spotting under the skin of some apples. So now instead of dumping on adjustments and tasting the soil to see if it is sweet or sour, I rely on the results of the tests from Penn State.

That is something that was done in

May. It took about a week to get the results back, which meant I had a week to get the recommended nutrients on the ground before I started to plow, but with what seemed like weeks of rain, that had to wait. As it always does, the ground eventually did dry out enough to plow and plant, and all the vegetables are in and growing.

But back to beginnings.

I had two spots where fruit trees had to be replaced. One is a corner where I had planted an old-fashioned apple tree: a Cox’s orange pippin, which died the first year after I planted it. I may not have been as careful with the planting as I needed to be, or the roots



Glenn Schuckers, a longtime member of United Electric, operated Schuckers’ Orchard in Luthersburg until the mid-1990s. He is a retired high school teacher and a contributing writer for *The Courier Express*.

We are pleased to have Glenn provide our *Penn Lines* readers with his take on rural life.



SMALL BLESSINGS: These are two trees the “boys” and I planted five years ago. They’re bigger now, and we harvested four apples last summer. It’s not much of an “orchard,” but the trees are good to have around and we like the fruit.

may have been damaged in transit. The leaves turned green, but by mid-summer, they turned brown and the tree died. I gave it a year to come back, as trees sometimes do if there is life in the roots, but by last summer, it was clear it was dead.

I ordered a new apple tree, a “macoun,” which is a type of Macintosh we used to have in the orchard. I had to wait a few months until the nursery had the trees in stock, but by last January, they had it. They also had a peach tree called “contender,” which is supposed to be hardy in our climate. It is in leaf now, but by this time next year, I’ll know if it really is a contender for our winters.

Experience has taught me that planting “bare-root” trees is the best way to go. Dad always bought trees like that and would bury the roots, or “heel in” the roots, to keep them moist until the day we would plant them. Of course, he usually bought them by the hundred or so — nothing like the dozen I ordered five years ago. Nonetheless, those trees always seem to do better than the ones that come in a burlap-wrapped ball.

The trick, which I learned from dad about 60 years ago, is to make sure there are no air pockets anywhere around the roots. Air will dry out the

roots, and they will soon die because no live roots equal no growing trees. It takes a little time to push soil down into the hole and make sure all the roots are covered, and it is not a job for anyone who wants to see his or her hands stay clean. If my hands are clean when I am done planting a tree, I know it has not been planted correctly.

So this is the month for dirty hands, but there is something about soil/dirt in the cracks and crevices of hands that is a badge of distinction among farmers and gardeners alike. I have often wondered how the people who run governments and businesses can do it with clean hands. Thomas Jefferson once said that he was never as happy as when he was planting a tree or a garden. There is something about making that connection with nature that is important to our soul. We know nature is there, all around us, but unless we “shake hands” with the Earth once in awhile, we can miss that connection.

So this is the month, I’ll be able to “shake hands” with nature. I have missed that connection for some seven months now. But just like making a connection with an old friend, once I get my hands deep in the dirt and soil under my fingernails, I’ll know that the cycle has begun again. Like that handshake with an old friend, working in the soil and planting something I have hope and faith will grow is an affirmation that nature still works its miracle. ❁

Surge protection 101

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outage. Sometimes, when electricity is being restored and reconnected, there may be a quick spike in voltage. In this case, follow the same advice given for surges caused by lightning: Unplug sensitive electronics and only plug them back in after power is fully restored.

Mitigation

Aside from unplugging devices when you suspect a power surge, there are a couple of other precautions you can take to protect electronics in your home.

Point-of-use surge protection devices, like power strips, can protect electronics during most surges. Not all power strips include surge protection, so read the packaging carefully before you buy and don’t overload the power strip with too many devices. You can also install specialized electrical outlets that offer additional surge protection. Talk to a trusted electrician to learn more.

Another option is a whole-home surge protector. These suppressors, which are usually connected to your home’s service panel or installed behind the meter, have features like notification capabilities, which indicate when a device has been impacted by a surge. They may also come with warranties guaranteeing a certain amount of coverage. Whole-home surge protector prices vary based on the home’s location, and they should always be installed by a qualified individual. United Electric offers whole-home surge protection that is installed behind the meter by our metering technician.

Occasional power surges are inevitable, and nothing offers 100% protection, 100% of the time. But you can help your wallet by unplugging devices when you think a surge may occur and/or using additional levels of protection to better safeguard sensitive electronics and devices. Call us for more information and to get the “surging” details. ❁

Do the “Electric Shift” to save

THE SUMMER heat drives the cost our members pay for electricity throughout the next year.

United’s wholesale power bill — and ultimately, your electric bill — is determined for the year based on the five highest-use periods throughout the summer. The amount of electricity being used by our members during these five peak periods will set the generation capacity we are required to purchase for the next year.

Simply put, we have to buy the generation capacity needed during these peak periods for the entire year, even though it is only needed during several unusually hot days in the summer. That is why United Electric is again asking that you do the “Electric Shift” to help us hold down the cost of electricity.

Peaks will occur on weekdays between noon and 7 p.m. on the hottest days of summer, June through September. It is crucial for United Electric and our members that we lower demand levels during the five peak periods. Since it is impossible to predict exactly when these peaks will occur, we may need to ask you to reduce or “shift” electric consumption several days each month — and quite possibly several days in a row — when we experience a heat wave.

There is not an energy shortage. Our request is specifically to reduce demand cost, which would otherwise result in higher electric bills to you. By reducing consumption during peak periods from noon to 7 p.m., United Electric hopes to maintain stable electric rates, both now and into the future. This can only be accomplished with voluntary help from you, our members.

You can help control our power costs by shifting your use of non-essential appliances to the evening hours on the days when you hear an “**Electric Shift**” announcement on local radio stations. We are asking you to shift the use of such items as stoves/

ovens, pool pumps, dehumidifiers, extra lighting, clothes dryers, air conditioners and any other non-essential appliances during these periods.

We urge you to please help in any

way you can. Feel free to call the United Electric office at 888-581-8969 for answers to any questions you may have, and thank you in advance for doing the “Electric Shift” to help us curb your electric costs. ❁

**United Electric’s office will be closed
Independence Day, Monday, July 4.**

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