

## Technology Alone Isn't the Answer



**MESSAGE FROM MANAGER ALAN LESLEY**

**G**rowing demand, environmental costs and regulatory issues add up to make an adequate, affordable future supply of electricity uncertain.

Alternative sources of power have been held out as the greatest hope for U.S. energy independence. Renewable energy is a key part of a plan promoted by politicians and others who want to cut down on fossil fuel use in electricity production.

That's a commendable ideal, and while sources that harness the sun, wind or water to generate power are relatively nonpolluting, they are no perfect solution, and we shouldn't count on them too heavily in the near term.

Some of the issues with these sources are already known, and some are beginning to crop up as the technologies become more widely used.

Take wind, for example. Installation of wind power is growing rapidly, especially in West Texas. Wind is an ideal solution, many believe, because it is "free" to use and doesn't cause pollution.

However, wind turbines must be located in places where the wind blows constantly, and in Texas, those places are largely away from densely populated areas. So an expensive network of transmission lines must be built to carry that power to

where it is needed in urban centers. The cost of building those lines will be borne by ratepayers like you.

In addition, the wind is not always steady, meaning that when it doesn't blow with sufficient force, power production at wind farms is nonexistent. This makes wind unsuitable for baseline power, the constant flow of electricity on which we all count.

That's where solar power could come in, at least in daylight. But on cloudy days, power production drops dramatically. To get around that, companies are building plants in the often-cloudless desert—both photovoltaic arrays, which convert sunlight directly into electricity, and solar-thermal

plants, which turn the sun's heat into steam used to drive turbines.

Those plants are clean, yet they have another drawback: They need lots of water to run. A recent article in *The New York Times* detailed a conflict in Nevada between a developer who wants to build two large solar farms, which would need hundreds of millions of gallons of water a year for cooling, about 20 percent of what's available in the area, and local residents who worry that their wells will go dry.

The lack of available water is similarly throttling plans for other water-intensive renewable facilities like biofuel and clean-coal plants, a hurdle that was not evident in planning processes.

This goes to show that while new technologies are important to solving our energy problems, we can't count on innovation alone. We've got a long way to go before some of these technologies can fill the majority of our power needs. That's why it's important that, right now, we all embrace conservation and efficiency.

Be conservative in your use of electricity. Cut back where you can, especially the simple things, like turning off lights when you leave a room or making sure you have a full load before using dish or clothes washers. If you have the means, make an investment in weatherizing your home. With tax credits and other incentives, not to mention lower electricity bills, such investments will pay for themselves.

As always, your cooperative stands ready to help you with advice and ideas on how to make the wisest use of electricity.



**Alternative energy sources such as wind and solar are likely to help fill energy needs in the future, but conserving today is one of the best things you can do to help solve our energy problems.**

AT COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

# Conservation Matters

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



## Wise Investments in Energy Efficiency

The economic uncertainty we're facing these days has many of us putting money into something with which we feel comfortable: our homes. Making a few upgrades around the house generally pays big dividends. And when boosting energy efficiency is one of them, the decision becomes a no-brainer.

For any energy-efficiency work made at your residence during the coming year, Uncle Sam will foot 30 percent of the bill—not a bad deal! Through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—better known as the stimulus bill—the Internal Revenue Service offers a personal tax credit of up to \$1,500 for energy-efficiency improvements made to existing homes during 2009 and 2010.

The credit covers 30 percent of the cost of adding insulation materials and exterior doors, windows and roofs designed to help reduce a home's heat loss or gain. It also includes efficient central air conditioners, air-source heat pumps, hot water boilers and biomass stoves.

For weatherization-related work, the credit covers only the cost of materials. With heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, as well as biomass stoves, installation costs also count toward the credit.

So how does the math work out? Say you spend \$1,000 on new insulation. You would get, in the form of a tax credit, \$300 off your tax bill. If you spend \$3,000 to purchase a new HVAC system and have it installed, you'd have a \$900 tax credit to show for it.

To take advantage of the program, a home improvement must have taken place after February 17, 2009 (the day the stimulus bill was signed into law), and products must meet specific energy-efficiency criteria. A few rules of thumb will help you determine those criteria.

For exterior windows and skylights, rely on the Energy



**If you've added insulation to your home or made other energy-efficient improvements, you may be eligible for a tax credit.**

Star label. For other efficiency upgrades, request what's called a "Manufacturer Certification Statement" that the product or component qualifies for the tax credit. Many manufacturers post these on their websites, but be sure to verify that the product does qualify before making a purchase. You can also visit [www.irs.gov/recovery](http://www.irs.gov/recovery) to review guidelines for eligible purchases.

Energy tax credits reduce taxes owed dollar for dollar and can be carried forward to following years. While they can help boost any refund you receive, you won't receive a check directly for the credit amount. You can file for energy tax credits using IRS Form 5695, with a total maximum value of \$1,500 for improvements made in 2009 and 2010.

# S.O.S. Program Builds Leaders of Tomorrow



It was another great year for the John Ben Shepperd System of Service (S.O.S.) Program. The S.O.S. Program is a joint effort between Comanche Electric Cooperative and The University of Texas of the Permian Basin. The program provides a structured venue in which to prepare students to be strong leaders in the future and help them face the challenges of a new millennium. The setting and program content encourages students to learn the basic elements of leadership, including the value of the individual and group process. Both educational and interactive, the program provides an opportunity for students to learn skills that will assist them in working with others while



utilizing a system designed to promote action within their local community, whether it be town, neighborhood or school.

In September, Comanche Electric Cooperative sent out invitations to all 25 schools within our service district, asking them to send their top leaders from their junior classes.

Eight schools responded, and 69 students attended the one-day leadership training. High schools represented were: Bangs, Comanche, Cross Plains, De Leon, Early, Eastland, Gorman and Sidney.



The program model teaches practical information and skills to students with leadership potential. It is interactive, entertaining and educational. The experiences, skills and techniques of successful business, political and civic leaders are combined with the ambition and idealism of students for a sound System Of Service.

Students with diverse backgrounds are not only introduced to current and future leaders, but are also given a networking opportunity with students of similar backgrounds.

Comanche Electric Cooperative looks forward to watching these talented students as they become leaders in their schools and communities.



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## COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

*wishes you peace, health  
and joy in 2010 and always.*