



Serving members in Baldwin, Emanuel, Glascock, Hancock, Jefferson, Johnson, Laurens, Warren, Washington and Wilkinson counties

Be ready for storm season

Preparedness is the best defense

Spring is on our doorstep, and like many of you, I'm looking forward to more opportunities to be outdoors and enjoying warmer weather. Springtime brings many of my favorite activities like cooking out with family and friends, working in the garden and simply slowing down a bit to enjoy life.

Unfortunately, spring and summer can also create the perfect conditions for severe storms.

Washington EMC crews are always prepared and standing by to respond should power outages occur in our area. When severe storms cause power disruptions, our line crews take all necessary precautions before they get to work on any downed lines.

I also encourage you to practice safety and preparedness to protect your family during storms and outages.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends the following items as a starting point for storm and disaster preparedness:

- Stock your pantry with a three-

day supply of nonperishable food, including canned goods, energy bars, peanut butter, powdered milk, instant coffee, water and other essentials (e.g., diapers and toiletries).

- Confirm that you have adequate sanitation and hygiene supplies, including towelettes, soap and hand sanitizer.
- Ensure your first-aid kit is stocked with pain relievers, bandages and other medical essentials, and make sure your prescriptions are current.
- Set aside basic household items you will need, including flashlights, batteries, a manual can opener and a portable, battery-powered radio or TV.
- Organize emergency supplies so they are easily accessible in one location.

In the event of a prolonged power outage, turn off major appliances, TVs, computers and other sensitive electronics. This will help avert damage from potential power surges and will also help prevent overloading circuits during power restoration. That said, do leave one light on so you will know when power is restored.

If you plan to use a portable generator, make sure it's rated to handle the amount of power you will need, and always review the manufactur-



Wendy Sellers
President/CEO

er's instructions to operate it safely. Also, be sure to set up and run your generator in a well-ventilated area outside the home.

Listen to local news or use a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio for storm and emergency information, and check, like and follow Washington EMC's Facebook page for updates. Other great sources include the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) and Homeland Security (HS) website and Facebook page, as well as online pages for your local county GEMA/HS office and law enforcement offices.

Severe storms can occasionally bring down power lines. If you see a downed line, always assume it's ener-

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Congratulations! Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication to this co-op. You are the reason we succeed.

Taco Casserole

Ingredients

- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil or canola oil, divided
- 1 cup diced onion, divided
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic, divided
- 1/2 cup diced bell peppers, optional
- 1-1/2 cups rice
- 2 tablespoons taco seasoning mix, divided
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 3 cups broth or water
- 1 pound ground beef or ground turkey
- 1 10-ounce can Rotel tomatoes or diced tomatoes
- 4 cups tortilla chips, broken
- 1 16-ounce can chili beans, drained
- 3 to 4 cups grated cheese (cheddar, Monterey Jack or pepper jack)

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
In a medium saucepan, heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium-low heat. Add 1/2 cup onions, 1 teaspoon garlic and bell peppers (if using). Cook for 2-3 minutes or until onions are translucent.
Add rice, 1 tablespoon taco seasoning, salt and pepper to saucepan, stirring to coat. Pour broth over rice. Bring rice to a boil, then lower heat to gently simmer for 15-20 minutes.



While rice is cooking, heat remaining oil in a skillet. Add remaining onions and garlic to skillet and cook over medium-low heat for 1-2 minutes.

Add ground meat to skillet, breaking it up with a wooden spoon. Add remaining taco seasoning and salt and pepper. Cook until meat is cooked through. Drain and discard excess grease. Add tomatoes to skillet and cook to heat through.

To assemble, sprinkle broken chips in the bottom of a 9x13-inch casserole dish. Spread cooked rice over tortilla chips, then layer with beans, followed by meat mixture and ending with cheese.

Place in oven for 10-15 minutes or until cheese is melted. Serve with whatever taco toppings you like, such as salsa, sour cream, scallions and cilantro. *Serves 8.*

Be aware of potential energy scams

By Jennah Denney

Electric cooperatives across the country are urging members to stay alert as utility-related scams continue to evolve. Fraudsters are becoming more aggressive and more convincing by using impersonation, false urgency and digital deception to extract payments or personal information from unsuspecting individuals.

Reports of scam calls, fake energy rebate offers and phony disconnection threats have increased in recent months. These schemes often begin with a phone call, text or visit from someone claiming to represent the local electric provider. The tactics vary, but the goal is always the same: to pressure the member into acting quickly before they have time to verify the request.

Some scammers demand immediate payment, threatening that your service will be shut off within minutes. Others offer too-good-to-be-true incentives like rebates, energy audits or free equipment installations—if the member provides banking information or pays an upfront fee. In many cases, scammers can even manipulate caller ID to appear as though the call is coming from a trusted utility number.

If something doesn't feel right, hang up, close the message or refuse entry. Call your cooperative directly using the number listed on your monthly bill or on the official website.



Scammers are becoming more aggressive and convincing, using impersonation, false urgency and digital deception to extract payments or personal information from unsuspecting individuals.

Washington EMC wants members to know they will never call and demand immediate payment. They will never ask for banking or account information over the phone, nor will they pressure a member to act without the opportunity to verify the situation. If someone claiming to be from our cooperative insists on urgency or payment through nontraditional means, that's a red flag.

These scams can arrive in the form of emails, text messages or QR Codes designed to look like real payment portals. Typically, the links redirect to fraudulent websites that steal sensitive data. The scammers may also encourage members to pay through untraceable



If you suspect you've been targeted by a scammer, hang up. Call your cooperative directly using the number listed on your monthly bill or on the official website.

methods like prepaid debit cards, mobile apps or cryptocurrency—methods legitimate utilities never use.

One concerning trend involves scammers visiting homes unannounced, posing as utility workers conducting inspections or installations. Unless someone offers proper identification or has confirmed an appointment, these visits should always be treated with caution.

Education and awareness remain two of the most powerful tools in this fight. Members are encouraged to talk with family, friends and neighbors about the warning signs of scams. Sharing information helps others stay safe and contributes to a stronger, more connected community.

If something doesn't feel right, hang up, close the message or refuse entry. Call your cooperative directly using the number listed on your monthly bill or on the official website. Member service professionals are available to assist.

Electric cooperatives were built on trust, service and community. By working together and looking out for one another, members and cooperatives alike can help expose fraud for what it is, and ensure that scammers are left in the dark.

Jennah Denney writes about consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape.

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ENERGY EFFICIENCY
TIP OF THE MONTH

As spring arrives, take advantage of milder temperatures to save energy at home. Open windows on pleasant days to bring in fresh air instead of running your HVAC system. It's also a great time to replace dirty air filters, which helps your system run more efficiently and improves indoor air quality. As daylight increases, turn off unnecessary lights and rely on natural sunlight when possible. Small seasonal adjustments like these can reduce energy use, lower monthly bills and help keep your home comfortable as winter transitions into spring.



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gized and never approach it. If flooding occurs, never walk through areas where power lines could be submerged.

Advance planning for severe storms or other emergencies can reduce stress and anxiety caused by the weather event and lessen the impact of the storm's effects.

Sign up for NOAA emergency alerts and warnings and follow us on www.facebook.com/WashingtonEMC for the latest updates. If you experience an outage, please don't report it on Facebook.

Call our outage reporting number at (800) 552-2577. This is the fastest way to let us know if your power is out.

I hope we don't experience severe storms over the spring and summer months, but we can never predict Mother Nature's plans. At Washington EMC, we recommend you make a plan today, because storm preparedness is always our best defense.

For additional FEMA information and resources, visit www.ready.gov.