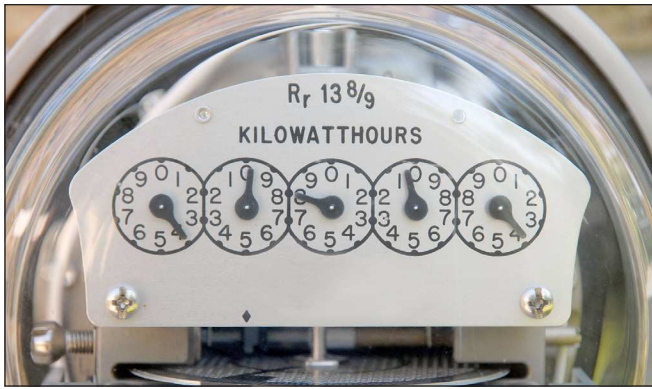


GROW Home, Garden & Outdoors

Save money by spreading energy use throughout the day

Voluntary OTEC program rewards those who use less capacity

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle



If you can keep from using a lot of electricity at once, you might be able to save money through a new alternate pilot program offered by the Oregon Trail Electric Co-op.

OTEC is conducting a volunteer study to determine whether charging customers based on the capacity of energy used, rather than just the total amount, will influence energy usage, General Manager Werner Buehler said.

The program charges a lower base monthly rate and about half as much for each kilowatt-hour used with an additional capacity fee based on how many kilowatts were needed during the highest 15 minutes of usage during the billing period. If people can spread their energy usage throughout the day to minimize the amount needed at any given time, they would be rewarded with a lower bill.

Buehler compared energy capacity to that of a vehicle engine: People pay a premium for an engine with the capacity to quickly accelerate up to 80 mph when passing, even though most of the time at 65 mph that capacity is not used. Similarly, he said, it costs an electricity company more to supply a high capacity to you — and your neighbor and the rest of the block during peak hours — because of increased infrastructure costs.

By not running, for example, an air conditioner, a dishwasher and an electric dryer at the same time, customers can reduce their needed capacity, which reduces the capacity needed to energize the rest of the block and the need for expensive, new transmission lines. This program provides an incentive for users to reduce their capacity with a lower electricity bill.

“With this voluntary pilot program, there will be an opportunity — other than saving kilowatt-hours — to separate demand for capacity into an optional rate schedule, giving members an opportunity to identify and shift their use of capacity and potentially save money on their electric bill,” he said.

The program will not be a great fit for all households, however, so OTEC will work with customers to analyze their last 12 months of energy usage and model how the alternate program would affect their bill, he said. Knowing they are being charged for capacity, customers can modify their electricity usage to save more.

“We want them to be successful,” Buehler said.

The program requires a 12-month commitment from

customers and must be initiated in 2016. Only 100 customers will be allowed to participate in the study, and about half of the slots are already filled.

For more information about the program or to check whether it might be a good fit for your household, contact the local OTEC office, 541-575-0161, 400 Patterson Bridge Road, John Day.

Hardscaping can be easy

Blue Mountain Eagle

achieve your outdoor vision.

that you’re complying with local bylaws.

Hardscaping doesn’t have to be hard at all. In fact, with a little creativity and sweat equity, hardscaping can be an enjoyable experience that adds serious style points to your home’s outdoor areas.

So what is hardscaping? It involves all of the design elements on your property that aren’t plants, grass or flowers. This sector of your landscaping strategy includes retaining walls, fire pits, decks, fences, paved walkways and sculptures.

Many hardscaping-specific specialty stores and contractors have popped up in recent years, as the practice has become big business. And because so many projects involve factors that can affect yard slope, water drainage and electrical add-ons, it may be your best bet to hire an accredited professional to help safely and compliantly

Do It Yourself

If you’re feeling handy and confident in handling certain projects, you can certainly save some money in your budget by doing the work yourself. If you do decide to go the DIY route, there are some things to remember as you prepare.

Research is key. Watch tutorials, talk with trained professionals, ask your hardware specialist — feeling comfortable scouting out a project will help you cover your bases before you jump in.

Also, check with your municipality to see if you need a permit and to ensure

Cater to the Space

Do you live in a country setting with ample space for outdoor additions? Or is your living situation more suburban with a limited yard? Either option can be greatly enhanced with strategically added touches.

Outdoor kitchens, family rooms, barbecue areas, fire pits and greenhouses can all be awe-inspiring additions, if space allows. Smaller quarters may require only a stone walkway or outdoor sitting area to spruce things up.

Analyze your space to make an educated decision on your hardscaping plans.

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