GENERAL MANAGER

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The Difference Between Conservation and Efficiency

THE TERMS ENERGY conservation and energy efficiency are often used interchangeably, but they have distinct definitions. I like how the U.S. Energy Information Administration differentiates the two based on behavior and technology.

Energy conservation is a behavior—using less energy. To achieve it, consumers have to change their habits: Turn off lights, unplug appliances or opt to use a clothesline instead of a clothes dryer. Conserving energy often means sacrificing something.

While there's great merit in adopting habits that conserve energy, we also have the option to use less energy without having to give up comfort or convenience.

That brings me to the definition of energy efficiency: applying technology to use less energy while getting the same result or service.

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Technological advances allow us to automatically perform some actions we used to have to do manually. Because newer appliances are able to do the same tasks with less energy, energy efficiency doesn't necessarily mean going without.

An LED is considered energy efficient because it uses less electricity to produce the same amount of light as an incandescent bulb. In the same way, Energy Star-rated products are intended to deliver the performance consumers expect while using less energy. Take today's Energy Star-rated refrigerators, for example. They keep food cool with about half as much energy as older models.

Ultimately, energy efficiency may result in energy conservation—or using less energy.

Smart electricity usage is important to Karnes Electric Cooperative because it's beneficial to you, our consumer-members.

For one, using less electricity saves you money on your electric bill simply because you consume less. But it also benefits the co-op as a whole because wholesale power costs fluctuate depending on the time of use.

You see, the cost of power increases during peak hours—typically from 3 to 8 p.m. during the summer. This is energy conservation in action: If members try their best to use less power during those hours, the cooperative's total wholesale power cost decreases. Those savings are passed along to you.

In addition, those in the electricity industry, including KEC, are trying to find ways to reduce consumption in case of potential electric generation shortfalls in the future. Maintaining energy-conscious habits and adopting energy-efficient technologies now will help us use electricity more wisely down the road.

I encourage you to apply the principles of energy conservation and energy efficiency together. Just because you install an LED in the light fixture on your front porch doesn't mean you should leave it on 24/7. And even if you have an Energy Star-rated clothes dryer, be a good steward and think twice about running it half-full or during those peak hours.

By combining energy-efficient technology with conservation-minded behavior, you can save electricity and money. ■