



Meet the Energy Coach You Can Do Better Than 'Average'

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Members are always asking us here at the Co-op about various issues of electric usage or energy usage generally. Often the member will say that he or she wishes to be "efficient" and do the right thing. That's commendable, but what is "the right thing" to do when it comes to "efficiency"? There are some universals, and some conservation fixes that must be tailored to your house, your needs, and your life.

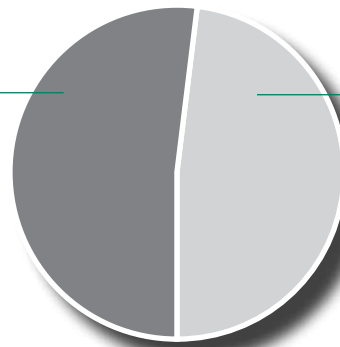
From an engineering perspective "efficiency" is about the energy used to perform a task (or "work"), compared to the gross energy input. So one can think of efficiency as the gross-to-net ratio. And today there's a lot of information about "efficient" appliances – for example, those with the "ENERGY STAR®" label, which use less energy than "standard" appliances or equipment.

However, it makes no sense to have efficient equipment if the human beings using that equipment don't use it correctly. So the Co-op advises that members begin to learn about their role and responsibility for energy use. Because remember, the equipment is just equipment; you're the one with the brains.

Another aspect of helping members understand their role in all energy use is to help them gain an appreciation of the volume of energy being used,

Median Usage of Co-op Households

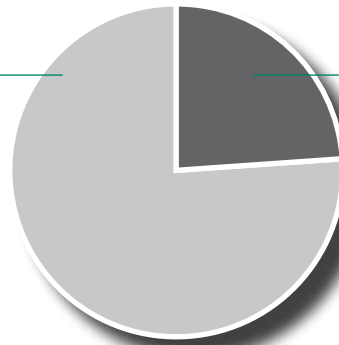
Percentage of all Co-op households with an average usage of less than 15 kWh/day (52%)



Percentage of all Co-op households with an average usage of more than 15 kWh/day (48%)

Distribution of 2005 Residential Energy Usage

Percentage (76%) of 2005 energy consumption by 52% of membership with an average usage of more than 15kWh/day



Percentage (24%) of 2005 energy consumption by 48% of membership with an average usage of less than 15kWh/day

especially as compared to the "average." It's not a difficult calculation, but it's critical to know how you and your household compare in the great big universe of energy consumption.

As an example, the average kilowatt-hour (kWh) consumption for residential households in Vermont is around 19 kWh per day (nearly 7,000 kWh/year). The question you should

be asking is "What's my number?" because you need to understand where on the consumption spectrum you now are in order to gauge where you need to go.

The Energy Coach has had members, who upon hearing this and realizing that their electric usage was "about average" then state, "Oh, we're using an average amount of electricity!"

No problem!"

This is exactly the opposite reaction that an "efficient" consumer should have.

In this context being "average" is "bad," and being above average is "more bad." Maybe "above average" is okay Lake Wobegon, but not here. In today's global energy situation we need to assess where our personal energy use goes and then make changes to lower our use, cost, emissions, and carbon footprint.

The rule the Energy Coach uses is: "reduce the use; make your own." While it's possible today to make some or all of the electricity a household uses, that's not the first thing one needs to do. First order of business is to skinny down on your household electric consumption, to a place where your daily average is significantly less than "the average." You've got an easy way to do this: you can find your average (kWh/day) by looking at your Co-op bill.

Once your average is down in the area of 10 kWh/day or less, then if you're so inclined (and the Energy Coach hopes you are) you should consider making some or all of the power you use.

For members already using single digits of electricity per day, that's something the Co-op applauds and encourages. The Energy Coach, as they say, "tips his cap." And it's really the starting point for the next step: "making your own." Vermont allows member self-generation of electricity under its net-metering law. You can find out more about it by going to our website, www.washingtonelectric.coop.

In the big picture, the Co-op's power consumption, for all of its 10,000 members, can be seen in the graphs to the right. The first graph shows that our membership is nearly evenly divided between those who consume more than 15 kWh per day, and those who consume less than that amount (the graphs are based on residential usage, as our Co-op membership is about 97 percent residential).

The second graph shows that the approximately one-half of the residential members consuming 15 kWh/day or more, use about 76 percent of all the energy the Co-op provides. The half whose usage is less than the median of about 15 kWh/day use only a fourth (25 percent) of all the energy the Co-op provides.

When it comes to looking for the

households where there's clearly room for improvement, we look first at those using more than 15 kWh/day. (Remember what the bank robber Willie Sutton said: he robbed banks because "that's where the money is.")

If you've gone to look at your latest bill, you know where you stand. You're either "average," "above average," or "below average." Knowing is the first step.

At Washington Electric Co-op we encourage everyone to think about efficiency. Even if you're on the low end of power consumption you may still find places to reduce, and it can be fun to watch your usage decline on your WEC bill each month. Give us a call and we'll see what we can work out.

But if you're "average" or above, the Energy Coach would particularly love to hear from you. You may qualify for the incentives included in WEC's Pledge program for energy-usage reductions. Whether you do or not, energy savings in today's world provide their own rewards.

Get in the game! Call the Energy Coach at 223-5245 (or 1-800-WEC-5245), extension 329.