



“THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY REMAIN THE SAME”

PART II

In the years to come, we may all make reference to the summer of 2011.

As I am writing this article, we are experiencing what will probably be one of the hottest summers ever recorded for our state. Think about those words, *ever recorded*. Well, thank goodness for September and October.

I am answering dozens of calls each day from folks who have received high utility bills or have house problems related to the excessive heat. Most of those calls are about the same as the ones that I have received in summers past. I know for a fact that the local electric co-ops also receive plenty of similar calls. I decided to ask the member services representative of each co-op to provide a list of the energy usage questions that were most often asked by their members. I received those lists and they all contained really good questions. The reason that these questions are so often asked is because there is no one simple or obvious answer. Since these questions are asked so often, let's use the next few articles to answer them.

QUESTION: Should the thermostat be adjusted when leaving the house? If I had a dollar for every

time that I have been asked this same question, I could buy my wife a nice new fishing rig for her birthday. It was mentioned that this question was often asked to settle an argument between a husband and wife. My wife and I stopped at our favorite snow cone trailer last week for some cool refreshments. The lady at the window said that she had just finished reading my August column about the radio program. I told her thank you and that I had just started writing the September column, which would be about playing with the thermostat. She leaned back, turned to her husband, and told him to come to the window and listen to what I had to say. Well the answer is YES, NO, or MAYBE. Aren't you glad that you read this column?

The real answer depends on several factors, such as the outside temperature, the energy efficiency of the house and how long you will be away. *Remember that the more energy efficient the house, the less that you even need to think about adjusting the thermostat.* If your house is energy efficient with low utility bills, you can't save much, if any, by playing with the thermostat.

For the average house, I think that we would all agree that it won't make much difference either way if the out-

door temperature is mild. But let's take a look at hot summer days. If you raise the thermostat setting from 75 to 85 degrees, everything in the house will try to change to 85 degrees – the walls, the carpet, the furniture, even the dishes in the cabinet, everything. And when you adjust the thermostat back to 75 degrees, the air conditioning unit will have to re-cool everything in the house back to 75 degrees, which might require more energy than if you had just left the thermostat alone. If you are going to be gone for several days, it is probably okay to make that change. However, it is usually not necessary to adjust the thermostat if you are going to be gone only a day or so, unless your house is very energy inefficient.

In the cold winter, the same advice applies. And also be aware that some heat pumps are wired where the heat strips will come on if you raise the thermostat setting a few degrees. Having the heat strips come on may increase your utility bill. Generally speaking, it is not usually necessary to adjust the thermostat setting if the house is energy efficient. I hope that encourages us all to make our houses more efficient. As always, call me if you have questions. See you when the leaves are pretty. •

Doug Rye, a licensed architect living in Saline County and the popular host of the “Home Remedies” radio show, works as a consultant for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas to promote energy efficiency to cooperative members statewide. To order Doug’s video or ask energy efficiency-related questions, call Doug at 1-501-653-7931. More energy-efficiency tips, as well as Doug’s columns, can also be found at www.smartenergytips.org.