Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative

POWER LINES

MARCH 2026

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STAY SAFE AS WE SPRING FORWARD

Message from the President

With the arrival of spring, there are some specific things to look out for regarding electric safety. Remember, you cannot see, smell, or hear electricity, so it is important to take these precautions seriously.

CALL BEFORE YOU DIG: Spring is prime time for landscaping projects around the home. Remember to contact JULIE at 811 or call 800-892-0123 at least three business days before you dig to any depth so underground utilities can be properly located at no charge to you.

PUT SAFETY FIRST IN THE FIELD: As you head into the fields to plant, always make sure to keep a 10-foot clearance between your equipment and power lines. Take time to study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and inform your workers about them. Plan your route between fields and on public roads so that you avoid low-hanging power lines; never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. When moving large equipment or high loads near a power line, always use a spotter to help make sure that contact is not made with a line. If equipment comes into contact with a power line, assume the line is energized. The operator should NOT get off the machinery unless there is fire. If the operator touches the ground and the equipment at the same time, he will become a channel for electricity. Instead, contact us or 911 immediately, so electricity can be shut off safely before exiting.

STAY AWAY FROM DOWNED LINES: Spring weather can bring storms and lead to downed power lines. Assume any wire lying on the ground is carrying electricity and stay away from it. If you spot a downed wire, immediately call us. Keep others from getting near the downed wire until help arrives. Never attempt to drive over a downed power line.

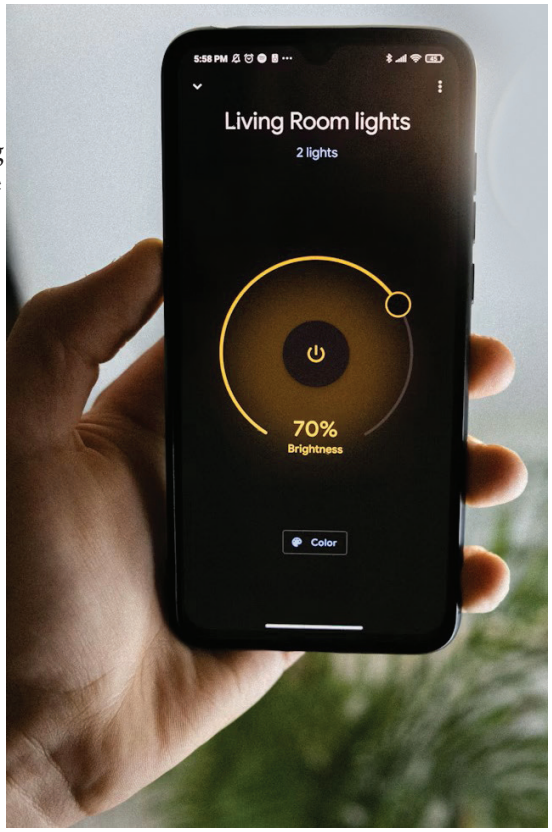
BE AWARE OF DEVELOPING STORMS: Spring storms will be here soon, so it is important to be aware of weather forecasts and watch for developing thunderstorms. Eastern Illini is focused on staying prepared. The storms we can experience this time of year often bring high winds, heavy rain, and lightning, which may cause power outages. We are continuously monitoring weather patterns, maintaining our infrastructure, and readying our crews to respond quickly should any storm affect our area. As always, we remain committed to restoring power to your homes and businesses as safely and quickly as possible.

Thank you for being a member of Eastern Illini. We are ready for whatever spring brings and are here for you, no matter the weather. And as we "spring forward" for daylight saving time, stay safe and remember to take advantage of the longer days ahead!

Cooperatively,

Bradley W. Smith

SMART HOME UPGRADES TO CONSIDER IN 2026



In 2026, smart home upgrades are not just about cool gadgets, they're one of the most practical ways to lower utility bills and make your home more comfortable. Consider choosing a handful of smart home upgrades that actually lower your monthly costs, qualify for home energy tax credits, and make life easier day to day.

Inflation has made the cost of heating, cooling, and powering a home feel a lot heavier than it did a few years ago. The right smart home upgrades help you control those recurring costs instead of just reacting to them. Devices that automatically reduce wasted energy, catch leaks early, or extend the life of major appliances put money back in your pocket month after month.

Before you start shopping, it helps to think in categories: temperature control, plug and lighting control, water protection, and whole-home monitoring. Then you can decide which smart home devices will give you the biggest return.

A smart thermostat is still one of the best smart home devices for long-term savings. Modern models like the newest Nest, Ecobee, and smart thermostats from major HVAC brands all support 2025–2026 standards like Matter, making them easier to integrate into an existing system.

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that homeowners can save around 10% per year on heating and cooling by using programmable thermostats correctly. Recent studies highlighted by the DOE show that combining automatic scheduling with occupancy sensors often pushes those savings even higher for busy households.

Over a few years, that kind of smart home ROI can easily cover the cost of the device and then some. When you compare smart home upgrades in this category, look for models that:

- Works with your existing HVAC system and any rebate programs
- Include room sensors so you're heating and cooling the spaces you actually use
- Support open standards like Matter so they'll still integrate with future hubs
- Offer energy reports you can actually read and act on

Not every high-value upgrade is a big investment. Smart plugs and power strips remain low-cost upgrades that help you tame "phantom load" power use—electricity consumed by devices that are technically "off" but still drawing current.

In 2026, many smart plugs can report real-time energy use and integrate with automation rules like "turn everything off when we leave" or "shut down the home office at 8 p.m." For items such as space heaters or window A/C units, look for smart load controllers that can manage higher amperage safely and provide more detailed data.

Used strategically, these small devices support larger energy efficient home upgrades. You can see which electronics are quietly adding $15–$30 a month to your bill and decide whether to automate them or replace them entirely.

Smart lighting remains popular for mood and convenience, but it also has real financial value when you combine LEDs, sensors, and automation. Platforms like Philips Hue, LIFX, and newer Matter-compatible bulbs let you group lights by room and create schedules so you're not lighting empty spaces.

If cost is a concern, start with high-use areas: kitchen, living room, and exterior lights that stay on for security. Add motion sensors to avoid lights staying on all night.

Water damage is one of the most expensive household risks, and it's exactly where smart home upgrades can quietly save thousands. Battery-powered leak sensors placed near water heaters and washing machines will alert your phone as soon as they detect moisture, giving you time to act. More advanced systems monitor water pressure and flow for the entire home. Products in this category can automatically shut off the main water line when they detect a major leak and provide detailed use reports through an app.

When you're evaluating smart home upgrades for water protection, ask your insurer whether particular brands or certifications qualify for savings.

Some of the most powerful smart home upgrades are tied to broader electrification trends: heat pump HVAC systems, heat pump water heaters, induction cooktops, and home EV chargers. Many modern heat pumps include connected thermostats, remote diagnostics, and performance monitoring. These features don't just feel futuristic—they let you match energy use with off-peak pricing, stretching your dollar further.

With many products promising savings, it's easy to overspend. A simple way to prioritize smart home upgrades is to rank

them by three factors: payback period, risk them by three factors: payback period, risk reduction, and daily convenience.

Fast payback: Smart thermostats, advanced power strips, and water-saving sprinkler controllers often pay for themselves within a couple of years.

Risk reduction: Leak sensors, smart smoke/CO detectors, and security systems protect you from large, one-time expenses and may qualify for discounts.

Daily quality of life: Voice control, smart lighting scenes, and app-based control of blinds or garage doors make the house feel easier to live in—even if the financial payback is softer.

When you're comparing the best smart home devices, don't just look at features. Check whether they integrate with your existing hub, support standards like Matter, and have a track record of receiving software updates. Snart home ROI isn't just about one device paying for itself, it's about one device paying for itself, it's about how your upgrades work together. The smartest smart home upgrades in 2026 aren't necessarily the flashiest gadgets. They're the ones that quietly reduce your bills, protect your home, and make day-to-day life smoother. A thermostat that trims energy use, leak sensors that prevent flooding and ruined flooring, lighting that only turns on when needed, all add up to savings over time.

MATTER: *a unified, open-source connectivity standard that allows smart home devices from different brands to communicate securely and work together seamlessly.*

Start where the numbers make sense, use incentives to your advantage, and choose devices that fit into a long-term plan instead of impulse buys. Do that, and your smart home won't just be connected—it will be working as a real financial ally in an era of higher costs.

smart hub®

- View your bill
- Make a payment
- Compare usage by month
- Review known issues
- Report an outage
- Update account info

SIGN UP TODAY!

QUICK TIP

As spring arrives, take advantage of milder temperatures to save energy. Open windows on pleasant days. Replace dirty air filters. With more natural daylight, turn off unnecessary lights. Seasonal adjustments like these can reduce energy use and lower monthly bills.

CONTACT US

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DOWNED AND DANGEROUS

When a power line has gone down and is over or near your car, you should always assume the power line is still live or "energized." Even if you cannot see smoke, arcs, or sparks coming from the power line, it may still be energized.

Even downed lines that have low voltage, from 120 to 130 volts, still have enough amperage and enough voltage to give you a lot of trouble as any high voltage line could. The real danger occurs when you step out of your car, setting one foot onto the ground while the other remains in the vehicle, which causes you to complete a circuit and then get electrocuted or shocked.

In another instance, you might step out of your vehicle and start walking from the downed line to a safer distance. It is when you separate your legs while walking that you complete a circuit, causing you to be electrocuted or shocked. No doubt, this is a serious situation to find yourself in. Here's what you should do to keep from being killed when there is a downed power line over or near your car.

While this may seem like a no-win scenario, there are ways of protecting yourself, including the following steps below:

Remain in your vehicle until the utility or power company de-energizes the power line, and do not get out till the utility or power company says that it is safe to do so.

However, if smoke or fire become visible inside the car, and staying there is no longer an option, then cross your arms over your chest and make a clean jump out. Make sure you land using both of your feet together, but do not stumble, you could fall and get electrocuted. Bend your knees after jumping for better balance to avoid stumbling.

After successfully jumping, you need to use small, toe-to-heel steps without separating your legs or feet, moving thirty feet away from your vehicle before you can separate your feet. If you start feeling a tingling sensation in your feet while attempting to separate them, you may still be at risk, so walk another five feet to give yourself more clearance. Once you pass thirty-five feet, it should be safe for separating your feet, but avoid entering the energized zone and returning to your vehicle until the power is shut off.

Another option you have is bunny hopping with your legs and feet together, jumping using only small leaps, as leaping too far might result in you falling, seperating your legs and toes, and getting shocked. Again, clear at least thirty-five feet.

If you are a bystander, do not approach the scene to try and help. It is a normal reaction to try to help, but it may put you in harms way and at risk for electrocution. Stay at least fifty feet away and do not lean on anything or touch anything, because damaged poles and lines may still be energized and dangerous.

If you come upon a car accident involving downed power lines, never drive over them as that can pull more lines and related equipment down and exacerbate the situation.

In the state of Illinois, motorists strike more than 3,000 power poles per year. Your first instinct might be to get out and run when you see a downed power line, but doing so could cost you your life. It is best to stay as far away as possible from down power lines. Call 911 as soon as you can. Take precaution, so you don't become electricity's path to ground.

2026 Eastern Illini Empowering Education Grant Winners

Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative

EDUCATOR	SCHOOL	PROJECT
Ellen Vore	Armstrong Township High School	Food Science
Joseph Kroeck	Arthur Lovington Atwood Hammond HS	Strengthening our Rhythm through Percussion
Kym Bentley	Bement Elementary School	Bringing History to Life: Wax Museum Project
Stephanie Block	Bement Middle School	Efficient Electricity: It's a Snap!
Denise Burns	Cissna Park High School	Macbeth Mock Trial
David Payne	Clifton Central High School	Youth Fitness Development
Kimberly Onnen	Donovan Jr/Sr High School	100 Mile Club Running Program
Diane Anderson	East Central Christian School	Indoor PE Project
Tina Hausmann	East Prairie Middle School	Voices from the Prairie
Tara Roberts	Fisher Grade School	Beyond the Page: CKLA Interactive Learning
Jeremiah Benison	GCMS Elementary School	After School Esports Program
Lisa Brooks	Heritage High School	Swoop's General Store and Cafe
Kayden Gonzalez	Hoopeston Area High School	Orff Ensemble
Elizabeth Hart	Hoopeston Area High School	Marching Band Color Guard Equipment
Stephanie Tetrault	Iroquois West Upper Elementary	The Red & Blue Raider News Crew Upgrades
Rebekah Holt	Judith Giacoma Elementary	Hatching Chickens
Katie Flood	Mahomet Seymour Junior High	Sprouting Roots in Education
Tracy Patterson	Mahomet Seymour High School	Indoor Gardening
Cindy Cheney-Hunter	Mary Miller Junior High School	Hands on Electricity for Future Innovators
Sarah Atwood	Milford Grade School	Exploring Measurement
Cheryl Davis	Oakwood Grade School	Mohs Hardness Testing Kits
Bethany Frost	Oakwood Grade School	Language Arts Podcast
Samantha Greiff	Paxton Buckley Loda Jr. High	Small Group Differentiation
Bryce Herrin	Pine Crest Elementary	Hatching Curiosity
Amber Stivers-Anders	Pleasant Acres Elementary	KidLit Kitchen in the Library
Anthony Nowaczyk	Potomac Grade School	3-D Printing in the Classroom
Josey Schouweiler	Prairie Central Elementary	Social Emotional Learning Games
Sara Zittler	Prairieview-Ogden Junior High	Expanding Percussion
Delissa Graham	Rantoul Township High School	Field Trips
Marsha Hays	Ridgeview High School	Creative Writing Project
Carley Zimmerman	Ridgeview High School	Powering Education: Electrical Wiring Tool Kits
Linnea Nordstrom	Rossville-Alvin Grade School	Operation Set Creation
Chelsi Harrold	Salt Fork North Elementary	Chickstart: Hatching Science in the Classroom
Neal Buck	St. Anne Grade School	Introduction to Coding and Robotics
Julia Arron	St. Paul's Lutheran School	STEAM
Richard Knofsky	Tuscola Community High School	Industrial Arts Air Handling
Nicole Bagwell	Unity East Elementary	Science & Industry Museum: Coal Mine Exhibit
Melissa Marquart	Urbana High School	Powering Up Tech Theater
Haley Sappenfield	Villa Grove Elementary	Outdoor Exploration
Kimberly Moore	White Heath Elementary	Family Math Night

We value our schools and teachers, because their students are tomorrow's leaders, scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs and engineers. Each year, Eastern Illini awards up to $20,000 in grants to school districts in our service territory. We are pleased to award these grants to educators who inspire students and provide them with memorable learning experiences.

NOMINATING PETITIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR THE EIEC BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S ELECTION

Nominating petitions are available for the June 8, 2026 director election. Nominating petitions can be obtained by stopping by the Eastern Illini headquarters in Paxton between 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday - Friday.

Each member who desires to be elected to the EIEC Board of Directors must have a petition signed by not less than twenty-five members of the co-op. Petitions should be returned to EIEC by Thursday, April 9, 2026, at 4 p.m.

Directors in Directorate Districts 2, 5, and 9 will be elected at Eastern Illini's annual meeting in June. Incumbent directors Kevin Moore, Hoopeston, District 5; and Lauri Quick, Tolono, District 9, have indicated they will seek re-election. Eastern Illini is seeking nominations for District 2 which encompasses the northwest section of our service territory near the towns of Chatsworth, Cropsey, Fairbury, Forrest, Piper City, and Strawn.

Those who are interested in serving on the Board of Directors are encouraged to contact Gayle Ford at 217-379-0423 for more information.

On Friday, April 10, 2026, the Credentials Committee will meet at Eastern Illini's headquarters in Paxton to review the qualifications of all candidates who file nominating petitions. The Credentials Committee will determine the eligibility of the candidates to serve as an Eastern Illini director.

Members of the 2026 Credentials Committee are:

- Matthew Kaeb, Onarga, District 4
- Megan Deck, Hoopeston, District 5
- Carl Phillips, Rossville, District 6
- Douglas Vaughn, Gilman, District 4
- Tom Schlatter, Chatsworth, District 2

The nominating process is conducted in accordance with the following provisions of the EIEC Bylaws, Article III, Section 3.5: Nominations*: Any member of the Cooperative in good standing who desires to be elected to its Board of Directors may be nominated by petition signed by not less than twenty - five (25) members and filed with the Secretary/Treasurer of the Cooperative not less than sixty (60) days prior to the annual meeting of members.*

Nominations from the floor shall not be permitted. The Secretary/Treasurer of the Cooperative shall cause to be prepared and posted at the principal office of the Cooperative at least forty-five (45) days before the annual meeting, a list of the nominations for Directors thus filed with him or her.

A specimen ballot marked "Ballot for Directors" containing the names and addresses of all candidates listed in the order of priority determined by the date and time when the Cooperative received the respective completed candidate information shall be printed in or mailed with the notice of the meeting.

In the event that multiple candidates' completed information is received on the same date and at the same time for the same directorate district, the ballot order shall be determined by lot conducted by the EIEC Board of Directors.

The Secretary/Treasurer shall also have printed in or mailed with the said notice of the meeting or separately not less than seven (7) days prior to said annual meeting, a statement of the number of directors to be elected and the district from which they are to be elected.

If a particular directorate district does not have a contested election, that director can be elected by a voice vote as provided in Section 2.6 of Article II of the Bylaws. In such case, the name of the candidate for that specific directorate district shall not be required to be placed on the specimen and actual ballots.