

Transcript of Power Chat in the Electric Lounge
Season 2 – Episode 7 “Summer Survival Guide: Save Energy, Protect Your Home & Prepare for Florida's Storm Season”
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00:08 – 00:22

Narrator: Power Chat in the Electric Lounge is powered by SECO Energy, an electric distribution cooperative serving over 260,000 members across parts of seven Central Florida counties. For more information about us, visit [SECOenergy.com](https://secoenergy.com).

00:26 – 01:17

Curtis Wynn, SECO Energy Chief Executive Officer: Are you ready? That's what I needed. Hi, I'm SECO Energy CEO Curtis Wynn and your host. Welcome back to Power Chat in the Electric Lounge, the podcast where we have real conversations that help SECO Energy members get the most from their electric cooperative. Summer in Central Florida brings higher temperatures, increased air conditioning use, afternoon thunderstorms, and sometimes higher electric bills. Today we're sharing practical ways to manage energy costs, protect your home from power surges, and prepare for storm season. Joining me are Kim Walters. Kim is from Energy Solutions, Tralene Lucas, who is from our surge protection services division, and Rich Luke who is from member services and member experience.

01:18 – 01:44

Curtis Wynn: So let's jump in. Let's start with understanding why energy use and electric bills often increase during Florida's summer months. Now Kim, I'll start with you if you would just tell us why do electric bills typically increase during these Florida summers and even when the family behaviors don't change from what they were doing in the wintertime or what they were doing in the springtime.

01:45 – 02:07

Kim Walters, Energy Services Supervisor: Great question. So, our daily habits don't typically change. What does change is the temperatures outside. So, the temperatures outside are going to dictate how much our air conditioners are going to run or our heat's going to run in the winter. Typically, here though in summer our air conditioners are going to run a lot. So that temperature outside really does dictate how much that runs which is going to drive up that utility bill.

02:08 – 02:20

Curtis Wynn: Yeah. So, the air conditioning is usually operating during off summer months and temperatures 70° 80° and now when it gets to 90 90s consistently um it does work harder. Right.

02:21 – 02:45

Kim Walters: Absolutely. So typically, in the spring months your air conditioner is going to run collectively about 3 to 6 hours a day when you have a set point of about 78 degrees. Um you know, when we start to reach 90s and the upper 90s, our run time is going to go to about 10 to 12 hours a day on average. And some days we're going to hit 16 to 18 depending on the temperatures outside and depending on what you're setting your air conditioner at.

02:46 – 03:06

Curtis Wynn: Yeah, I checked the temperature this morning as I was leaving home around 7 o'clock this morning. It was already 87 degrees. So I get what you're saying. It's already hot. Now, when members call concerned about high usage, what does your team look at first when that call comes in?

03:07 – 03:45

Kim Walters: Right. So, I think it's important that members understand that there's not always an issue because you have increased usage. Um some think that even the meter is bad. That's not always the case. Um my team, we look at the facts of the account. So, we look at your historical usage at the home. We look over the last couple years and what your bill is. um or what your consumption was. Then we're also going to look at the meter data management. So our smart meters give us 15 minute interval data. So my team looks for patterns. We look at the usage in those 15 minutes and we can typically tell you what's running, you know, what's pulling that that power, especially during certain times of the day.

03:46 – 04:00

Curtis Wynn: Let's bring the rest of the panel in. Tralene, Rich, what are what are um what's one thing that you would say that our members should understand about this summer energy usage that happens that Kim was just describing?

04:01 – 04:21

Tralene Lucas, Surge Program Supervisor: Yeah, I think I definitely agree with Kim about the AC usage. I think that's important, but I think one of the most overlooked items

in the home is the hot water heater. It does run year-round, but you can make some changes to help impact your bill. Setting your temperature to 120 degrees, taking shorter showers, and even washing um your clothes in cold water when possible, can have an impact.

04:22 – 04:41

Rich Luke, Member Services Supervisor: I would say for members with a pool, take a look at your pool pump. You know, pool pumps can use a lot of power if it runs constantly. So, look at setting a timer or, you know, making the pool only run enough to clean the pool. That would help you reduce your bill by quite a bit.

04:42 – 05:03

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. So once we understand what's driving this energy use, energy consumption, now let's talk about some tools and programs that can help members manage it more effectively. Kim, going back to you, tell us about SECO's energy audits and the most common savings opportunities that you uncover when these audits occur.

05:04 – 06:42

Kim Walters: Right. So we do offer a program um we offer audits for our our membership. Um so typically we start with an audit over the phone. A lot of energy efficiency information is general um and is universal to everybody. My team looks at their historical usage. We first look at that just to see are we in line with what we've used in the past. We look at temperatures outside to see are we comparable to last year. then we also look again at their meter information. Um we will ask questions. We talk about just energy efficiency information in general, recommended settings. Um, we will look at their home online as well just to see um the size, square footage, so we have an idea of what they should be using. Um, if we determine that we need to do an in-person audit and that the member would benefit from that, we will schedule an appointment with a technician that comes out to the home. We start with looking at the building envelope. So, we look at things like sophets, windows, um your your um seals around doors. So, we will look at your major appliances such as your air conditioner. We'll check it to make sure that it's using power efficiently as what the manufacturer says it should. Um, our technicians will do a evaluation and give recommendations, low cost, no cost things, even up to major appliance upgrades. The member will get a personalized report at the end that gives them our findings and what our recommendations are. Our goal isn't to sell major appliances. It's to give members the information and the tools to where they can make informed decisions when needing to replace them.

06:43 – 06:57

Curtis Wynn: Now, that HVAC system uses a pretty significant percentage of the energy consumption in one's home. What are some warning signs that members should look for to make sure that, as you said that HVAC system is running efficiently?

06:58 – 07:35

Kim Walters: So, yes. So, the air conditioner is going to use about 50% of your consumption in the summer months. So, it is the largest user in your home. Um, and it will give you some signs before it typically just fails. One of the signs, the first signs is going to be, are you comfortable in your home? Does it feel humid? Do you notice that the unit is running longer? Those are all signs that you might want to have it checked out. Um, another one is going to be ice. Ice buildup on the outside unit or the inside unit is never good. Um, that's typically an indication that you are low on refrigerant, you could have restricted air flow, things like that. and that definitely needs to be looked at by a certified technician.

07:36 – 07:53

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. And Rich, many members use Smarthub. It's a very effective program that we put in place here, but not everyone has completed that home profile that is a part of SmartHub. What is that and why does it matter?

07:54 – 08:32

Rich Luke: So, the home profile is a great tool for our members. Um, so by entering their information about their home, their appliances, they're able to get a snapshot of what their predicted consumption should be. Also, when you're looking through that, it gives you details through your bill based on your consumption for that month. It tells you kind of where each appliance, your AC, fridge, you know, how much power did it use. So I think that's a tool that I would recommend any member to set up because it gives them an idea of where their power is being used and puts them in control of their consumption.

08:33 – 08:47

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. Now how do these home profiles usage alerts and the energy insights that are part of smart hub? How do they help members avoid what we all hate to see when we get our bill is that big surprise. So how does that happen?

08:48 – 09:22

Rich Luke: So, no one likes a surprise on their bill. By setting up your home energy profile and also setting up your high usage alert, um, we're able to let you know real time when you're having a problem. Like using Kim's example, when your AC starts to not function properly and it's not working efficiently, um, you'll get a high usage energy. It says it alert. It tells you; you know, you're expected a high bill this month based on your current consumption. So, in real time using those tools, members can make adjustments or have corrections or repairs done before it results in an unexpectedly high bill.

09:23 – 09:47

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. Every member has access to SmartHub and but unfortunately not every member has done that important step of completing that profile. So we can't reiterate enough how important that part is. That's smarthub. Let's talk about Smart Connect. Kim, back to you. um how does it help members manage energy use without sacrificing comfort?

09:48 – 10:53

Kim Walters: So yeah, so Smart Connect is a voluntary program that we offer our members that can partner with us to shift our peak um and try to control different items in the home. Um so we can achieve that. we have three programs. The first one being the smart thermostat program where we make small adjustments to a thermostat to the settings during an event. Um, and members can earn a monthly or a seasonal credit for that. The Second program is going to be our EV charging program where members with EV or electric vehicles um, agree to charge their vehicles between midnight and 6:00a.m. That's our super off-peak time for a utility. Um, and they will get a monthly incentive for that. The third program currently is our battery program. So, members with a battery system, um, where it's storing power will allow us to buy that stored power during an event. um and they will also receive monthly incentives. Smart Connect is a great program that gives members the power to partner with us and help us achieve our overall, you know, goal of shaving that peak and keeping our cost down, keeping our wholesale power cost down.

10:54 – 11:12

Curtis Wynn: So, Smart Hub is available to everyone, but Smart Connect is not. There are eligibility requirements for Smart Connect with regards to the thermostat, the EV charger, and the battery system. So Rich, could you tell us how one can determine if they're eligible for those programs?

11:13 – 11:38

Rich Luke: So, for our members that are looking to enroll in those devices and um see if they're eligible for Smart Connect, um I would recommend you go to our website SECOenergy.com under our energy solutions tab and then from there you can look at smart connect incentives. From there you can review the different incentives available. You can also review different devices and it gives you a list of supported devices that we're able to enroll in Smart Connect to help people save money.

11:39 – 11:47

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. So, Kim and Rich, if you could just summarize how smart hub and smart connect will help members take control of their energy costs.

11:48 – 12:14

Kim Walters: Yeah, I'll answer that one. So, a smart hub, it gives members the tools where they can see their usage, like Rich said, in real time. Used to you would get a month a bill at the end of the month that told you how much power you use. Now you have that information at your fingertips to help you have control over your consumption. Um as far as smart connect that gives you the opportunity to partner with us to keep our overall cost down. So it gives you gives you two ways of saving there.

12:15 – 12:25

Rich Luke: I agree with Kim. It's invaluable between smartub smart connect and all the other um applications that we have for our member to review their usage. It's a great way to help reduce and save.

12:26 – 12:50

Curtis Wynn: That's really what it's all about. So, here in Florida, the summer weather brings more than just heat. It also increases the risk of power surges that can damage valuable electronics and appliances within the home. So, Tralene, I'm looking to you. So, let's discuss how members can protect their homes. What damage can power surges and lightning cause inside the home?

12:51 – 13:22

Tralene Lucas: Yeah, definitely. So power surges and lightning cause more damage than people expect. Um so think of a power surge as a sudden spike in electrical voltage that rushes through the wires. When it does so, it damages um appliances and electronics. And even if it your appliance does survive that initial hit, it degrades the appliance over time just with the constant surges coming in. Um another thing that I think people don't think about is you don't have to be hit directly by lightning for damage

to happen. nearby lightning storms can send those surges through the power lines into the home.

13:23 – 13:28

Curtis Wynn: So many people assume that these surges only happen when we have storms, is that true?

13:29 – 13:45

Tralene Lucas: No, it's actually a common misconception. Um I would say the storms and lightning can create some of the biggest power surges. Um but we do see power surges created when there are car accidents involving our infrastructure, um animals that get into our substations, and also when trees bring down power lines.

13:46 – 14:00

Curtis Wynn: Um so as we often do when there are issues that like that, we try to have a program for that. So, we have a program for that, and it's called surge mitigator. And tell us how that protects the home's electronics and appliances.

14:01 – 14:21

Tralene Lucas: Yeah, for sure. First, I want to say we are celebrating 30 years of the surge mitigator program this year. So that's exciting. We have about 70,000 devices installed across our territory. Um but what we do is we install a meter-based surge protection device. We come out, pull the meter, plug the surge protection device in, and it's designed to stop transient high voltage surges before they enter the member's home.

14:22 – 14:28

Curtis Wynn: So, I want one of those. So, how can I get one, and what should I expect the installation process to look like?

14:29 – 14:45

Tralene Lucas: Yeah, so the installation process is easy. Our qualified installer comes to the home, they knock on the door. Um, they let the member know that you're going to be without power for less than 5 minutes. if you're not home, they will go ahead and proceed with the installation and they'll leave a note on the door to let you know that it's been done.

14:46 – 14:54

Curtis Wynn: How do I get it? What? So, can I purchase it, or do I have a chance to pay for it over time? So, how can I how can I get that?

14:55 – 15:09

Tralene Lucas: Yeah, so we have a couple of options. If you want to purchase, it's \$349 plus tax. That includes the installation. Um but there is a lease option and it's \$5.95 per month plus tax. There's a \$40 installation fee and a one-year agreement with that.

15:10 – 15:18

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. Wonderful. So, how does the surge mitigator program complement power strips? A lot of people have power strips throughout their home. So, how do those two work together?

15:19 – 15:59

Tralene Lucas: Yeah, we absolutely at SECO encourage a layered approach and that's exactly what that is. So, as I said earlier, our meter-based surge protection device, it stops high voltage surges before they enter the home, but low voltage surges are still generated and can get through. So that's where the surge strips or point of use devices come in handy. So, what I tell members is any appliance that you have plugged into a regular 120 volt outlet, if you want that protected, you need to plug it into a surge strip or point of use device. It helps with those low voltage surges and then also helps with internal surges that are created within the home. Every time one of the large motor-driven items cycles on or off throughout the home, it creates a surge internally.

16:00 – 16:24

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. Wonderful. Okay. Summer also means storm season here in Central Florida. Let's talk about how members can prepare before storm season ever gets here and before severe weather arrives and staying how can they stay informed when it does occur. So, what should they do before the storm and when that unfortunate situation of an outage occurs?

16:25 – 17:07

Rich Luke: Before storm season arrives, I encourage members to get their homes and their families together, prepare an emergency kit, um and you know, set up a communication plan and follow local updates from your local officials. Um as far as you know, knowing when or to research these outages, you could go to our SECO Energy Storm Center website. From there, you can get updates on estimated times of restoral.

you can look at your specific outage. So, there's a lot of details there as well. And you can set up notifications um so that you could be alerted when the potential issues have been resolved or um you know if there's anything ongoing or you know how long it's about it's going to be.

17:08 – 17:21

Curtis Wynn: Well, during a storm and during an outage, information is really power. No pun intended with that. But um so if my neighbor has called to report outage, should I just rely on their call or should I also call and report it myself?

17:22 – 17:44

Rich Luke: So even if your neighbors reported an outage, you definitely want to report one for yourself because it could be an isolated incident. Um the more outages that we have reported an area, we're able to identify and isolate where the problems coming from as well. Um, and this also helps us resolve the issue or, you know, restore power quickly and safely and efficiently when we have more information to go on.

17:45 – 18:00

Curtis Wynn: Great. So, Kim, back to you. Let's talk now about what some of our members are doing to prepare for outages. They buy a generator. If you don't mind, just share a little a few safety tips that um members should know about generators.

18:01 – 18:22

Kim Walters: Yeah. So, the biggest concern is going to be how it's connected to the home. Um, without an actual transfer switch, the members are plugging it into a random plugin or using extension cords going all around the house to plug different items into their generator. Um, many times they're keeping the generator too close to the home as well, which is causing carbon monoxide hazards.

18:23 – 18:52

Curtis Wynn: Right. So, as it relates to safety and one of something new that we've just started and implemented is maybe we've got a program for that too that can help with safety around generators. It's called GenerLink. Um why is it tell us about why this GenerLink program that we just implemented is a is a safer alternative to those extension cords that you just mentioned.

18:53 – 19:24

Kim Walters: Yeah. So, GenerLink is a meter mounted, device that goes behind the meter. Um, it is a transfer switch. So, it gives a member a safe way to, um, plug their portable generator into the device. That device keeps power, um, from the generator. , it allows it to feed the home, um, safely, and it keeps the power from back feeding onto our lines. Um, so that's a new product that we're offering. It's \$1,200 plus tax um if for members who want to purchase that um and they can give us a call and we can help them

19:25 – 19:38

Curtis Wynn: Yeah, safety is safety is number one for SECO and our members. Not just for our members but for our employees. So I would like for you to expand a little bit about back feed. I don't think everybody completely understands how dangerous that is and who it impacts.

19:39 – 20:06

Kim Walters: Right. So back feeding is when the power is going to flow back through our meter onto our lines and into our equipment. Um, you know, you have to think of a of a lineman going to a home to fix your home and they don't know a generator is plugged in and potentially back feeding. They may think that that power is dead or even people, the general public could um and back feeding can only, you know, electrocute somebody, but can also damage our equipment, which is going to only um extend your outage as well.

20:07 – 20:17

Curtis Wynn: So, Kim, what type of generators are compatible and what does the installation process involve when we bring those GenerLinks out there?

20:18 – 20:59

Kim Walters: Yeah, so there's so many different generators on the market today. Um, so we typically will refer our members to contact the manufacturer of GenerLink, which is Global Power Products, to speak with them about compatible generators if they have questions. Um there is information on our website that will help you choosing um what is compatible with our device. Um as far as installation, it's very similar to our surge protector. A qualified technician comes to your home. Um they do they will knock as well, tell you that we're there. It's about a 10-to-15-minute outage. Um if we do have to ground the device, it again is installed behind the meter. Once we put that meter back in, you have power and you're ready to use that that transfer switch.

21:00 – 21:13

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. Yeah. Wonderful. So, you've talked a lot about savings um saving savings tips. So, what would you leave with the members as your single most effective energy savings tips for the summer?

21:14 – 21:35

Kim Walters: Yeah. So, again, your air conditioner is about 50% of your summer bill. So, if you can control how much your air conditioner is running, um you're going to be able to see those savings pass on to your bill. So, just raising your temperature setting a degree or two will save you 5 to 7% per degree. So that's significant when you're talking some of the bills that we see our members have in the in the summer months.

21:39 – 21:48

Curtis Wynn: Savings, So Tralene, you have helped us out a lot with protecting the home from Florida's unpredictable weather. Um what is one investment that can help protect the home from Florida's unpredictable weather?

21:49 – 21:53

Tralene Lucas: Well I would definitely say the Surge Mitigator.

21:53 – 22:13

Curtis Wynn: I thought you may say that, so that's a real good tool and it's available and we can make it very simple for people to get that. So, Rich, you have you've shared some information with us about um a lot of tools and resources. So, what's the one tool or resource every SECO Energy member should be using?

22:14 – 22:36

Rich Luke: I would recommend the SmartHub app. Um that's a great tool. It's a one-stop resource where you can manage your energy usage, your bill, um update your account, make changes. Definitely set up your home energy profile. So those are resources that are available to the members, and I think it's an invaluable tool that you can manage on your computer and on your phone.

22:37 – 22:50

Curtis Wynn: Great, great, great summaries. Um to all of you, if you had one thing that you would say to the members, what is that one thing that you wish every Energy member knew? Kim.

22:51 – 23:06

Kim Walters: One thing that I wish every member knew is that they have the information at their disposal. So, they can use our tools that we've talked about today to go online, look at their usage and be really involved in their usage and understand it so they can have the power to lower their bill.

23:07 – 23:08

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. Tralene?

23:09 – 23:15

Tralene Lucas: Um I would want them to know that their voice matters, their membership matters, and that the products and services we provide are there to benefit them as our member.

23:16 – 23:17

Curtis Wynn: Awesome. Rich?

23:18 – 23:32

Rich Lucas: For the members, I specifically want them to know that we're not here just to keep the lights on. Um, we offer tools and resources such as SmartHub, the energy home profile to help our members save money and give them control of their usage and allow them to have access to real-time data.

23:34 – 24:38

Curtis Wynn: Wonderful. Well, today's conversation comes down to four simple ideas. Understand it, manage it, protect it, and prepare for it. Understanding how weather impacts energy use helps explain seasonal bill changes. Tools like Smart Hub, Home Profile, Smart Connect, and Energy Audits help members manage usage and costs. Surge protection can help safeguard valuable electronics while storm preparation, outage awareness, and generator, and safe generator practices help keep families ready when severe weather strikes. At SECO Energy, we're committed to providing more than electricity. We're here to provide the tools, information, and services that help our members stay informed, efficient, and prepared year-round. Thank you, Kim. Thank you, Tralene, and thank you, Rich. All three of you for joining us today and thank you for listening to Power Chat in the electric lounge. Until next time, stay cool, stay protected, and stay prepared.