

# Proficiency in efficiency

*Tools of the trade for cooperatives*

By Erin Huntimer



(From left) Brad Quenette of Roughrider Electric and Chad Reisenauer use an infrared camera to detect cold air infiltration during a training session.

**E**lectric cooperatives were encouraging energy efficiency long before it was the cool thing to do. Though on the surface it seems to fly in the face of what electric cooperatives do – sell kilowatt-hours – it ultimately makes sense for a member-owned cooperative.

John Euchner, general manager of Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative in Harlan, IA, puts it in perspective. “We’ve done it for selfish reasons here with load control and energy efficiency to save us money, which saves the consumer money, which actually saves NIPCO money,” and likewise all the way up the cooperative chain. Nishnabotna Valley is a Class C member of Basin Electric through Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative (NIPCO).

Lately, cooperatives have other reasons to encourage it, and those reasons are increasingly putting pressure on cooperatives with small staffs and limited resources. Many states, including Nishnabotna Valley’s home state, are looking at energy efficiency standards. Iowa’s neighbor to the north, Minnesota, is already mandating it. Other states are allowing energy efficiency efforts to count toward meeting renewable portfolio standards or goals.

Euchner is concerned regulations may make cooperatives accountable for consumer behavior. “We won’t get any credit for kilowatt-hours saved until members actually replace the windows or add the insulation.

Just because we do an (energy) audit, doesn’t mean Mrs. Smith’s going to follow through,” he says.

Until standards are established, member cooperatives forge on to prepare for what may lie on the road ahead. Basin Electric has resources available for their journey.

## Energy Audit Assistance

Whether Mrs. Smith is a residential consumer or business owner, the first step in helping her understand how to save dollars and kilowatt-hours can be an energy audit. Chad Reisenauer, Basin Electric key accounts/energy conservation coordinator, is available to assist cooperatives with on-site inspections for residential and commercial members.

Reisenauer is certified as a Home Energy Rating System (HERS) Rater from the Kansas Building Science Institute’s Energy and Environmental Ratings Alliance (EERA). EERA is accredited by the Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET), which sets energy performance verification standards recognized by the federal government. He is certified to evaluate a home’s energy features according to RESNET’s nationally recognized standards.

He received his certification on April 28 following comprehensive classroom and field training, and practical experience conducting audits. Reisenauer’s certification must be renewed every three years

by conducting home energy audits and submitting them to EERA.

“The program was challenging and worthwhile. I learned in-depth methodologies for analyzing the economics of efficiency improvements, including studying building science, determining equipment efficiencies, and calculating payback. The key now is to apply these skills in ways that benefit the membership,” he says.

Reisenauer is willing to share his experience with members who are also working toward HERS certifications. The next step for Reisenauer is accreditation as a Certified Energy Manager® through the Association of Energy Engineers.

To further assist member cooperatives, Michael Riedman, Basin Electric electric technologies



Proliant Meat Proteins, Harlan, IA, is one of Nishnabotna Valley’s first commercial members to request an energy audit. (From left) Terry Donscheski of Proliant, Paul Erickson of Corn Belt Power, and Chad Reisenauer of Basin Electric explore Proliant’s operations.

demonstrator, will be working toward his HERS certification this fall and will be available to assist member cooperatives when he's completed the program.

## Equipment Loan Program

The tools of the trade for energy auditors can be spendy. Basin Electric has a variety of equipment available for cooperatives to check out as they need them through the Equipment Loan Program. Equipment includes: infrared cameras, blower doors, duct blasters, light meters, an ultrasonic leak detector, and more. Basin Electric requires and will provide training for first-time users of the equipment.

## Training

Cooperative energy experts have a new opportunity to hone their skills and learn at their own pace. Basin Electric is offering an online energy auditor training program that provides an extensive review of residential energy auditing procedures and protocols, tools and test equipment, weatherization practices and auditing formats.

The comprehensive program, developed by Be Online Inc., consists of two components: the online training course and an on-site lab. The cost for the course is \$300 per individual participant.

The online course is equivalent to a three- to four-day workshop and will take 20 to 30 hours to complete. Once signed up, participants can work from any place with Internet access.

After finishing the online course, participants can take part in a one-day lab to review course materials, conduct an energy audit, and complete an energy audit report. Basin Electric staff will schedule labs according to member request and program participation.

Basin Electric can also schedule other training courses as members identify the need. For example, in May Basin Electric and the Western Area Power Administration worked together to offer a workshop on the future of water heating technologies.

In a first for a Basin Electric training course, the workshop was also offered via webinar; eight people participated online. A live video stream was tested as well.

*For more on energy audits, equipment loans and training, contact Chad Reisenauer at [chadr@bepc.com](mailto:chadr@bepc.com) or 701-557-5710.*

## Efficiency and Technology Display Program

Michael Riedman and his Segway skills have made the booth promoting electric technologies a popular stop at cooperative annual meetings, home and farm shows, fairs and other special events. Formerly called the Electric Technologies, or E-Tech, Program, its focus is shifting to better meet the needs of the membership.

Now known as the Efficiency and Technology Display Program, the program promotes energy efficiency and conservation through innovative electric technologies. Visitors experience these technologies first-hand and learn how the energy experts at their local electric cooperative can help them make smart energy choices in their homes and businesses.

Riedman is adding stand-alone table-top displays that demonstrate fluorescent and LED lighting options as well as inexpensive ways to cut heating and cooling costs. "By showing members how to use caulking, insulation, and weather stripping effectively, they can stop small leaks that can add up to real savings," he says.



**The freshly refocused Efficiency and Technology Display Program features a hybrid Chevy Tahoe that Michael Riedman uses to pull a trailer packed with his program's wares from co-op to co-op.**

Riedman also plans to add displays on Energy Star® appliances, heat pump water heaters, windows, and electronic thermostats. He has resources to help visitors decide what improvements make the most sense for them.

*For more information, contact Michael Riedman at [mrriedman@bepc.com](mailto:mrriedman@bepc.com) or 701-557-5609.*

## Extra! Extra!

Basin Electric has a variety of print materials designed to support member cooperatives' efficiency and conservation efforts. Brochures, displays and more are available on a variety of topics, including efficient technologies, rebates, energy-saving tips and more.

Members can browse materials and place orders at [www.coopsupport.com](http://www.coopsupport.com).

## On the web ...

- Information on these resources and more can be found on Basin Electric's members' website at [www.basinmembers.com](http://www.basinmembers.com).
- Tag along on an energy audit for a commercial member of Nishnabotna Valley. Visit The Flip Side at [basinelectric.wordpress.com](http://basinelectric.wordpress.com) and find: May 4, 2010: Co-ops team up for energy audit