

EMPIRE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

Echoes of the Empire

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TECHNOLOGY CAN BE RISKY

BY HEATHER L. ROMERO IT MANAGER



HEATHER L. ROMERO

In today's world, the only constant is change. As Empire Electric Association's information technology manager, I watch my world of technology change every single day and expect it to continue. These constant changes affect all of us and require more awareness of potential problems that can put us at risk.

One of those risks is when a company, like Microsoft, terminates an operating system and no longer supplies patches to fix vulnerabilities. Empire recently received notification that Microsoft's operating system for Windows 7, which was released on July 22, 2009, will be terminated on January 14, 2020.

This isn't the first time Microsoft terminated an operating system. Windows XP came before Windows 7. Windows XP was released on August 24, 2001, and Microsoft terminated support on April 8, 2014. To date, Windows XP was Microsoft's longest supported operating system.

What does this mean for you? As of January 14, 2020, if your computer has Windows 7 on it, when you connect to the internet, you will be at a high risk for cyber criminals to compromise your computer.

Believe it or not, Microsoft (and other vendors) do not release completely tested and secured products. They are first released to the public and then each week a Windows update is released to patch found vulnerabilities and holes that were discovered. After January 14, 2020, Microsoft will no longer support Windows 7 and will no longer release Windows updates to patch vulnerabilities and holes. This makes it considerably easier for cyber criminals to take advantage

of these vulnerabilities and they can do so at their leisure because Microsoft is not going to stop them.

Cyber criminals can use these known and unpatched avenues to infect your computer with malicious software, they can steal credit card or financial information, they can "watch" everything you do on the internet and they can encrypt your data so that you are unable to access it until you pay them their desired sum. This is also known as a "ransomware" attack.

Due to these risks, it is advised that you upgrade your operating system from Windows 7 to Windows 10 or replace your computer with a computer that already has Windows 10 on it. Windows 10 was released on July 29, 2015, and its end of life will be October 14, 2025. If some of you still have Windows XP computers connected to the internet, they are considerably dangerous to have online and we urge you to replace these machines.

In addition to security risks for operating systems, other cybersecurity hygiene practices are recommended to keep your computers safer. They are:

1. Make sure you have a legitimate antivirus program installed on your computer.
2. If you are surfing the internet and a message pops up stating that your computer is running slow or a virus was noticed on your computer, it is a scam. Do not click on the pop up. When you do, malicious software can be installed on your computer.

3. If you are not backing up your computer to an external hard drive or to the cloud, you should consider it. By backing up your computer, not only are you saving all those pictures and music you have collected in case of a computer crash, but you will also have a backup in case you are infected with malicious software and need to replace or wipe your computer clean. When an external hard drive is connected to a computer 24/7, it can also be compromised. It is best to disconnect the external hard drive from your computer when you are not backing up to it.
4. Do not use the same password for every account you have. If one of your accounts is compromised, a cyber criminal will have a hey day on the internet accessing other accounts you have.
5. Try to make your password as strong as possible. It is recommended to have a long password that does not mean anything and is a mix of letters, numbers and special characters, such as %Xgh665#@1y. This type of password is tougher to crack.
6. Email is the number one attack vector for malicious attacks.
7. If you receive an email from PayPal, eBay, your financial institution or another entity requesting you to follow a link to reset your password because it has been compromised, this is a scam. Contact the entity directly by calling the number on the back of your credit card or monthly statement, or search Google for their number. Do not use the information in the email.
8. If you receive an email from someone in your address book stating that they are stranded in a foreign country and ask you for money, be wary. If you are

- not in close contact with them, find someone who knows that individual to confirm the legitimacy of the email.
9. If you receive an email from anyone that you are unsure of, send a new email to that person or contact them by other means to verify the suspicious email.
10. Do not open attachments that you are not expecting or from people that you do not know.
11. Do not provide information to Microsoft or anyone else calling about computer assistance if you did not initiate the call. Don't provide any information, navigate to any links or follow any commands on your computer. Microsoft will not call people and offer to help them with computer issues.
12. Phone numbers can be "spoofed." People can download a free program online to change their phone number to show whatever they want for the caller ID. Do not trust a caller or what they are saying based on what their caller ID says.


13. Finally, scrutinize all emails you receive; be careful what websites you download files or data from; and be leery of scams and social engineering calls.

The world is full of new apps and gadgets. Technology continually moves forward at an incredible speed, which means it is full of incredible risks and pitfalls. People's lives can be destroyed by technology.

However, we can enjoy the benefits of technology and use what it has to offer to simplify our lives and improve relationships with people. But we must be safe and aware, so that we minimize the risks to ourselves and our families. In today's world, not only do you have to be "street smart," you also have to be "cyber smart."

As a reminder, if you ever receive a call from someone claiming to be from Empire Electric and they threaten to turn your power off if you don't pay them "x" amount of money immediately, don't give this person your credit card number or bank account information over the phone. Call Empire Electric directly at 970-565-4444 to validate the status of your account.

Sue McWilliams Resigns as District 2 Director

 In December 31, 2018, Sue McWilliams resigned as the District 2 director because she moved out of Empire Electric's service territory. McWilliams was elected to the director position on June 11, 2005, and participated in many committees during her tenure, including the scholarship, bylaw, youth trip and survey committees. She represented Empire Electric at monthly meetings for Western United and Colorado Advocates for Rural Electrification (CARE).



General Manager Josh Dellinger stated, "Sue served EEA's members well during her tenure on the board. She worked to stay informed about pertinent issues and always kept our members' best interests in mind. It has been an honor to work for her and I wish her and her family well in the future."

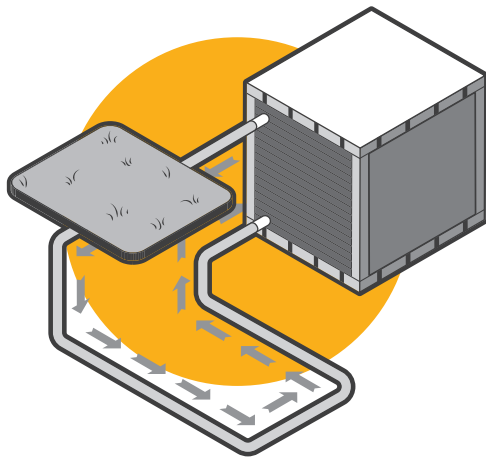
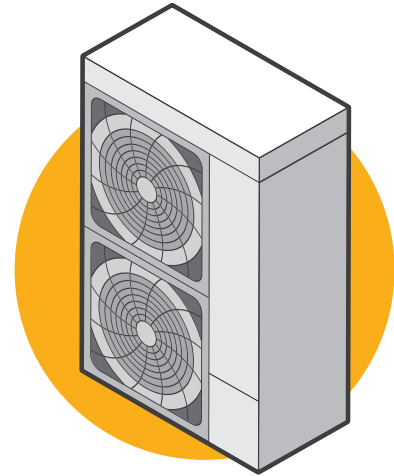
Types of Heat Pumps

There are three main types of heat pump systems. Use the information below to determine the system that's best suited for your climate and home.

Air-Source Heat Pumps

- Most commonly used heat pumps
- Moves heat rather than converting it from a fuel like combustion heating systems do
- Can reduce heating costs by about 50 percent when compared to baseboard heaters or electric furnaces
- Newer, more efficient systems now offer legitimate space heating alternative in colder regions like the Northeast and Midwest.

Note: *If temperatures in your area drop below 10 to 25 F, you will need an auxiliary heating system (depending on the size of the system).*

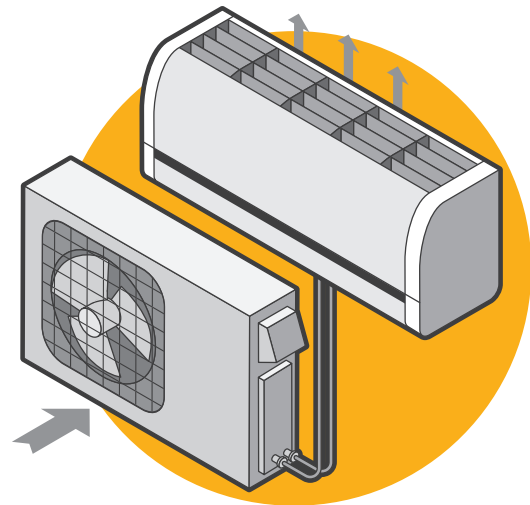


Geothermal Heat Pumps

- More expensive to install but provide more energy savings for heating and cooling
- Move heat through pipes buried underground
- When compared to a conventional heating system, can reduce energy use by 25 to 50 percent
- Effective in extreme climates
- Not ideal for smaller lots and certain soil conditions

Ductless Mini-Split Heat Pumps

- Easier to install, quiet, small in size
- Flexible for heating and cooling individual rooms and smaller spaces
- No energy loss through ductwork, which accounts for more than 30 percent of a home's energy use for space heating/cooling.
- Installation can be pricey, but federal incentives may be available



Heat pump systems should be installed by a licensed professional. Contact your local electric cooperative for more information about options and potential incentives.

Sources: Dept. of Energy and Consumer Reports

Photo Contest Winner for February



Mesa Verde Winter Sunset
by Mike Porter

My Co-op Advantages

Youth and Adult Scholarship Program

Each year, Empire Electric offers scholarships for high school seniors who are dependents of a member of Empire Electric. Twenty-four \$1,000 scholarships are available for students who plan on attending a two-year community college or a four-year college or university program. Ten \$500 scholarships are available for any student who will be attending a vocational or technical school that requires less than two years to complete. Home schooled seniors and Southwest Open High School seniors are encouraged to apply and will be considered with other applicants from the local high school they would be affiliated with.

Empire Electric Association offers educational scholarships for high school seniors planning to go to college (\$1,000) and for students pursuing a vocational or technical certificate as a lineman or other electrical related trade (\$500). Six

scholarships are available to adults who are furthering their education. Applicants must be EEA members, a spouse or a dependent of a member.

High school seniors may pick up a **Student Scholarship Application** or a **Lineman or other Related Trade Vocational/Technical School Scholarship Application** from their guidance counselor's office or at EEA headquarters, or download the form from www.eea.coop.


Adult Scholarship Applications may be downloaded at www.eea.coop, or picked up at EEA headquarters located at 801 N. Broadway, Cortez.

Applications for student and adult scholarships must be received by Friday, February 15, 2019. For more information, please contact Denise Moore at denise.moore@eea.coop or 970-564-4458. Utah residents may call 800-709-3726 ext. 458.

Energy Assistance Help from Empire

In December, Empire Electric Association presented the Piñon Project with a check for \$16,425.39. The money will be distributed by the Montelores Emergency Assistance Coalition and is allocated for energy assistance to residents of Montezuma and Dolores counties who are usually self-sufficient but are experiencing a one-time emergency. Empire matches member donations to the Energy Outreach Colorado program every year and the remainder of the \$20,000 budgeted amount is donated to the Piñon Project.

In addition, Empire sponsored three families with a total of 10 children for the Piñon Project's Christmas for Kids Program. Empire and its employees donated \$1,000 for the purchase of predominately practical items like clothing, shoes, hygiene products, school and art supplies, and some toys.



Co-op Calendar

- February 2**
Groundhog Day
- February 8**
Empire's board meeting begins at 8:30 a.m. at its headquarters in Cortez. The agenda is posted 10 days in advance of the meeting at eea.coop. Members are reminded that public comment is heard at the beginning of the meeting.
- February 14**
Valentine's Day
- February 15**
Scholarship Applications DUE
- February 18**
Presidents' Day