

Big Savings in Littlest User Contest

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When it comes to reducing energy consumption, wet hair can be an important ally.



Six families made up Wright-Hennepin's energy-savings team in "The Littlest User" contest. (Photo By: Wright-Hennepin Cooperative Electric Association)

That's one of the tidbits gleaned from participants in a friendly, but determined, energy-savings competition that pitted consumer-member teams from two Minnesota electric co-ops against each other.

Dubbed "The Littlest User," the contest wrapped up July 31, after six member households each from [Wright-Hennepin Cooperative Electric Association](#) and [Lake Region Electric Cooperative](#) vied for four months to see who could achieve the biggest energy savings.

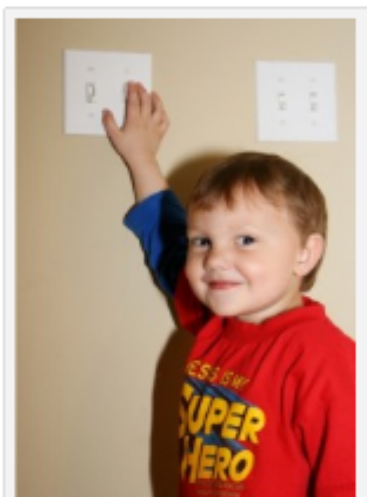
That's where the wet hair comes in.

"I wait until my hair is half dry before I blow dry it and adjust the thermostat during the day to reduce our heating and cooling costs. It all adds up," said Lisa Zipp, of St. Michael, Minn., part of the Wright-Hennepin team. Her family slashed energy use by 20.7 percent, compared with the same period in 2010.

That wasn't even the most impressive result, though. The Lefevre family of Maple Grove, Minn., reduced its energy use by 58 percent to earn individual household honors. The family's contribution helped Rockford-based Wright-Hennepin's team, nicknamed the "Watt Watchers," edge out Lake Region's team, with a total energy reduction of 43 percent.

According to Wright-Hennepin representatives, the Lefevre family was initially skeptical that small changes could yield big savings, but found there was hidden value in unplugging unused devices or turning off the TV when viewers left the room.

"If it's not critical, it doesn't stay plugged in," said Kent Lefevre. "Changing a few small things can make a huge difference."



Caden Walstad of Buffalo, Minn., has become mindful of his energy use as a result of "The Littlest User" competition. (Photo By: Wright-Hennepin Cooperative Electric Association)

Participants shared their experiences and findings in [an online forum](#)—“the clothes dryer is not our friend,” one entry declared.

[“The Littlest User” came with strict rules](#)—households couldn’t buy a new energy-efficient appliance to slash consumption, for instance. They employed MyMeter, a software program developed by a St. Paul, Minn., company, to track their energy use in a simple graphic format.

“I was surprised to find out how easy it was to cut back on our use,” said Steve Walstad of Buffalo, Minn. “It just shows how wasteful we were being before the contest.”

Wright-Hennepin said that the contest served as a fun and interesting experience for the contestants, and as a learning experience for the co-op’s entire membership.

“The Littlest User contestants proved that making small, inexpensive changes can produce dramatic, positive implications for a household’s energy consumption, as well as for the future of the electric industry,” said Mark Vogt, Wright-Hennepin’s president and CEO.

“With the help of the six participating families, WH is proud to have demonstrated that reducing energy usage need not be difficult. More importantly, it provided a tangible road map for all electric consumers, showing how to accomplish this.”