Outdoor Chores: Tips to Stay Safe

After spending long winter days indoors, most folks love to get outside in spring, even if just to do chores. But outdoor chores can bring electrical hazards.

Ladders contacting power lines cause 9% of electrocution-related deaths each year, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Landscaping, gardening and farming equipment cause another 7%.

The CPSC and Electrical Safety Foundation International suggest everyone follow these simple tips:

- Use a fiberglass or wooden ladder if you must work near overhead wires.
- Store power tools indoors.
- Unplug outdoor tools when not in use.
- Do not carry power tools by the cord.
- Avoid damp conditions when using electricity. Keep all electrical devices and cords away from water. Place waterproof covers on all outdoor outlets.
- Install ground-fault circuit interrupters in outlets where water may be nearby.
- Only use extension cords marked for outdoor use. Match the cord to the power needs of an electric tool or appliance.
- Never touch a person or an object that has made contact with a power line.
- At least 72 hours before engaging in any type of excavation work, call 811, the national Call Before You Dig phone number. Local utilities will be notified to mark the approximate location of underground lines on your property.
- Teach children to stay away from electric transformers and substations, and explain what posted warning signs mean. ■

Heat Pump and Furnace Maintenance

Maintaining your heating and cooling equipment helps prevent future problems and unwanted costs.

Inspect, clean or change air filters once a month in your central air conditioner, furnace and/or heat pump. A dirty filter can increase energy costs and damage your equipment, leading to early failure.

Keep your cooling and heating system at peak performance by having a contractor do annual preseason checkups. Contractors can get busy once summer and winter come, so it is best to check the system in the spring and the heating system in the fall.

A typical maintenance checkup should include examination of:

- **Thermostat settings.** Check thermostat settings to ensure the cooling and heating system keeps you comfortable when you are home and saves energy while you are away.
- **Electrical connections.** Tighten all connections and measure voltage and current on motors. Faulty electrical connections can cause unsafe operation of your system and reduce the life of major components.
- **Moving parts.** Lubricate all moving parts. Parts that lack lubrication cause friction in motors and can increase the amount of electricity you use.
- **Condensate drain.** Inspect the drain in your central air conditioner, furnace and/or heat pump (when in cooling mode). A plugged drain can cause water damage in the house and affect indoor humidity levels.
- **Controls.** Check controls of the system to ensure proper and safe operation. Check the starting cycle of the equipment to ensure the system starts, operates and shuts off properly.

KPUD Can Help

Time to upgrade your heat pump to a more energy-efficient model? Contact Klickitat PUD before you buy to learn about rebate-program requirements. For information, call 509-773-7622 or 800-548-8357.

Cooling Systems

- **Coils.** Clean evaporate and condenser air-conditioning coils. Dirty coils reduce the system's ability to cool your home and cause the system to run longer, increasing energy costs and reducing the life of the equipment.
- **Refrigerant levels.** Check your central air conditioner refrigerant level and adjust, if necessary. Too much or too little refrigerant will make your system less efficient, increasing energy costs and reducing the life of the equipment.
- **Blower components.** Clean and adjust blower components for proper system airflow for greater comfort levels. Airflow problems can reduce your system's efficiency by up to 15%.

Heating Systems

- **Connections.** Improperly operating gas or oil connections are a fire hazard. They also contribute to health problems.
- **Burner combustion/heat exchanger.** A dirty burner or cracked heat exchanger causes improper burner operation. Either can cause equipment to operate less safely and efficiently. ■

This information and other money-saving tips can be found at www.energystar.gov.