


New Enterprise Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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FROM THE MANAGER/CEO

Work plans go on in spite of the economy



Rick L. Eichelberger
General Manager & CEO

THE work plan goals for 2008 have been met and the projects for 2009 are already under way. New housing starts have slowed, material costs are up and operational costs have increased, but adjustments have been made and work continues without interruption.

A major project for the last decade or so was to replace over 100 miles of old

copperweld wire on our oldest lines. Today, there are no lines longer than a half mile having the older wire. This is a major accomplishment that is reflected in the service reliability improvements we have experienced. We now can shift time and dollars to other areas such as “smart” meters.

‘Smart’ meters have arrived

Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) — the installation of “smart” meters — is the focus of a lot of attention. In addition to recording electric consumption, these meters can communicate with the cooperative. A module that stores data and transmits it at a specific time to the cooperative office is located inside the meter.

The cooperative substations are linked to the office by communication lines, and data flows over the power lines from the substations to the meters. Requests can be sent to a specific meter or groups of meters. Your consumption of electricity can be analyzed by the hour and information can be used to help pinpoint exactly what was used on certain days.

Some additional benefits of smart meters include the ability to read meters daily, obtain accurate, final readings for persons who are moving and the end of the need to estimate bills due to lack of meter readings. Also, consumer-members will no longer be able to send in

bogus readings and pay less than they owe. Meter tampering will be spotted immediately and the state police will be notified.


The meter change-out plan

Beginning in 2008, 600 smart meters were installed. Annually over the next six years, similar amounts will be changed. Ultimately, the need to submit a reading will be eliminated for all consumer-members.

Many of you have seen our linemen replacing the meters as the entire change-out program is a work in progress. We ask those who do not have a smart meter yet to be patient. A priority list will accommodate as many requests as possible.

For years we experimented with a few hundred meters that communicated by using your household telephone line; these meters provided a monthly meter reading for \$2 per month. With fewer hurdles to conquer, the new AMI meters will be installed without a monthly fee.

Former seasonal accounts, cable and telephone company accounts, along with some randomly selected accounts, received meters in 2008. More will be installed in 2009. Consumer-members will be notified as their meters are activated. Don't stop sending your reading until you receive notification. Consumer-members with the original, phone-based automatic meters will have their meter replaced with an AMI in early 2009; the \$2 per month fee will be removed from the bill.

We have involved every employee in the AMI meter change-out program, and eventually every consumer-member will be free from having to read his or her meter. AMI will help increase our efficiencies and give us more complete information when it comes to your electric consumption. It's just another way we are working to provide you with the highest quality service at the lowest possible price. 

People cause fires

The tragic truth about house fires is that many could have been prevented — if someone had taken the proper safety measures ahead of time.

People's actions — and how they fail to consider fire safety — are common to all major causes of household fires. Major causes include improper use and maintenance of heating appliances, improper use and care of electrical appliances, lack of functioning smoke detectors, and careless use of smoking materials.

Check electrical cords

Two-thirds of all electrical fires begin in plugs or cords on fixed appliances such as refrigerators, air conditioners or lamps. Frayed cords expose electrical wires that spark on contact with each other or anything that can ground the electrical current.

Electrical plugs and cords usually deteriorate gradually, making damage difficult to detect. Inspect all appliance cords and plugs for wear at least once a year. If you discover a frayed cord or loose prongs on a plug, discontinue use until repairs can be made.

Check electrical outlets

Never overload electrical outlets and circuits. Overloaded electrical outlets or circuits that supply power to several outlets are major causes of residential fires. Overloaded outlets and circuits carry too much electricity, which generates heat in undetectable amounts. The heat causes wear on the internal wiring system and can ignite a fire.

All wiring systems have circuit

breakers or fuses that disconnect power when circuits become overloaded. However, an improperly sized fuse or breaker can cancel this built-in safety feature.

To prevent overloading, never plug more than two appliances into an outlet at once or “piggyback” extra appliances on extension cords or wall outlets. Use only outlets designed to handle multiple plugs.

Give special consideration to appliances that use 1,000 or more watts, such as air conditioners, refrigerators, hot plates, irons, microwave ovens, dishwashers, heaters and deep fryers. Avoid plugging them into the same outlet or circuit. To use these appliances safely, know which outlets are connected to the same electrical circuit in your home. Do not exceed 1,500 watts for each outlet or circuit. Wattage requirements are listed in appliance manufacturer's instructions.

Begin a habit of regularly checking electrical cords and outlets. Fires that begin in these areas are difficult to detect, yet easy to prevent.

Check smoke alarms

Researchers estimate that smoke alarms could have prevented almost half of the annual fire fatalities. Smoke alarms alert you to potential dangers that your senses cannot detect, such as a slow, smoldering fire in an overloaded electrical outlet.

However, it is more dangerous to rely on a smoke alarm that does not work properly than it is to have no smoke alarm in your home. Check the operation of the smoke alarm every month, and replace batteries once a year when you are turning your clocks back.

If smoke from cooking sets off your alarm, never remove the battery to disable the alarm. You may forget to replace and reconnect the battery when cooking smoke is no longer a problem, and the disabled alarm offers a false sense of security. Consult a professional if the alarm continuously sounds from cooking smoke. The alarm may be located too close to the kitchen or an exhaust fan may be needed in the cooking area.

Consider manufacturers' suggestions on where to locate the smoke alarm. All smoke alarms should be placed on the ceiling or a wall near the ceiling in central locations. Most manufacturers suggest at least one smoke alarm for each floor. Some floor plans may require additional locations. Always select an alarm that has been tested and displays the seal of a testing organization.

Prepare a family exit plan

Early warning by a smoke alarm is effective only when accompanied by a prepared emergency exit plan. Emergency exit plans let you rely on automatic responses during an actual emergency.

It's a good idea to develop your own emergency exit plan. A good plan is known by all members of a household and includes an outside meeting location away from danger of the fire. It also will include more than one way to get out of each area of the home. Stage emergency exit plan practice drills periodically, then discuss the plan with family members.

Safe use of electrical appliances and outlets, a working smoke alarm and a good family emergency exit plan may be all that's needed to protect you and your family from the dangers of fire. ☀

Winter outage kit

Winter is here and along with winter comes storm-related outages. Don't be left out in the cold. Be prepared with an outage kit. The kit could include items such as:

- ▶ Candles, matches, flashlight and extra batteries
- ▶ Manual can opener and canned foods
- ▶ Windup or battery-operated clocks
- ▶ Camp-type stove and fuel or barbecue grill (use outdoor only)
- ▶ Extra blankets and sleeping bags
- ▶ Battery-powered lamps
- ▶ Emergency phone numbers and at least one phone that operates without electricity



Myths about thermostats

Your home's thermostat controls how long your heating or cooling system operates. You can save energy and money by learning how this simple device operates.

One common myth is that the higher you set your thermostat when you return home, the faster your furnace will heat up your house. This isn't true

since most furnaces deliver heat at the same rate no matter how high the thermostat is set. Set your thermostat at the temperature you'd like and your furnace will heat

your home as fast as it can.

Another myth relates to the efficiency of setting your thermostat down when you don't need heating or cooling, such as at night or when no one is home. This myth states that a furnace works harder than normal to heat your home back to a comfortable temperature after the thermostat has been set back, resulting in little or no savings. This is not true and has been proven by years of research and field observations. The longer your house stays at a reduced temperature when heating, or at an increased temperature when cooling, the more energy and money you'll save.

Your heating and cooling costs depend mostly on the temperature difference between indoors and outdoors. When you adjust your thermostat down in the winter, or up in the summer, you simply reduce this temperature difference. If you set your temperature back 10 to 15 degrees for eight hours while you're asleep or at work, your energy savings can be 5 to 15 percent on your energy bill.

You can also install a setback thermostat that automatically adjusts your home's temperature at pre-set times. However, you can achieve the same savings if you faithfully remember to change your thermostat whenever you leave home or go to bed. ☀



Tips to save energy and costs

It's that time of year again. The outside temperatures are dropping while heat inside is rising. Take the time right now to follow some easy suggestions to save money and energy. Below is a list of energy conservation projects and tips designed to help you contain winter energy costs. As a side benefit, you'll be doing your part to reduce energy consumption.

- ▶ Turn down your thermostat. You can reduce your heating bills by as much as 20 percent by lowering the thermostat from 70 degrees to 65 when you're at home and to 55 degrees when you're away or asleep.
- ▶ Use electric blankets or quilts for sleeping comfort and to allow a lower nighttime thermostat setting.
- ▶ Clean or replace furnace filter as often as it gets dirty.
- ▶ Check for drafts around doors and windows, and replace weather stripping and caulking where necessary. Use weather stripping for air leaks around moving parts like windows and doors. Use caulk for stationary structures like window frames and walls. Caulk that is cracked or shrunken should be replaced.
- ▶ For drafty windows, the best option is to replace them. If that is not a possibility, you can install storm window kits, window quilts or insulated window shades to keep cold air from entering your home.
- ▶ Examine your home for air leaks, paying particular attention to the attic area. Keep an eye out for spaces around electrical wiring, plumbing, vent pipes, areas above recessed light fixtures, and where walls are not completely sealed at the attic, such as stairway and interior partition walls.
- ▶ Insulate and weather-strip your attic door and make sure it closes tightly, stopping warm air from escaping.
- ▶ Install inexpensive foam draft blockers or gaskets around all of the electric outlets and wall switch boxes located on outside walls.
- ▶ Clean and vacuum baseboard heaters, heating ducts and vents. And while you're at it, remember to sweep the dust bunnies from under your refrigerator, allowing the unit to run more efficiently.
- ▶ Make sure radiators, baseboard registers and heaters are not blocked by furniture or draperies.

Heat tape safety

With the arrival of winter weather, many people are using heat tapes to prevent frozen water pipes.

Heat tapes are basically electrical wires covered with ribbon-like strips of plastic. They are installed by wrapping them around pipes. When the tape is plugged in and turned on, it warms up and keeps the pipes from freezing. Some models have thermostats, are plugged in year-round, and only come on when the temperature approaches freezing.

Consumer-members should be aware, however, that heat tapes can cause fires. Every year, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, heat tapes cause over 2,600 fires that result in an estimated 20 deaths, 160 injuries and over \$25.4 million in property damage.

If it is necessary to use a heat tape, use only those tapes that have been approved by Underwriters' Laboratories (UL). Most heat tape fires are caused by heat tapes that do not satisfy UL's safety standards.

Any minor installation error can cause a heat tape to malfunction and result in a life-threatening fire. If you do not understand the installation instructions, do not try to install it yourself. Instead, hire a professional electrician.

Never wrap a heat tape in layers or allow it to overlap itself even the tiniest bit. That's the surest way to start a fire.

Check the tape often throughout the winter. If it shows any evidence of melting, discoloration or charring, disconnect the tape immediately and replace it. Whenever the outside temperature rises above freezing, unplug the heat tape until it is absolutely necessary to use it again. Do not count on thermostats that are built into some heat tapes; they often do not work.

KIDZCORNER



Wasting energy is a problem that can be easily solved. Do you turn the lights out when you leaving a room? If your answer is no, why not start turning lights off when you will be out of a room more than five minutes? If someone else leaves a room and doesn't turn the light off, why not turn it off for them?

- ▶▶ Don't stand with the refrigerator door wide open while you decide on your drink or evening snack. Try to get what you need quickly and shut the door so the cold air stays inside the refrigerator. Be sure the door closes tightly. You can do an easy test to see if your refrigerator's seal is tight; close the door on a dollar bill. If the dollar pulls out easily, the door is probably leaking cold air.
- ▶▶ Turn the television off when no one is watching it. The same is true for computers, radios and video games. If no one is using them, why keep them on? When you are done with your computer, printer or speaker for the evening, turn the surge protector off. These devices still use small amounts of electricity even though the switch is turned off. Make sure you check with your parents before turning the surge protection switch off. Take a walk around your home and look for energy vampires. What is an energy vampire? An energy vampire is a type of energy used by things that consume electricity 24 hours a day, even when they are turned off or not being used. TVs, VCRs, DVD players, computers/printers, stereos, microwaves, coffee machines, washers/dryers, rechargeable power tools, etc. are the everyday secret users of energy.
- ▶▶ In fact, did you know that a television with a remote could use more energy during the 20 hours it is turned off waiting for you to turn it on than it does while you are watching it for four hours in the evening? And don't forget about those little clocks on microwaves and VCRs – with every blinking second, they, too, are using vampire energy and adding to your monthly energy bill.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Directors and Employees of New Enterprise Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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