

Northwestern
Rural Electric
Cooperative
Association, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric
cooperatives serving
Pennsylvania and
New Jersey

Northwestern REC
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22534 State Highway 86
Cambridge Springs, PA 16403
Home Page:
<http://www.northwesternrec.coop>

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- Administration/General**
1-800-472-7910
- FAX
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OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Mary Mulligan-Haines, Editor

FROM THE MANAGER & CEO

Automated meter reading – a new way of business



by Michael D. Tirpak
General Manager & CEO

THE NEW automated meter reading (AMR) system is just about complete as most of the residential meters have been replaced except for the Timbercrest apartment complex in Vernon Township (electronic meters are ordered and will arrive in early 2010) and the multi-phase commercial-industrial meters (also on order). This new AMR system

is giving us an opportunity to significantly change some of the ways we operate our business.

The major change in our business is how we read our 20,000 meters for billing every month. The previous way of sending a meter reader to every meter location on our system, which required us to battle the weather and the road conditions in our rural area, is no longer needed. We now read our meters about four times per day from our headquarters in Cambridge Springs with much less concern for the weather and the potential need to estimate any member's bill. Estimated readings were often done in the winter months in the former way of business due to our inability to get vehicles and people over all of our system in the snow and ice. Readings are now automated and feed directly into our computer billing system and are, for the most part, still billed in the same cycle and at the same time of the month. This keeps the bills more consistent in the number of days in the billing cycle and at the expected time of the month to fit into monthly budgets.

Information – the new way of life

The next extensive change in the way we now do business involves the information we have in our office computer systems. Our office employees now have access to these meter readings to help answer questions about home or business

use and bills, and they also can spot trends in a much more timely manner. Employees can request hourly reads for a meter to help spot very detailed variations in the electric use patterns. Other information about a particular meter can also be requested, such as how many outages have been recorded by the meter for the month or what the voltage is at the location. These tools are designed to help our employees do a better job of helping members. Plans are also under way to make some of this information available to the membership directly from our website at www.northwesternrec.coop. We will be keeping our membership up to date once this data is available — so, stay tuned.

Electric outages – a new way of processing information

The other extensive change in our business that I want to discuss in this article involves how we handle outage information. If any electric interruption occurs on our system, the previous way of business required members to call our "800" outage number and report their problem. The co-op dispatcher would then look at the calls being logged by the outage management system, decide the extent of the outage due to the calls received, and then send a co-op crew to repair the problem and restore the power. Today, if an electric interruption occurs, members still need to call and report a problem! Yes, you heard me correctly — you still need to call and report an outage. The difference with the new AMR system is that as soon as the first outage call is logged, the AMR system checks the member's meter for confirmation and checks some of the surrounding meters to identify the extent of the problem. The co-op dispatcher is then given the information from the AMR system and a prediction about where the linemen need to look for the needed repairs. Is

(continues on page 14b)



NO MUSS, NO FUSS: Automated meters are easy to read in spite of the winter weather.

the outage an “individual” outage or is it a “line” outage? What line protective equipment is affected? How many members are affected? This information should significantly help in the service restoration efforts and reduce outage times. Once repairs are made and power is restored, the AMR system again checks the outage area to make sure that all meters are back in service, which means few calls, if any, need to be made from the office to verify that repair. Plans are also under way to make some of this outage information available from our website, so that members can see the extent of outages, especially during major weather events, and track the restoration efforts by our crews. We will keep you informed when this information is available.

I am excited about the new AMR system and the many opportunities it brings to improve our way of doing business. Our employees have been very impressed with the widespread support of the membership for these changes and look forward to using the many new tools at their disposal to enhance their day-to-day activities.

Now don't forget — if an outage occurs, we still need for you to call 800/474-1710 to report your problem. We'll take care of it from there. ☀

Michael D. Tirpak
Michael D. Tirpak
General Manager & CEO



READY FOR DUTY: This automated meter is waiting for field installation.

To-do list

Rather than regretting the long winter, here are a few items you might include on your “to-do list.”

- ▶ Sign up for ebill at www.northwesternrec.coop. Once you do, you can view your electric use, pay online and stop having a paper bill sent.
- ▶ While you are online, check out the rest of Northwestern REC's website. You can find news about the co-op, use the HomeEnergySuite to save money on your electric bill and connect with links to other interesting websites.
- ▶ If you call the office each month to pay your bill with a credit card, you can ask the consumer services representative to stop sending a return envelope in your bill.
- ▶ Make the decision to join 9,000 other members participating in load management of your water heater. Once you sign up, the co-op takes care of servicing and replacing your water heater 24/7.
- ▶ Join Round Up and have your electric bill rounded up to the nearest dollar and the change will be donated to the Member to Member, Inc. Fund to help less fortunate members. The average contribution is \$6 a year.
- ▶ Change your furnace filter every month.



Energy Efficiency

Tip of the Month

Use your microwave for cooking whenever possible. They use 50 to 65 percent less energy than conventional ovens and do not heat up your house in the summer. However, conventional ovens may be more appropriate for larger size items when cooking time is increased.

Source: Touchstone Energy Cooperatives



UNINVITED GUEST: Note the gap between the side and bottom weatherstrips. Air can enter here, reducing the efficiency of your heating or cooling system.

Keep out the cold with weather stripping

NO mistaking it: winter has arrived. Any drafts around doors and windows that went unnoticed during fall are now downright uncomfortable — and adding to your energy bills.

Weather stripping offers a relatively quick fix for drafty doors. To determine if a door leading out of your house needs new weather stripping, look for daylight. If even a sliver of daylight remains visible between the door and its frame or the floor, add weather stripping.

Next, shut the door or window on a piece of paper. If you can pull the paper out without tearing it, you're losing energy.

There is a variety of weather stripping materials available, each good for fitting different types of door and window frames. Most are made of rubber, foam, metal, vinyl or a combination of materials. To determine the right item for the job, check the area: if any old,

worn material has been previously installed, take a sample to your local hardware store or expert like a contractor. If no material exists as a guide, make detailed notes about the type of gap and how the door or window is installed — someone at the hardware store or your expert should be able to make a recommendation for you.

Once you have the proper materials for the job, consult any instructions that may be on the weather stripping package. Installation techniques range from simple to technical, depending on the type of material being used. If replacing old, worn weather stripping, be sure to note how it was installed as you remove it.

Here are a few basic guidelines:

- ▶ Weather stripping should be applied to clean, dry surfaces in temperatures above 20 degrees Fahrenheit.
- ▶ Measure the area to be weather

stripped twice before you cut anything.

- ▶ Apply weather stripping snugly against both surfaces. The material should compress when the window or door is shut.

When weather stripping doors:

- ▶ Choose the appropriate door sweeps and thresholds.
- ▶ Weather strip the entire door jamb.
- ▶ Apply one continuous strip along each side.
- ▶ Make sure the weather stripping meets tightly at the corners.
- ▶ Use a thickness that causes the weather stripping to tightly press between the door and the door jamb, without making it difficult to shut.

When weather stripping windows:

- ▶ Apply weather stripping between the sash and frame.
- ▶ The weather stripping shouldn't interfere with the operation of the window. ☀

New Co-op Connections® program offers value to members

Program to be available in April

NORTHWESTERN REC will launch a program that offers further proof that being a member of an electric cooperative has its advantages. The Co-op Connections program, a new card-based member benefit program for Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives, is designed to deliver added value to cooperative members. Northwestern REC is implementing this program in conjunction with the other Touchstone Energy Cooperatives serving 22 million member-owners nationwide.

A free offering for co-op members and participating businesses, the program benefits cooperative members by offering valuable discounts at participating local and national businesses. At the same time, those businesses benefit from increased customer visits by co-op members participating in the program.

Northwestern REC members will receive Co-op Connections cards in the mail by the end of April. Once the member has signed the back of the

EDITOR'S NOTE: An alert reader noticed a mistake on our December pages. In the article, "The French Creek Connection" reprinted from *INSIDErie*, we incorrectly stated that 1,235 acres drain into French Creek, and Larry Merritt, who has lived his entire life in the French Creek Watershed, questioned that number. The article should have stated that 1,235 square miles drain into French Creek, meaning that the watershed includes more than 790,000 acres. Thank you, Larry, for bringing the mistake to our attention.



card, it may be used at participating businesses locally and nationwide. Co-op members can get a flavor for which businesses are participating in the Co-op Connections program by logging on to Northwestern REC's website at www.northwesternrec.coop. It will be easy to pick out which local businesses are participating. Look for the Co-op Connections stickers in their windows. Whenever a Co-op Connections customer — whether from Northwestern REC or from one of the hundreds of Touchstone Energy Cooperatives across the country — shows a card at a participating business, he or she receives a discount.

The Co-op Connections program benefits cooperative members by offering 10 to 60 percent savings on most prescriptions at over 60,000 independent pharmacies and national chains, including CVS, Walgreens, Wal-Mart, Target and more. With soaring prescription prices, this discount pharmacy program will work for your family and you. To find out which pharmacies are participating

and to look up the discount prescription price, co-op members can visit www.rxpricequotes.com.

"The Co-op Connections card is a valuable tool that creates an even greater sense of membership and reinforces Northwestern REC's long-standing commitment to community," reports Mary Mulligan-Haines, communications/marketing manager. "It will add value and increase customer loyalty at participating businesses. Simply put, the Co-op Connections program is another way our members benefit from being a part of their electric cooperative."

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives is a national alliance of local, consumer-owned electric cooperatives providing high standards of service to customers that they serve with integrity, accountability and innovation. More than 650 cooperatives affiliated with Touchstone Energy Cooperatives in 46 states are delivering energy and energy solutions to approximately 22 million customers every day. ☀