

**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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OFFICE HOURS

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

Mary Mulligan-Haines, *Editor*

FROM THE MANAGER & CEO

Thanksgiving at our cooperative



by Michael D. Tirpak
General Manager & CEO

THE Thanksgiving holiday is just around the corner and it is very appropriate to give thanks for the many blessings we enjoy at Northwestern REC, just like we do in our personal lives. Northwestern has had a very good year and I want to emphasize some of our blessings.

The first has been our ability to navigate through the almost unbelievable turmoil in the U.S. and world financial and economic recession. The experts tell us that we have been through the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Northwestern REC can count its blessings that we have navigated this world recession in a very positive way. We are having a strong financial year, despite a small reduction in energy sales (mostly due to the cooler-than-expected summer) but lower sales have meant lower wholesale power costs. The recession has brought down fuel costs for our fleet and material costs, such as copper, aluminum and steel, for our line construction projects. Having fewer new members has allowed us to spend more available man-hours on our Automated Meter Reading Program and our Old Conductor Replacement Program. We are also working closely with members who have been negatively impacted by the recession to find ways to pay their electric bills through payment arrangements and energy assistance.

The weather is another one of our many blessings this year. Yes, the summer was cool and damp, but the year

so far has been relatively mild from the aspect of major weather events that cause severe outages. We have had some storms that caused some outages, but the numbers have been down this year for frequency and duration by more than half of last year and well below our five-year averages. Let us hope that the remainder of the year follows suit!

Our Automated Meter Reading Project is well ahead of schedule and may be almost completed by year end. This new system will help us reduce our annual expenses for meter reading and provide a host of other high-tech advantages that will significantly improve our abilities to handle outages, process daily work flow and manage the billing processes. Members will also enjoy more real-time use data and outage information.

The last blessing I want to mention today is another general retirement of capital credits. The strong financial year will allow us to send out about \$530,000 in checks to members later this year. The amount of each check will depend upon each member's use for the periods the co-op is retiring the capital credits. This will be explained in detail with the checks we send out. Please watch for an announcement this fall.

In summary, Northwestern REC has many blessings to count this Thanksgiving season. I hope you have many blessings as well. Happy Thanksgiving everyone! ☀

Michael D. Tirpak

Michael D. Tirpak
General Manager & CEO

Reality check: climate change must be fair, affordable and achievable

WE NEED your help. As Congress debates climate change this fall, our voices must drown out special interests and businesses interested in turning a profit. We have to send Congress a reality check.

Since early this year, Congress has considered a cap-and-trade system to address climate change concerns. This system focuses on reducing carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, vehicles, and factories — essentially, impacting all sectors of the economy. As Congress acts on climate change, those changes will be directly responsible for raising our electric bills. But by how much?

Electric co-ops like Northwestern REC feel it's important for Congress to keep three things in mind regarding climate change. We know rates will go up as a result of any action Congress takes,

but any bill should be fair, taking into account regional differences in how electricity is produced. Some states have more low-carbon resources (such as wind or hydro) available than others, but we're all in this boat together. One

part of the country should not benefit at another's expense.

Next, we've got to keep electricity affordable for all Americans. We already have mem-

bers in Pennsylvania who barely manage to pay their monthly electric bills, or must choose between paying for medications and keeping the lights on. Even a small increase will be a hardship beyond measure for these folks.

Finally, the goals set by Congress must be achievable. Climate change policy must be realistic and in sync with technology to ensure long-term success. Otherwise we're doomed to fail.

Northwestern REC and others across

the nation have been working hard to make sure these concerns are raised — and we need your help.

More than 377,000 co-op members like you across the nation have joined the Our Energy, Our Future™ grass-roots campaign, demanding that elected officials keep consumer interests in mind. Their voices had a major impact this summer, as the U.S. House passed a climate change bill that included more than \$3 billion in rate relief for co-op consumers from initial proposals. Still, that bill fell far short of being fair to consumers. The climate change debate now moves to the U.S. Senate. We have an opportunity there to make more improvements — and you can impact the outcome.

Your senators as well as members of the U.S. House need a reality check from you, their constituents. Visit www.ourenergy.coop today to send a message about the need for fair, affordable and achievable climate change legislation. ☀



Co-op service offerings

Water Heater Maintenance – Participants in the Load Management Program receive 24-hour free water heater service plus a free replacement tank when necessary.

Outdoor Lighting – The co-op will install and maintain an outdoor light on an existing pole for as little as \$11.15 per month.

Co-op Courtesy Plan – This plan provides extended due dates for disabled or retired members.

Third-Party Notification – A third party will be notified before a member is disconnected for non-payment.

Gift Certificates for Electricity – Elec-

tricity gift certificates make a great present for anyone on your list.

Special Rates – Special rates are available for members who have interruptible electric heat and other interruptible electrical loads.

Zipcheck and eBill – You can have your monthly bill automatically deducted from your bank account through Zipcheck. You can also receive and pay your bill electronically through eBill at www.northwesternrec.coop. Either option saves you time and postage.

RoundUp – You can help others by having your bill rounded up to the next dollar amount and then donating the difference between your actual bill and

the rounded up amount to the Member to Member, Inc. Program.

Co-op PowerPlus™ – Credit cards offer a flat rate card and a rebate card returning up to \$100 cash back each year.

Member Sen\$e – This program offers coupons and free classified ads for members.

Electric Safety Demonstrations – Two safety demonstrations are available, including a portable tabletop demonstration and a non-portable demonstration.

Stop in or give us a call at 800/472-7910 for more information.



Construction of grain bins and outbuildings requires coordination with field services

BY BRADLEY SMITH
Field Services Representative

WITH THE INCREASE in grain production, there has also been an increase in the need to store this grain. As a result, more and more grain storage bins are being constructed every year. This development is great not only for our local farmers as they are able to maintain financial stability, but for the cooperative itself as grain operations bring more load to our system. On the other hand, the co-op has some concerns as these new bins are erected.

The installation, operation and maintenance of our electric supply lines are governed by the National Electric Safety Code (NESC). The rules contained in the code are considered necessary for the safety of the employees and the public, and we as a rural electric cooperative are required to adhere to these rules. The NESC contains clearance requirements that are to be acquired and maintained from structures, roadways, communication lines, swimming pools, etc.

In particular, grain bins are treated as a separate entity due to the technique of loading them with a portable auger, conveyor or elevator. The shape, along with the mobility of portable augers, introduces a safety concern when they are operated around electric utility lines. There have been several accidents and fatalities around the world due to portable augers coming in contact with

high-voltage supply lines. As a result, NESC has developed a strict clearance requirement around grain bins.

In the event that new grain bin construction (or any building project) is on your horizon, please contact your electric utility to discuss any clearance requirements. It is for your safety as well as the safety of the public and employees of the local community. ⚡

News Briefs

Christmas Snow Could Give You Some Dough – If you purchase and install an approved electric heating/cooling system before Dec. 15 and it snows 6 inches or more on Christmas Day, you can get 50 percent (up to \$6,000) back. Call Bruce Hough at 800/472-7910 for details.

Bill Presentment and Payment – If you would like to receive and pay your bill electronically, that service is now available. Just go to www.northwesternrec.coop to sign up. It's easy, secure and saves a stamp.

HomeEnergySuite offers an easy online energy audit and energy library. Go to www.northwesternrec.coop to begin.

Together We Save is a national rural electric program that also shows you ways to save electricity. Go to www.togetherwesave.coop to learn more.

RoundUp helps members struggling during these difficult times to keep their electric bill paid. Members simply allow their monthly electric bill to be rounded up to the nearest dollar and donate that change to the Member to Member, Inc. program. If you would like to sign up for RoundUp, just call 800/352-0014.

Fireplaces

Fireplaces may look warm and cozy, but all things considered, they tend to be relatively inefficient for home heating. Believe it or not, fireplace efficiency ranges from plus 10 to minus 10 percent.

The negative efficiency results from the fire sucking heated air from inside the home to fuel combustion. This air is then vented up the chimney, which pulls cold outside air into the home through the small cracks around windows and doors.

Even when there is no fire burning, fireplaces can vent heated air — especially if there is no flue damper, if the damper does not seal tightly or if the damper is left open.

Here are some ways to improve fireplace efficiency:

- ▶ If your fireplace does not have a damper, the first improvement is installing one, so you can close “off” the chimney when the fireplace is not being used. Also, non-flammable “open” and “closed” signs that hang from the damper handle make it easy to remember if a damper is open or closed.
- ▶ Installing glass doors on your fireplace will help prevent heated room air from escaping up the chimney. The fire still draws air through vents below the doors, but only enough to burn the fuel.
- ▶ While glass doors certainly improve the overall efficiency of a fireplace and still enable you to see the fire, they do have one drawback — they partially block the direct radiant heat you feel from the fire.
- ▶ Another improvement is to duct outside air into the fireplace. This is even more effective when it is combined with the installation of glass doors. Then the fireplace does not use room air for combustion at all. If you have glass doors, the vents can be sealed completely.
- ▶ If you are building a new fireplace, install ducts around it, so that cool room air is drawn in, circulated

around the firebox, and ducted back into the room. The ducts are completely self-contained, and the air never mixes with the chimney smoke. If you want to have the warmed air blown out at floor level, so that it will heat the room even better, install a fan in the duct system.


- ▶ If you have an existing fireplace and are not able to build a duct system around it, install a small-scale duct system in the firebox. This heat exchanger consists of hollow tubes bent into a shape that fits around the fire. Cool air from the floor enters the “bottom” of each tube, is heated by the fire, and convected out the “top” of the tubes and into the room.
- ▶ With one of the many available heat-circulating fireplace and chimney adapter systems, you can increase fireplace efficiency up to about 40 percent. These so-called fireplace inserts consist of a double-walled firebox, several air ducts, and depending on the model, a blower to speed the movement of heated air. You should not use a fireplace for supplemental heating unless you take

one or more of the following measures:

- ▶ Lower the house thermostat to 50 degrees Fahrenheit.
- ▶ Close all doors and warm air ducts to the room where the fireplace is located and slightly open (about one-half an inch) an outside window located near the fireplace.

When using any fuel-burning fireplace, be sure to check the manufacturer’s operating instructions. As an added safety precaution, installation of a carbon monoxide detector is recommended.

A cozy and safe alternative to a wood or gas fireplace is an electric fireplace, which requires no chimney or other venting. If you only want one for decorative purposes anyway, some of the newer electric fireplaces are amazingly realistic. You might have a fireplace store in your town where you can see one of these new fireplaces, or search the internet to see pictures of various models or track down a supplier.

Similar efficiency topics can be found in the HomeEnergySuite on www.northwesternrec.coop. 



Energy Efficiency

Tip of the Month

Don't keep your refrigerator or freezer too cold. Recommended temperatures are 37° to 40° F for the main refrigerator compartment and 5° F for the freezer. If you have a stand-alone freezer, it should be kept at 0° F. Appliance settings may vary, so an easy way to check the temperature is to use a meat thermometer.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy