

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

P.O. Box 1049, Dillon, MT 59725-1049
(406) 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271
Web site: www.vec.coop
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A Message from Your Manager

Recently I, along with several other managers and board members across the state and country, travelled to Washington, D.C., to meet with our federal legislative staffers. This was a coordinated effort through our national trade association, the National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association, and involved addressing four key points that potentially could adversely affect our electric cooperative family.

First was a request for support of the Rural Utilities Service and its loan program. The current administration proposed lowering the available loan funds by approximately 1/3 and placing onerous restrictions on the use of the loan funds. The current budget proposal only allowed loan funds for renewable generation projects and energy conservation efforts, and would not allow funds to be used for normal distribution line projects as has been previously allowed. We need those loan funds for distribution projects and substations, and this proposal obviously cannot work without increasing our financing costs — and subsequently the cost per kWh to the membership, which is unacceptable.

Incidentally, the RUS loan program is projected to bring in approximately \$130 million to the federal coffers. This loan program actually earns dollars for the federal government, which some may claim is in short supply in Washington, D.C.

Secondly, we addressed coal combustion residuals legislation. This issue does not necessarily affect us individually here in the northwest part of the state but does in other parts of Montana and most of the country. We simply asked our legislative staffers to encourage support for treating coal ash as non-hazardous, and to support the Coal Ash Recycling and Oversight Act of 2013 when it is introduced.

Thirdly, we requested that new energy-efficiency standards for electric water heaters be made workable by allowing a longer term waiver period. In 2010, the Department of Energy set stringent new efficiency standards for large water heaters. These standards essentially eliminated the type of water heaters cooperative members utilize. Cooperatives sought a waiver to allow continued use of water heaters used in demand-response programs, but DOE proposed a short-term unworkable waiver. Cooperatives need a longer waiver period. We urged our delegation to write the DOE to seek a workable waiver that preserves the use of large electric water heaters.

Fourth and finally, we requested that our delegation oppose more regulation on cooperative poles for non-cooperative utility pole attachments. Currently, electric cooperatives are exempt from FCC pole attachment regulations because Congress recognized the unique, locally directed governance of elec-

tric cooperatives. Recent lobbying from the cable industry proposed limiting the amount we can charge for the attachments to our poles. We currently charge the actual cost of the attachment, and recover all of the costs associated with it. Limiting the amount we can charge only places more costs on our members and creates a cooperative subsidized arrangement, which we consider onerous. We urged our delegation to maintain the federal pole attachment exemption for electric cooperatives.

We were very well received by the staffs for our three delegates, as they have worked with us and listened to our concerns in the past. Our effectiveness at the federal level is in our joining forces with the some 900 electric cooperatives across the country and letting federal legislators see firsthand the power of those joined forces.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call or email me. I can be reached here in the office or on my mobile at (406) 925-1085, or via email at rollie@vec.coop. I am very interested in what the membership has to say about our cooperative and can assure you your issues will be heard and addressed.



Rollie Miller
General Manager

Trustees

President

Dean Peterson

Vice President

Dean Hanson

Secretary/Treasurer

Sharon Lasich

Tom Helm

Andy Johnson

Don Jones

Allen Martinell

Jim Petersen

Norm Tebay

General Manager

Rollie Miller

Outage Notification Numbers

M-F 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**683-2327 or
(800) 221-8271**

Dillon

After Hours Mon. - Thurs.
Dan Snellman683-6222
Tim Myllymaki683-6369
Charles Wharton.....660-1878

Weekends

**683-2327 or
(800) 221-8271**

Whitehall

After Hours and Weekends
Marty Simons287-3950
John Moos266-3605
Justin Bair266-3351

Townsend

After Hours and Weekends
John Moos266-3605
Justin Bair266-3351
Marty Simons287-3950

As SIMPLE As DIALING 811

By Rod Siring, Member Services

“**C**all before you dig.” You have seen this on TV, newspapers and on billboards. The Call before You Dig campaign has been around for years. Why go to all these efforts to have people call in to request for utility locates before they dig? Well, digging into underground utilities is extremely dangerous, there are serious financial repercussions and it is the law.

Coming in contact with underground power lines is every bit as dangerous as contacting overhead lines. They can carry the same voltage as overhead lines and are much harder to identify. Don't take a chance, one wrong decision could be your last.

Digging up an underground power line also has financial consequences. The costs associated with repairing an underground power line becomes the obligation of the person responsible for the damage. Depending on the situation, digging into a power line can get very expensive, very fast.

If you need further persuasion, the following are excerpts from the Montana Law regarding this issue.

Montana Law, Annotated Code 2011, 69-4-502 states: “...an excavator may not make or begin an excavation without first obtaining information concerning the possible location of an underground facility from each public utility, municipal corporation, underground facility owner or other person having the right to bury underground facilities that is a member of a one-call notification center”

Montana Law, Annotated Code 2011, 69-4-503 states: “Before beginning an excavation, the excavator shall notify, through a one-call notification center, all owners of underground facilities in the area of the proposed excavation.”

This applies to everybody:

Montana Law, Annotated Code 2011, 69-4-501 states: “‘Excavator’ means a person conducting the excavation activities. ‘Excavation’ means an operation in which earth, rock or other material in the ground is moved, removed or otherwise displaced by means or use of any tools, equipment or explosives. The term includes but is not limited to grading, trenching, digging, ditching, drilling, augering, tunneling, scraping, and cable or pipe plowing and driving.

The easiest way to stay safe and avoid unnecessary problems is to call the Utilities Underground Locate Center (UULC) at (800) 424-5555, or you can simply dial

811. You need to make your request two full business days before you plan to dig. When you call, you will be asked a series of questions about your worksite. Being prepared greatly speeds up the process. Have the following information that is needed:

- **Your name, phone number, company name (if applicable), and mailing address.**
- **What type of work is being done.**
- **Who the work is being done for.**
- **The county and city the work is taking place in.**
- **The address or the street where the work is taking place.**
- **Marking instructions,** (*specific instructions as to*

where the work is taking place. Please use white or pink paint, or white or pink flags, to outline the area you are digging in.)

Once UULC has all the information, they will notify the relevant utilities in your area. Once the utilities are notified, they will dispatch a person to locate their utilities. By making a simple call you could save time, money and maybe even your life.

Please note that Vigilante Electric Cooperative will only locate wire between the transformer and the meter. We will not locate wire between the meter and the load. This is the responsibility of the member and will require an electrician.

Co-op Connections

What we are hearing from you

By Rod Siring, Member Services

Every Vigilante Electric Cooperative member received a Co-op Connections card in the mail toward the end of April. This card provides opportunities for the holder to receive discounts on a variety of health services, travel and online shopping. We have talked with a few members who brought up some interesting points worth noting.

The businesses on the Co-op Connections homepage are national businesses that were recruited by Touchstone Energy. Each business has agreed to participate under certain conditions, but they determine what discounts they will offer. In turn, they become part of a network with millions of cardholders, and have their business and discount featured on the website for free. Currently, we are in the process of recruit-

ing businesses at the local level.

Healthy Savings provides discounts on prescription drugs, dental services, vision services, chiropractic care, and lab and diagnostic work. The homepage does not list the local participants in the Healthy Savings program but they are posted online. To find more information about these types of offers, visit the Healthy Savings section of the site.

A vast majority of the questions have come from people without access to computers. While this program is Internet based it doesn't prevent people without computers from participating. To find Healthy Savings providers, members can call 800-800-7616 for assistance. There are numerous providers in the prescription drug program, but the other services are limited or not available within our service territory. We are hop-

ing this improves over time. Due to the national reach of the network, our members will be able to use these discounts whenever they travel to different parts of the country.

Travel discounts are another perk that members can take advantage of without the use of a computer. Currently, we are working with Touchstone Energy to produce a brochure that will provide the information needed to take advantage of these savings. We also will use these pages and our website to convey this information.

While this card has only been in our members' hands a few weeks, we are already hearing positive feedback. Even if you aren't seeing a huge benefit now, please hang on to your cards. The money saving features of this membership card will continue to evolve and grow.



Residential Efficiency Program

Heating and Cooling Options

By Rod Siring, Member Services

When you look at how your home consumes energy, the largest portion of your bill is dedicated to heating. If you are considering building a new home or you're considering remodeling, I strongly encourage you to contact us. Vigilante Electric Cooperative, in conjunction with Bonneville Power Administration, has programs that offer incentives for energy-efficient electric heating through heat pumps.

Most residential heating is done by converting an energy source into heat. Heat pumps are different. Heat pumps work like refrigerators, displacing heat from one place to another. They are very efficient, only using electricity to circulate fluids and/or air through the system.

There are two types of heat pumps, air source and geothermal. Which is best for you depends on the application you want it for and your budget. The following briefly describes the technologies available for an incentive through our residential energy efficiency program.

Ductless Heat Pumps

If you want to lower your heating costs and add year-

round comfort to a home with permanently installed electric zonal heat, such as electric baseboard, wall heater or ceiling heat, a ductless heat pump is a great option. Ductless heat pumps are a form of air-source heat pump. They are very efficient, providing room specific heating and cooling. Installation is relatively easy and unobtrusive because, as the name implies, there is no ductwork.

However, in our climate, the air-source heat pumps will not be able to meet all of your heating needs. This is why ductless heat pumps are ideal for existing homes with zonal heat. When the ambient air temperature gets too low, the system will shut down, and you can use your home's existing heat system.

Air-Source Heat Pump

Air-source heat pumps are an efficient and economical heating/cooling system for your home. Incentives are available for new and existing construction, as well as new and existing manufactured housing. These are ducted systems that provide both heating and cooling.

They provide heat when the ambient air temperature is quite low, and employ auxil-



ary heat during periods of extreme cool weather.

Geothermal Heat Pumps

These are the luxury versions of heat pumps. While geothermal heat pumps share the same qualities as air source, there are some big differences. They both provide heating and cooling, and both can be used for new construction as well as in existing homes. Their main differences are efficiencies and installation costs.

Geothermal heat pumps are a lot more efficient. Air-source heat pump efficiencies decrease as the air temperature falls. Geothermal heat pumps benefit from the near constant temperature provided by Mother Earth. The downside is that there is substantially more cost involved with the installation of a geothermal heat pump.

If you are planning to build a new home or are considering changing your existing heating system, take some time to

research heat pumps. A lot of valuable information can be found online or by contacting us. If you are considering installing a heat pump, contact us first. There are specific requirements that need to be met before work starts to qualify for an incentive.



Wayne Lemrick

OFF THE CLOCK

After 31 years of service, Wayne Lemrick has retired from Vigilante Electric Cooperative. Wayne started working for us as a lineman, and spent his entire career working out of the Whitehall shop.

There are two traits that endeared you to Wayne. He was dedicated to the job and the people he worked with, and he is an extremely nice guy. Vigilante Electric Cooperative would like to thank Wayne for his service to our organization, and we wish him well in the coming chapters of his life.

On the Job

Vigilante Electric Cooperative would like to take this opportunity to introduce our newest employee, Dake Green.

Dake is a journeyman lineman working out of our Whitehall shop. He is a native of Montana, who was raised in Columbia Falls. Dake attended Northwest Lineman College in Meridian, Idaho,

and has worked with various line contractors since graduating. His last employer was Hamlin Electric of Fort Morgan, Colorado.

Dake is married, and with his wife Sonya, they have two children, Megan and Cassey.

We welcome Dake to Vigilante Electric and look forward to a long relationship.



Dake Green