

# Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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**OWNED BY THOSE WE SERVE**

*A Message from Your General Manager, Rollie Miller*

## COVID-19

**W**OW!!! What a couple of months it has been. As I write this, it is showing indications that we are over the top for new COVID-19 cases in the state of Montana. Clearly Gallatin County has been hit the hardest, but we have seen cases in all counties we serve in. What a crazy time.

From the issue of safety and health for the employees and members we have done several things to protect all involved. For instance, we have split the line crew into two distinct groups, with only one-half working at a time. They operate in separate vehicles and the two groups are not allowed to work together.

In addition, I have sent almost one-half of the office staff to work and train at home. We are taking advantage of some downtime to provide some necessary training for employees to enhance and expand on capabilities, and to keep everyone engaged. Some of the work in the office has simply

been postponed until a later date when things settle down.

Another measure we have undertaken to protect the employees and the public is to close the office buildings to the general public. We have done everything paperwork-wise either through the mail or through the drop boxes.

Necessary meetings, including at least one board meeting, have been completed via Zoom. One good thing, I think, is that I can't believe how tech savvy most people got with Zoom and other things during this time.

Please thank the first responders and medical staff for their unending work and dedication during this unprecedented pandemic. Hopefully by the time you read this we are all back to work and catching up on tasks that were delayed. Stay safe and healthy!



## 2020 Construction Season

**I**n order for Vigilante Electric Cooperative to provide reliable electrical service, we invest heavily in our facilities. This requires ongoing testing, maintenance, and replacement of the electric facilities in our service territory. As we move forward, we would like to make our members aware of major projects, and where our line crews and contractors may be working.

Vigilante Electric line crews will be busy working on new services, pole testing and pole placements throughout our service territory. Other specific projects included in the 2020 Budget are projects along Highway 91 North in Dillon and along Hwy 41 near Twin Bridges. We are also working on a major 69kV transmission line rebuild over the top of Butch



Line contractor replacing a transmission pole near Whitehall.

Hill to just northeast of Jackson. We will utilize contractors as needed for any of these projects.

We do not anticipate many major outages, but there will be a few minor outages associated with this work. If you would like to be notified of a planned outage in your area, please call our office and verify your contact information with a valid email address.

We ask for your patience and understanding in these efforts. We will continue to use this publication for periodic updates, we will also post current information in the News/Events section on our website - [www.vec.coop](http://www.vec.coop), or you can call our office for updates.

# Reflect and Honor:

## May is Military Appreciation Month

By Anne Prince

**W**HILE enjoying various Memorial Day festivities this month, I hope you will join us in pausing to reflect on the sacrifices of our country's veterans and their families. I am especially thankful for those who gave the ultimate sacrifice so that we can enjoy the freedoms their service affords us in this great country of ours.

May is Military Appreciation Month, and in the words of John F. Kennedy, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

At Vigilante Electric Cooperative, we are grateful to have a veteran within our ranks, and we are proud to serve veterans and their families within our local communities. In addition to providing safe, reliable and affordable energy, we care for the veteran community and show our appreciation through our actions and ongoing commitment to them and their families.

We are not alone in our efforts to honor and serve veter-



Chase White, Vigilante Electric lineman and Army veteran.

ans. Vigilante Electric is part of a network of more than 900 electric cooperatives across the country that support and honor our nation's veterans of all generations. As part of our national association of electric cooperatives, spanning 48 states and serving 13 percent of U.S. consumers, there are countless programs that our family of electric co-ops has initiated.

One such program is "Vets Power Us," which is aimed at employing and honoring veterans, active military and their spouses. This effort helps veterans understand potential career paths with electric co-ops and, in turn, provides

co-ops with best practices in attracting, onboarding and retaining veterans.

Not only do we pause on Memorial Day to remember the sacrifice and service of those who gave all, but the month also holds several other military anniversaries and events, including Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 8, and Armed Forces Day on May 16.

Vigilante Electric Cooperative is proud to be a part of the electric cooperative network that honors and supports veterans of all ages, ranks and branches of the military. Please join us in taking a moment to show your appreciation to a veteran – not just this month, but every month.

# Let's Talk

By Anne Prince

**T**HE energy industry is undergoing rapid change, and technology is paving the way for innovation in the way energy is used, produced, stored and shared. Consumers are interested in more green energy alternatives while smart homes and apps make managing energy use and paying your electric bill more convenient than ever.

While the changing energy market has created more options for consumers, it has also resulted in more utility scams and misleading information surrounding solar installations in particular. That's because of two factors.

Utility scams are common because of the vast number of utilities that exist, and consumers are understandably anxious with the threat of disruption to their electric, heating or water service. Second, new products and services in the energy industry provide an opening for scammers and pop-up companies to provide misleading information or shoddy products and services.

## Avoid Phone Scams

A common phone scam typically begins with a phone number that appears to be from a valid utility company. The scammer will claim you have a past-due account and threaten to disconnect service or take legal action. The scammer will typically demand that you use a prepaid debit card or money order, often within a very short, urgent time frame to pay the "past due" amount.

You can combat this scam by being aware of the status of your account. Never give your banking or personal information over the phone to someone you did not call. If you have a question or concern about your energy bill, call us directly at 683-2327 or 800-221-8271. Do not use the phone number given by the scammer.

## Avoid Solar Scams

Another scam we see from time to time is connected to rooftop solar systems. Homeowners with rooftop solar may receive a sales call offering an accessory, upgrade or extended warranty to their solar array. The calls could be from crooks claiming to represent a solar company, promising to replace faulty or broken parts, or improve efficiency. Again, if you are not expecting the call, don't be fooled. These calls offering misleading information are likely a scam. Call Vigi-

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# Call Before You Dig

## Simple as Dialing 811

**T**HE Call before You Dig campaign has been around for years. 811 is the national number designated to help protect do-it-yourselfers, landscapers and contractors from unintentionally hitting underground utility lines while working on digging projects. Every digging project requires a call to 811. Digging into underground utilities is extremely dangerous, there are serious financial repercussions and calling 811 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 become 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 of Montana law regarding this issue:

*Montana Law, Annotated Code 2017, 69-4-502(2) states: "... an excavator may not make or begin an excavation without first obtaining information concerning the possible location of an underground facility from each underground facility owner having the right to bury underground facilities."*

*Montana Law, Annotated Code 2017, 69-4-503(1) states: "Before beginning an excavation, the excavator shall notify, through a notification center, all owners of underground facilities in the area of the proposed excavation."*

*Montana Law, Annotated Code 2017, 69-4-523 (1)(b) states: "an excavator who damages an underground facility is liable for the entire cost of the repair of the underground facility."*

### **This applies to everybody:**

*Montana Law, Annotated Code 2011, 69-4-501(12)(a) states: "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. "Excavator" means a person conducting the excavation activities."*

One easy phone call to 811, at least two business days prior to digging, starts the process of getting your underground utility lines marked for free. When you call 811, a local one-call center representative will ask you for the location and description of your digging job and will notify affected utility companies, who will then send a professional locator to the proposed dig site to mark the approximate

location of your lines within a few days of your call.

Once your underground lines have been marked, you will know the approximate location of your utility lines and can dig safely.

In the United States there is one unintentional hit every three minutes, which can lead to injury, repair costs, fines and expensive and inconvenient outages. Thirty-seven percent of these incidents are caused due to a failure to call 811 before digging. Another 37 percent are due to not digging safely around the marks. Knowing approximately where underground utility lines are buried before each digging project helps to prevent these situations.

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.

## Irrigation Efficiency Incentive Opportunities

**A**GRICULTURE has long been the lifeblood of our communities and those of rural communities in the Pacific Northwest. For this reason, Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has a variety of agricultural energy efficiency programs. As a BPA customer, Vigilante Electric Cooperative passes these rebates and incentives on to our members for qualified projects.

Irrigation plays a vital role in the success of modern farm/ranch operations. Irrigation costs constitute one of the largest expenses for an agricultural operation. The more efficient irrigation systems are, the lower their operating costs are long term. Therefore, we offer several incentives on irrigation system improvements with pumps connected to Vigilante Electric's distribution system.

### **Pump Replacement**

A new incentive available from Vigilante Electric is for pump replacements. Over time, pump efficiency diminishes and eventually pumps need to be rebuilt or replaced. When this time comes, we strongly encourage our members to consider a new pump (not previously used or rebuilt).

To qualify, the existing pump must be rated between 20 to 500 horsepower and have at least three years of con-

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## Incentive Opportunities

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sumption history. This incentive is available for centrifugal and turbine style pumps.

### **Variable Frequency Drives (VFD) for Irrigation Pumps**

#### *Centrifugal Pump*

This is also a new program available from VEC. To qualify for an incentive on the installation of a VFD on a new or existing centrifugal pump, the pump must be rated between 20 and 500 HP and with the integration of the VFD must produce at least a 20 percent variation in discharge pressure.

One issue with VFD's is harmonics. Harmonics can cause a variety of power quality issues and interfere with connected equipment. For this reason, Vigilante Electric requires that all VFD installations have mitigation for harmonics and meet the IEEE 519 standard. (Your VFD supplier can provide options for you to meet this requirement.)

#### *Turbine Pump*

For the installation of a VFD on a new or existing turbine pump, the connectivity, size and harmonic requirements are the same as that for a centrifugal pump. However, for a turbine pump there must be at least a 20 percent variation in flow, or at least a 10 percent variation in discharge pressure.

### **Green Motor Rewinds**

The Green Motor Initiative is where participating service centers strive to maintain or improve on the original efficiency characteristics and reliability when rewinding or rebuilding electric motors. The key advantages to the Green Motor Initiative are it ensures a quality rewind and saves up to 40 percent on the cost of a new motor. Participating service centers recycle 98.5 percent of motor materials and the program utilizes third-party oversight to ensure standards are being met.

This incentive is taken off the bill by the service center when work is completed. Contact Rod Siring at Vigilante Electric for a list of participating service centers.

### **Irrigation System Maintenance**

For an irrigation system to be as efficient as possible, all components need to function properly to deliver the appropriate amount of water to the crops. Over time, pivot and sprinkler components wear and/or fail. When this happens, water usage increases, which in turn can increase energy usage. Also, when pivot and sprinkler components don't work properly you can experience less uniformity in crop growth and potentially lower yields.

On existing systems, Vigilante's irrigation incentive program has rebates for most pivot and sprinkler components, and incentives for custom projects. Contact your irrigation contractor or Rod Siring at (406) 683-2327 for details regarding rebate and/or incentive levels.

### **Other Opportunities**

If you are planning an irrigation system rehabilitation or have other energy savings ideas, a custom project may be appropriate. If you have any questions regarding the programs above, or would like to discuss incentive levels, please contact Rod Siring at (406) 683-2327 for more details.

## Let's Talk

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lante Electric or the company that installed the solar array if you think there may be a problem. Other than occasional cleaning, rooftop solar (if installed correctly) is virtually maintenance-free.

### **Use Trusted Sources**

If you're considering solar for your home, make sure you are working with a reputable company. Because this is still an emerging industry with evolving technology, there has been a proliferation of pop-up companies in the market to make a quick buck. Representatives of rooftop solar companies may have more sales experience than knowledge of the energy industry, and their primary goal could be making a sale and moving on to the next prospect.

If you are considering adding solar to your home, make Vigilante Electric your first call. After all, Vigilante Electric has a different "bottom line" that is not directly tied to the sale of a product or service. We take a more holistic, objective view of how to achieve energy and cost savings for our members, and that may or may not include rooftop solar.

In this ever-changing environment, it's important to remember you have a trusted energy advisor – your local electric cooperative. We are a community-focused organization that works to efficiently deliver affordable, reliable and safe energy to our members.

Remember, we're just one call or click away, so please reach out with any questions about your electric service or bills – we're here to help.