A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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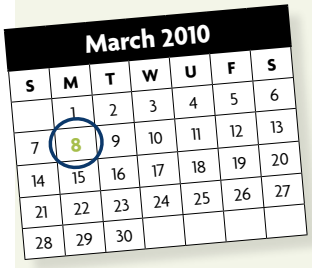
Bluestem NEWS

Annual Meeting Is Almost Here



The Bluestem Electric Cooperative, Inc., Annual Meeting will be held on March 8, 2010, at the Riley County High School beginning at 7:30 p.m.

Please bring your Official Notice of the Annual Meeting for door prize drawings. All members attending the meeting will receive a $5 credit toward April's electric bill.

We hope that you will plan on attending and take part in the business of the cooperative.

The U.S. Census Bureau Needs You!

If you are a U.S. citizen, at least 18 years old and have work experience, call the U.S. Census Bureau at 866-861-2010 today. Pay depends on the area where you live. "EOE."

For more information on the US Census 2010, go to www.2010censusjobs.org

Weathering the 'Perfect Storm'

Our Energy, Our Future™
A Dialogue With America
www.ourenergy.coop

Our nation's electric utility industry is heading into a "perfect storm."

While the amount of electricity we use every day steadily increases, the capacity to generate and transmit that power is running short. In the past, fossil fuel-fired power plants were the go-to option to meet growing new demand with proven technology, but looming federal regulations on carbon dioxide emissions is changing that.

The cost of complying with new regulations could make electricity less affordable for everyone–a concern Bluestem Electric Cooperative is fighting to voice.

In December, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a part of the executive branch, declared that six key greenhouse gases from auto emissions, including carbon dioxide, are "endangering public health and welfare" of current and future generations. Emissions from motor vehicles of four of those greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, were also said to contribute to dangerous air pollution.

The endangerment finding puts a foot in the door for EPA to issue sweeping new rules that could impose strict limits on carbon emissions, including those from power plants. The cost of generating electricity would go up, and in the end those costs would hit consumer pocketbooks.

Congress is mulling over its own set of carbon dioxide regulations, and we must continue to ask that any resulting legislation be fair, affordable, and technologically achievable. If passed, Congressional legislation should also preempt use of any other existing laws, fixing a regulatory disas-

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Notice to Irrigators

The contract year for all irrigation services is June 1–May 31. If you need to change the rate for any of your irrigation services for any reason, please notify the business office by May 1.

The appropriate equipment must be installed for the load management rate by the beginning of the contract year. If you have any questions about the load management options, any current irrigation service, or any new irrigation service, please do not hesitate to contact your cooperative office.

Do It Yourself Project Safety

Spring is the time of year when many individuals begin work on home improvements. While making a to-do-list, keep in mind that there are many federal tax incentives to include efficiency improvements during repairs and new construction. Before people start tackling do-it-yourself projects, Bluestem Electric asks everyone to take precautions before starting renovations or construction projects, especially when working around electrical equipment and overhead power lines.

Safety tips to keep in mind:

- **Make sure you have the right tools and equipment for the job.** Use only extension cords that are rated for outdoor use when working outside. Keep your work area tidy and don't allow your power cords to tangle. Make sure outlets have ground fault protection. Use a portable ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) cord if your outdoor outlets don't have GFCIs.
- **Look up and around you.** Be sure to lower equipment when you are moving it. Carry ladders and other long items horizontally whenever possible. Remember, aluminum ladders, as well as wooden ladders, can conduct electricity. Fiberglass provides better protection against electric shock.
- **Be especially careful when working near power lines attached to your house.** Keep equipment and yourself at least 10 feet from lines. Never trim trees near power lines–leave that to the professionals. Never use water or blower extensions to clean gutters near electric lines. Contact a professional maintenance contractor.
- **If your projects include digging, like building a deck or planting a tree, call your local underground utility locator before you begin.** Never assume the location or depth of underground utility lines. This service is free, prevents the inconvenience of having utilities interrupted, and can help you avoid serious injury.

Bluestem Continues Outstanding Safety Record

The KEC Loss Control, Safety and Compliance department, presents Bluestem manager Ken Maginley with a certificate of recognition for the cooperative's safety achievement. From left: Todd Bailey and Stacey Marston, both LCS&C instructors; Ken Maginley Bluestem manager; and Larry Detwiler director of LCS&C.

The employees of Bluestem Electric Cooperative, Inc., Wamego, were honored recently for their safe working practices.

Bluestem Electric's employees worked a total of 240,703 worker-hours without a lost-time accident. The last time Bluestem Electric suffered a lost-time accident was on November 11, 2006. The cooperative was honored in Topeka during the 68th Annual Meeting of Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (KEC), the statewide association for the electric cooperatives that serve in Kansas.

Presenting the award was Larry Detwiler, coordinator of the KEC Loss Control, Safety and Compliance Department.

"In order to receive this award, the employees go a complete calendar year without missing a full day of work due to an injury or accident," Detwiler said. "This award is a great way to recognize the efforts of the members and their overall commitment of safety and the safety program."

Accepting the certificate acknowledging the safe work practices was Ken Maginley, Wamego, manager of the cooperative.

"This award is well deserved and speaks to the dedication and professionalism of all of our employees," Maginley said.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

A significant amount of the average home energy bill pays for heating water. Take five-minute showers instead of baths and make sure your water heater is set no higher than 120° F.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

Short Circuits: Old Wiring Could Be Hazardous

Each year, household wiring and lighting cause an estimated average of 32,000 home fires.

Residential electrical wiring changed during the 20th century as new appliances appeared on the scene and electricity evolved from a luxury to a mainstay.

More appliances at home led to safety improvements and an increased number of room outlets, leaving older home wiring to play catch-up. Although most older home electrical systems have been upgraded over the years, safety shortcomings may still exist. Since a third of American homes were built more than 50 years ago, home buyers and folks living in older homes should be aware of how wiring changed during the last century.

Electric capacity is a major concern with older wiring systems. Homeowners in the 1930s didn't use a lot of electrical appliances, except for a refrigerator, a few lights, and a radio.

An explosion of appliance purchases followed in the late 1940s and early '50s. But the arrival of air conditioning during the 1960s soon rendered many mid-century home electrical systems obsolete. More recently, residences built as little as 20 years ago might be insufficient for handling entertainment systems and personal computers.

Each year, household wiring and lighting cause an estimated average of 32,000 home fires. On average, these fires result in 950 injuries, 220 deaths, and nearly $674 million in property damage, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

"Residential electrical systems are seldom inspected after they are installed and tend to be destroyed in house fires," explains John Drengenberg, consumer affairs manager for Underwriters Laboratories, Inc., (UL), an independent product safety testing and certification organization based in Chicago, Ill. "Homeowners should not assume all is well simply because fuses aren't blowing, circuit breakers tripping, or they're not receiving shocks or smelling burnt plastic. Inside the walls, wire insulation could be cracking and crumbling, especially if wires are drawing more current than they were designed to handle. The wood frame above plaster ceilings could also become charred by lightbulbs that are too close to the ceiling or higher in wattage than the light fixture's rating."

To avoid such hazards, consumers should understand the limits of home wiring systems. Often, this depends on when a home was built or if the electrical system was upgraded. In other cases, though, telltale signs may indicate a problem.

"Anytime you receive a shock from an electrical appliance, outlet, or wall switch in your home, it's a warning that you should talk with a qualified electrician," Drengenberg cautions. "If a fuse blows or a circuit breaker trips right after you replace or reset it, you have trouble somewhere. Flickering or dimming lights could mean loose connections, overloaded circuits, improper wiring, or arcing and sparking inside walls."

In older homes, heat means too much electrical current's being drawn through outlets. "If your receptacles or

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Lightning & Surge Protection Spring Special

What You Don't Know About Surge and Lightning Protection Will Shock You!

Lightning and power surges can strike at any moment and can destroy or cause expensive damage to your sensitive electronics and appliances. Being prepared for these unexpected surges and spikes can make a big difference in protecting your appliances and equipment.

Lightning is often the cause of power surges, but other factors such as birds, squirrels, and trees interfering with power lines can cause a power surge.

Construction work, demand fluctuations in your home, auto accidents involving utility poles, and even disturbances transmitted through telephone and cable lines can have the same effect. We want to help shield your electronics and appliances with our affordable surge protection program. Let us start protecting your home electronics and appliances today.

Bluestem is running a **SPRING SPECIAL** on the installation of the meter base lightning and surge protection ring. The ring will protect your home and specific major electrical appliances and equipment from lightning and power surges. The cooperative is offering you an invitation to sign up for the Lightning and Surge Protection Program. Here's how easily we can begin the service for you:

- The lightning and surge protection device, installed at your electric meter, will provide protection from lightning strikes and other power surges for your home appliances. You lease the lightning and surge ring for only $4.95 per month, added right on to your electric bill. Our technicians do the installation for a one-time fee of $69.95. However, if you act before May 31, we'll drop the installation fee to $34.95.
- As part of the program, when you sign up you may also purchase in-home plug-in surge protection products for individual electronic equipment.
- The lease lightning and surge suppression ring comes with a warranty that has a total household coverage of $50,000 and $5,000 per appliance.
- For more information on available products and prices or to sign up for the Lightning and Surge Protection Program, call Member Services at your appropriate Bluestem office.

Weathering the 'Perfect Storm'

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ter that would only add to costs for consumers with a mess of overlapping regulatory red tape.

Whatever the political outcome, the honest truth is the change won't come overnight. Fossil fuels currently account for more than 70 percent of all electricity generated in the United States. New technology will be key to both keeping these traditional options up-to-date and refining new ways to affordably keep the lights on. Cleaner use of fossil fuels, an increased use of renewable energy, and a big commitment to energy efficiency will all be necessary.

Electric co-ops have a long history of providing safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to their members, and no "perfect storm" is going to keep us from continuing to do our job. Co-op research projects are already underway to expand the current limits of renewable energy, make coal- and natural gas-fired power plants cleaner and more efficient, and possibly even capture carbon dioxide from plant emissions before they go up a smokestack and store them deep underground to keep them out of the atmosphere.

The Cooperative Research Network was recently awarded a $33.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy, which will support a wide-ranging "smart grid" research project. The effort brings together 27 electric co-ops in 10 states, which will match the grant money awarded to create a pool of nearly $68 million for ground-breaking technology development. With a smarter electric grid, we'll be able to deliver electricity to our consumers more efficiently–cutting the amount of emissions we'll need to generate as a result.

Co-ops have stepped up to challenges in the past, and we have no doubt our response to this challenge will be any different in the end. But we need your help in relaying to Congress just how important it is to keep climate change legislation fair, affordable, and technologically achievable. To make your voice heard, join the Our Energy, Our Future® grassroots awareness campaign at www.ourenergy.coop.

Short Circuits: Old Wiring Could Be Hazardous

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plugs are hot to the touch–you can't keep your hand on them for more than five seconds–you may have an overload," Drengenberg advises.

When too much current gets drawn, wires heat up, baking and eventually weakening the insulation. Wires with damaged, decayed, or brittle insulation can lead to shocks and fires.

Another issue associated with older home wiring systems is the number of receptacles in each room. Today's electrical code requires outlets be placed every 12 feet of running wall space, about one per wall in the average 10-by-12-foot room. Houses built before 1956 were required to have outlets placed every 20 feet, while homes built before 1935 weren't required to have wall outlets at all.

"Relying on extension cords is not the answer," indicates Drengenberg. "Extension cords are meant for temporary use only and should not be a substitute for permanent wiring."