



Bluestem NEWS

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FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

Thank a Lineworker on April 12



Mike Morton

If you were asked to associate an image or a person with Bluestem Electric Cooperative I imagine you would picture a lineworker. One of the most visible employees of

the co-op, lineworkers work tirelessly to ensure our community receives uninterrupted power 24/7.

“Lineworker” is listed as one of the top 10 most dangerous jobs in the U.S. This is understandable as they perform detailed tasks near high-voltage power lines. Regardless of the time of day, having to brave stormy weather and other challenging conditions, lineworkers must climb 40 feet in the air, often carrying heaving equipment to get the job done.

Being a lineworker is not a glamorous or easy profession. It takes years of specialized training, ongoing education, dedication, and equally important, a sense of service and commitment. How else can you explain the willingness to leave the comfort of your home to tackle a challenging job in difficult conditions, when most are sheltering comfortably at home? This dedication and sense of service to the community

is truly what sets them apart. That's why we set aside the second Monday in April to celebrate and recognize the men and women who work around the clock to keep the lights on.

While lineworkers may be the most visible employees at Bluestem, it's important to note that there is a team of highly skilled professionals working behind the scenes. Customer Service and Member Service representatives are always standing by to take your calls and questions. Our information technology experts are continuously monitoring our system to help safeguard sensitive data. And these are just a few of the folks who work together to ensure we can deliver the service and reliability you expect and deserve. Without them, our lineworkers wouldn't be able to “bring the light” to our community.

Our dedicated and beloved lineworkers are proud to represent Bluestem, and they deserve all the appreciation and accolades that come their way on Lineworker Appreciation Day.

On April 12, and any time you see a lineworker, I hope you'll join me in thanking them for their exceptional service. I also hope you'll remember that you have a dedicated team of professionals working behind the scenes at the co-op whose commitment to service runs just as deep.

FEBRUARY'S COLD WEATHER EVENT

Keeping You Informed

Our commitment to your best interest as a Bluestem Electric Cooperative member is always at the forefront of our operations. In the time since the polar vortex phenomenon, there have been many discussions and meetings regarding the outages that some of our members experienced and the cost of this event. To keep you informed, we want to communicate to you, our members, what happened and what you can expect to see on your bills in the coming months.

What happened?

- ▶ A mid-February polar vortex caused historically low temperatures, and ice/snow gripped many regions of the country, stressing both electric generating capacity and the ability of the transmission grid to move power from state to state and region to region.
- ▶ Emergency alerts quickly declared by the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) forced many electric cooperatives into outages due to the inability of electric generation supply to meet demand.
- ▶ Generation by natural gas was an issue at this time:
 - ▶ Depletion of natural gas supply due to increased use by residential, commercial, and industrial users created high prices during a short time frame.
 - ▶ Some natural gas suppliers were not equipped to handle the extreme cold, which left the supply frozen in the ground.
- ▶ The inability of renewable energy to produce, such as wind generation, at this time due to the extreme cold also placed stress on natural gas generation units, which had to make up for the shortage of generation capacity.
 - ▶ Natural gas generation is typically used to back up renewable generation. This escalated demand

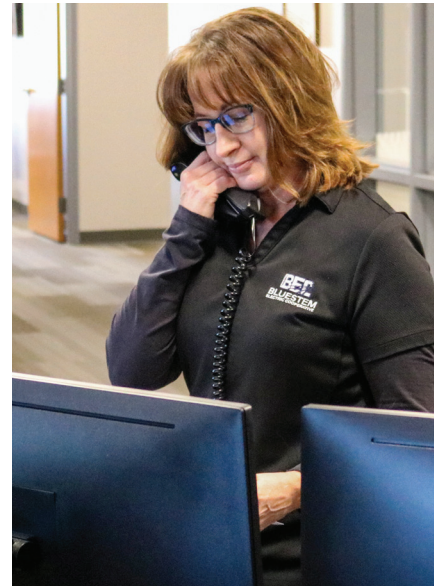
and depleted supply caused the price of natural gas to drastically increase during this time frame.

What is the SPP and why is it important?

- ▶ The SPP oversees the bulk electric transmission system (often referred to as “the grid”) and manages the reliability for a 14-state region that includes Kansas.
- ▶ The SPP does not generate electricity or own power lines or substations, but, rather is tasked with operating the power grid in a safe and reliable manner.
- ▶ SPP handles many power transactions in any given time frame. It will take the SPP up to 120 days to go through the transactions to determine the final costs associated with the polar vortex event, and even then, with regulatory agencies and state and federal politicians involved, the process could take longer to determine final, attributable costs.
- ▶ The SPP has never in its 80+ year existence had to implement power curtailments and has never dealt with this extreme type of phenomenon.

Why was there no warning?

- ▶ The SPP declared and broadcasted that they had enacted an Energy Emergency Level 1 that began Sunday evening, Feb. 14, to conserve energy. During brief periods on Monday, Feb. 15, and Tuesday, Feb. 16, SPP elevated the Energy Emergency to a Level 3, which required prompt response.
- ▶ These Energy Emergency declarations resulting from record cold temperatures forced transmission-owning electric utilities within the SPP region to take extreme steps to prevent catastrophic damage to the power grid.



Bluestem Electric staff are here to help. Give us a call at 800-558-1580.

- ▶ Mandatory power curtailments are controlled at the high voltage transmission level, which Bluestem does not own; our office was given no warning or notification of the curtailments that were implemented until the moment the power went out.
- ▶ Grid operators, like the SPP, operate with a focus on the overall reliability of the electric grid. When demand exceeds supply, grid operators have the authority to mandate curtailments like some of our members experienced a couple of weeks ago.

What's going to happen to my electric bill?

- ▶ **ACTUAL USAGE COST:** Your bill for February will more than likely be higher simply due to increased energy usage to heat your home during the extreme cold weather. The normal rates will apply for this usage.
 - ▶ Space heating and water heating are the two biggest drivers of energy use in most households, accounting for over 50% of a home's energy use during the winter months.
 - ▶ Heating equipment will run longer to maintain the temperature setting as outside temperatures drop.

As an example, your furnace will run longer to maintain an indoor temperature setting of 70 degrees when the outside temperature is minus 21 (actual low temp on Feb. 16) compared to an outside temperature of 30 degrees.

- ▶ **POWER COST ADJUSTMENT:** Each month our members see a power cost adjustment (PCA) to their bill. Sometimes it is an additional amount and sometimes a credit. Our power supplier, KEPCo, determines this adjustment every month, which is dependent upon the fluctuating cost of fuel and purchased power. This is where Bluestem members will see the price adjustments for the energy emergency crisis. The good news is that KEPCo established a cap on the energy/PCA for Bluestem, for the month of February usage, not to exceed \$0.033 per kilowatt-hour. Once Bluestem receives KEPCo's PCA amount, we will calculate the Bluestem PCA and run it through our billing process. As of this time, there are too many unknown factors to determine exactly what the PCA amount will be.

What's the good news?

- ▶ The good news is Bluestem believes we were more protected from market conditions than some other utilities. Given the energy emergency situation, less exposure to the market during this time is viewed as a rea-

sonable safeguard to our members.

- ▶ Bluestem's resources (Wolf Creek, Iatan 2, Federal hydropower allocations and the Sharpe diesel station) generated at their best during the extreme weather situation.
- ▶ KEPCo's contract with its largest supplier provided some additional benefits and protections during this event. Although we feel we had a very small portion of our power supply exposed to the extreme energy market prices during this crisis, we are still concerned about how the exorbitant natural gas prices will affect energy costs moving forward.
- ▶ Any increase in prices caused by this phenomenon has been capped on February's billing. (See power cost adjustment description above.)
- ▶ Members' bills should not be as high as the variable price spikes reported by some Texas customers of retail electric companies because of long-term, stable resources and power supply contracts between KEPCo and its suppliers on Bluestem's behalf. Additionally, our situation is different than Texas. Texans' electric bills were compounded due to the fact they are deregulated at the retail level, which means many consumers have chosen to pay wholesale prices for their power. This approach can be cheaper during good weather but spikes when there is a high demand for electricity and generation capacity shortage, such as what occurred in February.

What happens next?

- ▶ It will take some time for SPP to finalize all the costs associated with the February energy emergency crisis. Bluestem will deal with the costs on a monthly basis and communicate with our members the cost effects from this February event.

What are my options for assistance to pay my bill?

- ▶ Members are encouraged to contact our office to review payment assistance resources and discuss payment arrangement options.
 - ▶ **Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP)** is a federally funded program that helps eligible households pay a portion of their home energy costs by providing a one-time per year benefit. Applications are due by May 28, 2021.
 - ▶ **Budget Billing** is an available payment option to help keep monthly electric bills predictable and manageable. This free option averages electric use over a 12-month rolling period to avoid big fluctuations in monthly bills. Budget bills are trued up once a year on the June bill.
- ▶ Bluestem encourages members to sign up for the SmartHub App where they can closely monitor their daily electrical usage.

NOTICE TO IRRIGATORS

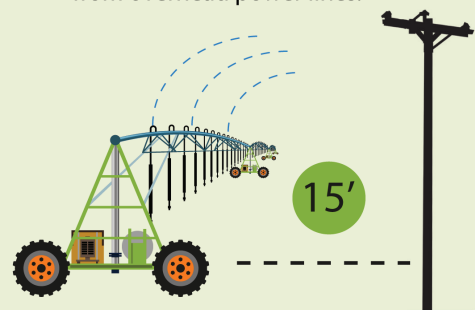
Contract Begins June 1

The contract year for all irrigation services is June 1, 2021, through May 31, 2022. If you need to change the rate for any of your irrigation services for any reason, please notify the office at 800-558-1580 by May 1, 2021.

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, or any current or new irrigation service, please contact the office.

Keep IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT

and **water streams** 15 feet away from overhead power lines.



Keeping the Lights On: What Does an Electric Lineworker Do?

While it takes each employee across all departments to keep operations running smoothly at Bluestem Electric, one of the more visible jobs is that of a lineworker. You may see one of ours working 35 feet (or more) overhead or maintaining lines at ground level.

We entrust your safety to our lineworkers, so they hold a very important job. We also rely on their expertise to power our world.

On any given day or night, and in all kinds of weather conditions, these specialized workers install and maintain overhead and underground electrical systems. Components of these systems include power lines, transformers, fuses, insulators and other related equipment.

Lineworkers must commit to safety above all else. They spend numerous hours in safety trainings each year and must understand and apply crucial safety regulations. Electrical lineworkers are specially trained to:

- ▶ Climb poles to service power lines in areas inaccessible by trucks.
- ▶ Stand in an elevated bucket to assess and repair overhead lines.
- ▶ Install poles, overhead lines and other equipment.
- ▶ Work on both energized and de-energized lines.
- ▶ Install and service underground lines.

Along with their specialized training and knowledge of safety, lineworkers are required to wear protective clothing to

What Does a Lineworker Do?

On any given day or night, in all kinds of weather conditions, lineworkers install and maintain overhead and underground electrical systems.

Their job is crucial as we rely on their expertise to power our world and we entrust our lineworkers with your safety.

Safety Comes First

Lineworkers must commit to safety above all else for the benefit of those they serve (you!), fellow crew members and themselves. They spend hundreds of hours in safety training each year and must learn and apply numerous safety regulations.

They are Specifically Trained to:

- ▶ Climb poles to service power lines in areas inaccessible by trucks.
- ▶ Stand in an elevated bucket to assess and repair overhead lines.
- ▶ Install poles, overhead lines and other equipment.
- ▶ Work on both energized and de-energized lines.
- ▶ Install and service underground lines.



shield themselves as they work around high voltages. Collectively, gear components can weigh up to 45 pounds, the equivalent of carrying around a 5-year-old.

Reporting Your Power Outage by Text

How do I sign up for outage texting?

- ▶ **STEP 1** Check with BEC Office to make sure your cell phone number is listed on your account.
- ▶ **STEP 2** Go to [HTTP://TEXTING.CRC.COOP/DEFAULT.ASPX?U=6727](http://TEXTING.CRC.COOP/DEFAULT.ASPX?U=6727) and follow the instructions as listed on the Member Login page. (See actual member login screen below.)
- ▶ **STEP 3** Once you receive a text verification on your cell phone, you are ready to report an outage at your location(s).

How do I report an outage via text?

- ▶ Text "Outage" to **55050**. If multiple accounts, add a key word after "Outage" — such as home, well, irrigation, etc. — depending on how you have the account listed.
- ▶ When CRC receives your message they will autorespond with "Outage reported."
- ▶ When power is restored you will receive the message "Power Restored."

Member Login

Welcome to the member log-in website for our text messaging service! After completing a few easy steps, you'll have the ability to report power outages faster through the convenience of text messaging from your text-enabled cell phone or mobile device.

Please check with our office to make sure we have your cell phone number in our current database before outage texting can be activated. After registering your cell number with customer service, it may take two business days before you can sign-up for Outage Texting.

Get started today by completing the fields to the right.

Password Strength Requirements:

Minimum Length: 8
 Upper-case Letters: 1
 Lower-case Letters: 1
 Numerals: 1
 Special Characters(e.g.; !@#\$%^&*()+=,.-~): 1

Email:	<input type="text"/>
Password:	<input type="password"/>
Re-enter password:	<input type="password"/>
<input type="button" value="Register"/>	

Already a member? [Log In!](#)