

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Bluestem Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
1000 South Wind Dr., P.O. Box 5  
Wamego, KS 66547  
800-558-1580

[www.bluestemelectric.com](http://www.bluestemelectric.com)



# Bluestem NEWS

## Bluestem Electric Cooperative

### Board of Trustees

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President

**Donald Classen**  
Vice President

**Bruce Meyer**  
Secretary

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### Management Staff

**Michael M. Morton**  
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**Jason W. Moore**  
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Manager of AMI and IT

**Trisha Bradley**  
Manager of Accounting and Finance

**Jerod Chaffee**  
Manager of Line Operations

**Ben Easterberg**  
Manager of AMI and IT

**Kevin Heptig**  
Manager of Member Services

### Contact Us

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## FROM THE MANAGER

# Get Involved! Join us at the Annual Meeting

One of my favorite events is coming up on Monday, March 27, when Bluestem Electric Cooperative will host our annual meeting for you, the members we proudly serve. I always look forward to this event because it's a great opportunity for me and our employees to talk with our members and hear what's on their minds.

We hope you'll join us for the annual meeting, which will take place at the Bluestem Electric Warehouse at 1000 South Wind Drive in Wamego. If you are able to attend, we thank you in advance for getting involved because your participation means so much to us.

During the annual meeting, we will

share a few brief business updates on financial reports, recent projects, and we will have some fun too! We will have tasty cobbler from Vathauer's Catering, ice cream, tea, coffee and several prizes.

Spending time with you and hearing your take on our community's energy future is so important to us. In fact, it's essential because everything we do is shaped by the members of our community. As I'm sure you know, the energy industry is in the midst of changes. Consumer needs



Mike Morton

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## 2023 Bluestem Electric COOPERATIVE ANNUAL MEETING

The 2023 annual meeting will be held at 7 p.m. on March 27, 2023, at the Bluestem Electric Cooperative warehouse in Wamego, Kansas.

The meeting notice will be included in the March issue of *Kansas Country Living* magazine. Please look for this issue as there will not be a separate booklet mailing. Official Notice of the annual meeting will be mailed prior to the meeting. Again, this will be included in March *Kansas Country Living* magazine.

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

MARCH

27

## Keep Your ACH Payment Information Current

If you are signed up for automatic bank draft or recurring credit/debit card payments for your Bluestem Electric account(s), please update your information if you change bank accounts

or get new credit/debit cards. This will ensure that your account will be paid on time and you will avoid any penalty charges.



## Statement of Nondiscrimination

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer. If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at [www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), or at any USDA office, or call 866-632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter by mail to U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax 202-690-7442 or email at [program\\_intake@usda.gov](mailto:program_intake@usda.gov).

## 2022 Teller Committee Selected

Each year, the Bluestem Electric Board of Trustees appoints a teller committee to count and verify the ballots for the election of trustees. The Bluestem Board of Trustees met on Dec. 19, 2022, and appointed the following members to serve on the teller committee:

- ▶ **LABERTA LOHMEYER** – Wamego
- ▶ **MIKE EBERT** – St. George
- ▶ **RANDY MEYER** – Palmer
- ▶ **JANICE GOEHRING** – Westmoreland
- ▶ **ROYCE OHLDE** – Palmer
- ▶ **LARRY MATZKE** – Wheaton
- ▶ **MICHAEL MILLER** – Wakefield
- ▶ **JAY STAMM** – Alma
- ▶ **LOUIS YARROW** – Wakefield
- ▶ **BOB MERTZ** – Manhattan
- ▶ **JAY PETERSON** – Leonardville
- ▶ **ANDREW SYLVESTER** – Westmoreland

The teller committee will meet on **JAN. 4, 2023**, at the Bluestem Electric Cooperative office located at 1000 South Wind Drive in Wamego at 6 p.m. to tabulate and certify the election results.

The results of the election of trustees will be printed in the February edition of Bluestem NEWS located in *Kansas Country Living* magazine.

## Get Involved! Continued from page 12A ▶

and changing technology impact nearly every aspect of how we manage and deliver energy to local homes, schools and businesses.

As we navigate major changes in the coming years, we need to hear from you and your neighbors to help with our planning as we strive to meet the long-term needs of all Bluestem Electric members.

You have a say.

You may be wondering if your opinion really makes a difference, and yes, it does! Gaining guidance and perspective from our members and board helps set priorities for the co-op and guide future decisions. At our annual meeting, we raise issues for voting consideration by the general membership (that's everyone who pays for electric service from Bluestem Electric).

Our board of directors is comprised of eleven members who live and work right here in our local service area, so they are in the best position to know where community investments are most needed. We hope you will consider running for the board in the future — we are always looking for folks who care about our community who would be willing to serve.

Your electric bill is an investment in our community.

This local input means those closest to the community know its needs and priorities and help direct where the co-op's dollars are spent. Every year, we invest funds to make updates to our local system, which helps maintain reliability and grid resilience. Think of it this way: every time you pay your electric bill, you're investing in your community because the money we take in stays here in the local community. By making these investments in our local system, we can ensure you have reliable power for everyday life.

Most consumers likely don't equate active involvement in their electric company with helping their community. But Bluestem Electric is not an ordinary utility company. We're a co-op, and our business model is meant to serve the members and the community in which it operates.

Our core purpose and mission are to provide safe, reliable power. But as a co-op, we're also motivated by service to our community, rather than profits. We hope you'll exercise the benefits of your co-op membership and join us for the annual meeting on March 27. We look forward to seeing you!

# Be Proactive in Preventing Electrical Fires

Take steps to help prevent electrical fires by identifying possible issues before they occur.

When assessing your home, the first step is to hire a qualified electrician to check all wiring to ensure it is up to code and that the electrical system can handle the demands of your electronics, appliances, lights and other electrical needs. Beyond that, watch for possible issues as they arise.

Symptoms of issues include flickering lights, discolored outlets and switch plates, damaged cords, frequently tripped circuit breakers or blown fuses.

Check these electrically related items in your home:

**1 ELECTRICAL OUTLETS:** Check for loose-fitting plugs and loose wall receptacles. Replace missing or broken wall plates. If you have young children, install tamper-resistant outlets if your home does not have them. Avoid overloading outlets with adapters and too many appliance plugs.

**2 GROUND FAULT CIRCUIT INTERRUPTERS (GFCIS):** Make sure GFCIs are installed in your kitchen, bathrooms, laundry room, workshop, basement, garage and outdoor

outlets. GFCIs help protect against electrical shock. Use the test and reset buttons monthly to ensure they are working properly.

**3 CORDS:** Check cords to confirm they are not frayed or cracked. Do not place cords under rugs, tightly wrap them around an object or locate them in high traffic areas. Do not nail or staple cords to walls, floors or other objects.

**4 EXTENSION CORDS:** These are not intended to be permanent solutions, so use them temporarily. If you find that you need more electrical outlets, consult your electrician.

**5 LIGHTBULBS:** Verify that your lightbulbs are the intended wattage for the lamp or fixture they are in.

**6 APPLIANCES/ELECTRONICS:** If an appliance repeatedly blows a fuse, trips a circuit breaker or gives you an electrical shock, it is time to discard it and replace it with a new version. Use surge protectors to protect expensive electronics. Make sure your appliances and electronics are placed in dry locations.

**7 CIRCUIT BREAKERS/FUSES:** Check that circuit breakers are working properly. Fuses should be properly rated for the circuits they protect.

**8 ELECTRICAL WIRING:** If an outlet is not working, it may be an indicator of unsafe wiring. Also, check for loose wires and lighting fixtures. Listen for popping or sizzling sounds behind walls. If light switches are hot to the touch or lights spark and flicker, immediately shut them off at the circuit breaker and contact a qualified electrician to make repairs.

**9 ARC FAULT CIRCUIT INTERRUPTERS (AFCIS):** AFCIs, which monitor the flow of electricity throughout your home, should be properly installed. If an AFCI detects any abnormality, it shuts off the system to prevent a fire. Upon inspection, an electrician can assess whether your home is properly protected.

**10 SERVICE CAPACITY:** If fuses blow or trip frequently, you may need to increase the capacity of your electrical service or add new branch circuits. Contact a qualified electrician.

For more information on electrical safety, visit [SafeElectricity.org](https://www.safepower.org).



## Home Electrical Fires

Fire departments respond to an average of 46,700 home fires each year caused by electrical failure or malfunction.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), over a recent 4-year period:

**30%** happened in cold weather months (Nov. – Feb.)

Fires caused an estimated average of:

- ▶ 390 deaths
- ▶ 1070 injuries



Wiring and related equipment were involved in the greatest number of home electrical fires.

Lighting, a lamp or a bulb, was involved in the second largest number of fires.



## WARNING SIGNS

of electrical issues:



Damaged cords and flickering lights

Discolored outlets and switch plates



Frequently tripped circuit breakers or blown fuses

Hire a licensed contractor to ensure your home's wiring is installed to code and functioning properly.

SOURCE: NFPA'S ELECTRICAL FIRES REPORT, 2022

## Common Causes of Home Electrical Fires



An average of **346,800** home fires occur every year, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Electrical issues (either failure or malfunction) account for 46,700 of those fires.

### Common Causes

Incorrectly installed wiring; overloaded circuits or extension cords; defective or improper plugs, switches or outlets; and misuse or poor maintenance of lighting are common causes.

### Warning Signs

Signs that indicate possible wiring or electrical problems include flickering or dimming lights; discolored cords, outlets or switch plates; switches or outlets that are hot to the touch or emit an odor; and recurring blown fuses and tripped circuit breakers.

### Prevention

Hire a qualified electrician to examine and repair electrical issues in your home. Do not take on do-it-yourself electrical projects if you are not qualified.

# Heating Equipment Leading Cause of Fires

Heating equipment, such as space heaters, kerosene heaters, fireplaces and wood-burning stoves, is a leading cause of fires in U.S. homes, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). The term “homes” includes one-and two-family homes (including manufactured homes), apartments, townhouses and other multi-family dwellings.

During a recent four-year period, local fire departments responded to an estimated average of 48,530 fires involving heating equipment each year. The fires resulted in 500 civilian (non–first responder) deaths, 1,350 civilian injuries and \$1.1 billion in direct property damage, according to NFPA’s Home Heating Fires report published in 2021.

### In Addition:

- ▶ Heating equipment caused one in seven home fires and 19% of home fire deaths.
- ▶ Most home heating fire deaths (81%) included stationary or portable space heaters.
- ▶ More than half of the home heating fire deaths were caused by placing heating equipment too close to things that can burn, such as furniture, clothing, mattresses or bedding.
- ▶ Nearly half (48%) of all home heating fires occurred in the time frame of December, January and February.
- ▶ Failure to clean equipment, such as chimney flues, accounted for a quarter of all heating equipment fires.

In addition, approximately two in five home heating equipment fires involved

items that ran on what is considered solid fuel, such as wood-burning or pellet stoves or wood-burning fireplaces. However, electric-powered heating devices were responsible for the largest share of losses, accounting for more than half of the fatalities, three in five injuries and two-fifths of the property damage.

### Follow These Safety Tips to Use Space Heaters Safely:

- ▶ Read all instructions and use space heaters only as recommended.
- ▶ Do not leave space heaters unattended.
- ▶ Plug them directly into an outlet; most power strips and extension cords are not equipped to handle the energy spikes caused by space heaters cycling on and off.
- ▶ Unplug any other items from the outlet you are using and try to use a dedicated circuit to avoid overload.
- ▶ Keep children and pets away from space heaters.
- ▶ Turn the heaters off before you leave the room or go to sleep.
- ▶ Do not use heaters that are in disrepair or have frayed cords or damaged plugs.
- ▶ Place them on flat, level surfaces and never on furniture, counters or carpet, which can overheat.
- ▶ Unplug and put space heaters away (out of the reach of children) when not in use.

Use space heaters with care.

For additional safety tips, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).

## 2023 Holiday Office Closings

### JANUARY 2

New Years Day

### MAY 29

Memorial Day

### SEPTEMBER 4

Labor Day

### DECEMBER 25

Christmas

### APRIL 7

Good Friday

### JULY 3 & 4

Independence Day

### NOVEMBER 23 & 24

Thanksgiving