

# From the CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER: Better days ahead



**by Craig Eccher**  
*Executive Vice President  
and Chief Operating Officer*

Last year we experienced some of the worst weather conditions in recent memory. We were hit by a severe ice and snowstorm in January, hammered by high winds and a tornado in July and harassed by the remnants of Hurricane Isabel in September.

These forces of nature toppled trees, snapped off limbs and brought down numerous electric lines, leading to some of our most extensive power outages ever.

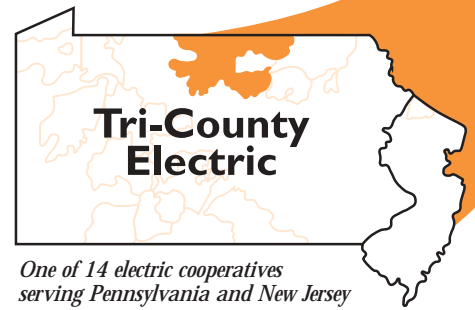
Electric utilities throughout the Northeast — cooperatives and private power companies alike — saw their reliability ratios deteriorate in 2003. Since reliability and customer satisfaction go hand-in-hand, you can be sure we are scrutinizing the events of the past year to look for ways to minimize weather-related outages in the future.

We know the severe weather of the past year put our electrical system to the test like no other. The harsh conditions undoubtedly stressed our system, reducing the longevity of our poles and other equipment and weakening the trees growing near our rights-of-way.

While there is no practical way to totally eliminate damage and outages caused by wind, rain, ice and snow, we can reduce weather-related power interruptions by bolstering our right-of-way maintenance efforts. With that in mind, we have budgeted a significant increase for tree-trimming work in 2004.

The new year will also bring about an increased emphasis and expenditure on circuit-breaker maintenance work and other system-improvement projects. Over the next 12 months, we plan to rebuild approximately 14 miles of circuits, replace about 200 poles and rebuild our substation in Morris.

While our construction and maintenance programs are more aggressive than those of past years, I believe they will pay dividends in improved reliability for years to come.



*One of 14 electric cooperatives  
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey*

In addition to improving our own electric system, we're working closely with FirstEnergy/Penelec, our primary transmission supplier, on reliability issues.

I'm pleased to report that FirstEnergy/Penelec has committed to a number of system improvement projects for the coming year that will directly benefit the cooperative and its members.

While challenging for employees and members alike, the events of the past year also highlighted some of the cooperative's strengths. For one, ability to quickly bring in manpower from our sister companies to assist in power restoration efforts proved to be a major benefit. And we saw what a tremendous asset we have in the C&T Call Center, where operators handled a deluge of calls from members who were without power.

The past year also pointed to areas we need to concentrate on in the future. One thing we hope to improve upon is coordination with groups and agencies that provide additional assistance to members during extended outages. So the next time the lights go off, we will be better able to inform members about where they can go for emergency shelter, seek dry ice, etc.

While I'm optimistic 2004 will treat us more kindly than its predecessor, I want to assure you that when bad weather comes calling, we won't let you down. Our team at Tri-County is committed to safely and quickly restoring your power as soon as possible following an outage.

## Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

22 North Main Street • P.O. Box 526  
Mansfield, PA 16933  
Mansfield – 570/662-2175  
Coudersport – 814/274-8740  
Web Site: [www.tri-countyrec.com](http://www.tri-countyrec.com)  
E-mail: [trico@epix.net](mailto:trico@epix.net)

**For Emergencies call**  
1-800-343-2559

## Robert O. Toombs *President & CEO*

### Staff

Craig Eccher <i>Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer</i>	Michael W. VanBergen <i>Sr. Director, Electric Operations</i>
Annette Fowler <i>Executive Assistant</i>	Bert Cunningham <i>Director, Human Resources</i>
Barbara Johnson <i>Director, Financial Services</i>	Alex F. Hartley <i>Director, Member Services</i>
Ralph Park <i>Sr. Director, Engineering Services</i>	

## Board of Directors

Ferd W. Irish.....	<i>Chairman</i>
Ralph E. Snyder .....	<i>Vice Chairman</i>
Alston A. Teeter.....	<i>Secretary/Treasurer</i>
Donald H. Blackwell	Alfred G. Calkins
James R. Davis	Jay E. Haldeman
Gerald A. Kite	Barbara J. Seeley

## Office Hours

7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Mon.-Fri.)

## Co-op sponsoring workshop for farm members

Tri-County invites farmers with livestock operations to attend a stray voltage workshop Thursday, March 4, in the Youth Building at the Tioga County Fairgrounds in Whitneyville.

This first-time event aims to educate the co-op's agricultural members, particularly those with dairy and swine operations, about stray voltage — its causes, symptoms and remedies, as well as prevention techniques.

Conducting the workshop, which runs from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., will be Dr. Robert E. Graves, a Penn State University professor of agriculture and biological engineering, and Thomas H. Wilson, a Penn State Cooperative Extension agent and agricultural engineer. Technical assistance will be provided by the extension offices of Bradford and Tioga counties.

Topics of discussion will include:

- ✓ What is stray voltage?
- ✓ Stray voltage's effect on animals
- ✓ Standard testing protocol for stray-voltage investigations
- ✓ Determining when stray-voltage mitigation steps should be taken
- ✓ Methods of mitigating stray voltage on and off the farm

The free workshop is being funded by Tri-County as a service to its farm members. Lunch will be provided at no charge to attendees.

Pre-registration is required by February 9. If you have a livestock operation and have not received a registration form, contact Jacki Lawrence, key accounts manager, at 1-800-343-2559.



## Taking stock of stray voltage

**S**tray voltage refers to a small amount of electrical current flowing between two points — a barn floor and a metal drinking bowl, for example — that an animal can touch simultaneously.

While stray voltage usually cannot be detected by humans, some types of livestock, especially dairy cows, are very sensitive to it. Swine farrowing units may also be affected by stray voltage.

By definition, stray voltage is low-level voltage — less than 10 volts. It can produce mild electrical stimulation that may cause stress in the animals, resulting in decreased milk production and higher incidence of mastitis and related health problems.

Stray voltage, or neutral-to-earth voltage, is present in nearly all farm electrical systems. When these ground-based electrical currents exist at sufficient voltage, animals that contact well-grounded equipment, such as metal stanchions or drinking bowls, may receive a shock.

While humans are not nearly as sensitive to stray voltage as livestock, people can sometimes experience a slight tingling sensation from stray voltage,

especially if they have a cut or abrasion near a contact point.

If a person feels an uncomfortable jolt when touching a metal object in the barn, this would not be a stray-voltage issue but would indicate a serious electrical or wiring problem requiring immediate attention.

### Symptoms in cows

Dairy cows exposed to stray voltage can exhibit three general types of symptoms:

- **Behavior Changes.** Cows may hesitate or refuse to approach certain waterers, feeders or metallic equipment and may hesitate before entering the milking parlor or jump across transition joints. They may also tread, kick or appear nervous while milking or show reluctance to consume water or feed. Increased defecation or urination in the milking parlor may also occur.
- **Milking Problems.** Cows may experience poor milk letdown and incomplete or uneven milkout (leaving abnormal amounts of residual milk in one or more

quarters). There may also be an increase in milking time.

- **Poor Production.** Stray voltage may cause increased mastitis as well as lowered milk production.

It is important to remember that these conditions may be caused by sources other than stray voltage, including: poor milking practices, improper feed, poor herd health or poor herd management. All possible causes should be examined to determine the appropriate corrective procedure.

### Sources of stray voltage

Stray voltage can be caused by a number of factors from in and around the farm, as well as nearby off-farm locations. It can result from arcing at equipment connections, frayed insulation and other mechanical problems.

Multiple grounds that are not interconnected can also create ground conditions capable of shocking livestock.

Other common sources of stray voltage include: loose or corroded ground rod connections; dirty or damaged electrical boxes; wires, electrical boxes or motors located in wet or damp areas; accumulation of dust on or around electrical equipment; bent, broken or rusted conduit; insulated wires wrapped around metal pipes; loose, hanging wires; electrical outlet missing third hole



for ground; pinched pulsator wiring; and improperly installed or faulty electrical motors.

### Remedies

There are several things a farmer can do to try to reduce stray voltage.

If the problem originates on the farm, remedies include upgrading the electrical system, replacing faulty equipment and installing heavier equipment grounds or adequate power circuits.

If the problem originates off the farm, contact Tri-County to work out a safe and effective solution. The installation of a neutral isolation transformer on the farm may be advised.

For additional information about stray voltage, contact the cooperative's Member Service Department at 1-800-343-2559 or visit our Web site at [www.tri-countyrec.com](http://www.tri-countyrec.com).



## Watch out for utility impostors

Don't allow impostors to gain entry into your home by posing as Tri-County Rural Electric employees. Normally, the only Tri-County employees with routine business in your neighborhood are our meter readers, servicemen and member services representatives.

Tri-County workers do not perform repairs on household wiring systems. In fact, our employees have instructions NOT to enter customers' homes unless there is an emergency or for pre-arranged visits for services such as conducting energy audits.

Each Tri-County employee carries a laminated plastic identification card with his or her photograph and signature on it. Employees drive vehicles that are clearly marked with Tri-County emblems on the doors.

If you do not recognize our employee, protect yourself by:

- Asking to see identification.
- Calling Tri-County to verify work and employee identities if there is any doubt.
- Looking for clearly marked service vehicles.
- Reporting any suspicious activity to the police.

## Co-op director re-elected to chairmanship

Tri-County Director Alston Teeter was re-elected to a two-year term as chairman of Continental Cooperative Services (CCS) member Allegheny Electric Cooperative during its board meeting in Harrisburg in November.

Teeter has been Tri-County's delegate to the Allegheny Electric board since 1984 and has served as Allegheny's board chairman since 1995.

Allegheny Electric, a generation and transmission cooperative based in Harrisburg, supplies wholesale power to the 13 electric distribution cooperatives in Pennsylvania and one co-op in New Jersey.

Teeter also serves as CCS board vice

chairman. CCS is a strategic alliance between Allegheny Electric Cooperative and Illinois' Soyland Power Cooperative.

A resident of East Smithfield Township, Bradford County, Teeter has served on the Tri-County board of directors since 1979 and currently holds the position of secretary/treasurer.



# Need help paying your heating bills?

**Y**ou can count on the return of winter to bring lower temperatures and higher energy bills. Many low-income homeowners and renters have difficulties keeping up with their energy bills during the cold months.

That's why Tri-County supports Pennsylvania's Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This program provides energy-assistance grants to help low-income households pay their heating bills through the winter.

### To receive help...

- **You don't have to be receiving public assistance**
- **You don't have to have an unpaid heating bill**

- **You can either rent or own your home**

If you are eligible for assistance, a payment will be sent directly to your utility or fuel dealer, and the payment will be credited on your bill. You will receive written notice telling you if you are eligible for assistance and the amount you will receive.

Crisis grants are also available to help those who have emergency situations in which they are in danger of being without heat. Those situations include: having broken heating equipment or leaking fuel lines; being without

fuel; or having utility service terminated.

If you have a heating emergency, please call your county assistance office.

To apply for help from LIHEAP, you will need to provide the assistance office with a recent heating bill, as well as the names, Social Security numbers and proof of income for everyone in your household.

Below are the financial guidelines for acceptance into the program:

Household Size	Maximum Income (before taxes)
1	\$12,123
2	\$16,362
3	\$20,601
4	\$24,840
5	\$29,079
6	\$33,318
7	\$37,557

*For each additional household member add \$4,239*

# Get Yourself Into Hot Water

*...with a new electric water heater from Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative.*

**Y**ou can replace that old, leaky, inefficient tank for as little as \$4.75 a month, when you lease a new water heater from Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative.

An electric water heater is clean, safe and flameless. It is also more energy-efficient than gas or any other type of water heater because it converts more than 90 percent of your purchased electricity into usable hot water.

And when you have a leased electric hot water heater installed, you'll receive a \$125 installation credit from Tri-County.

Tri-County sells and leases electric water heaters as a service to its members. We sell two quality brands, Sepco and American, and carry them in 50-, 80- and 120-gallon models.

Any member who owns a home and has a good credit history can qualify to lease a water heater from Tri-County. With all leased tanks, there is a seven-year service agreement. Tri-County will be responsible for maintenance on the tank during those seven years. After the

seven years are over, members have the option of continuing the lease or assuming ownership of the tank.

A load control receiver is attached to all leased tanks. This timer allows Tri-County to control the flow of electricity to your water heater during times of peak energy demand. All members with load management devices on their water tanks automatically receive a \$5 credit on their electric bills each month. And as long as you are leasing a properly sized water heater for your family's needs, you shouldn't experience any periods of cold water during periods of load management.

Members also have the option of having Tri-County install the water heater or doing the installation themselves.

If you'd like to get into "hot water" with a new electric water heater from Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, call our Mansfield office at (570) 662-2175 or toll free at 1-800-343-2559.

## Replacing A Water Heater? Go Electric!

If you need to replace your water heater, consider installing an electric unit. Why? Because electric water heaters generally use less energy than fossil-fuel types.

Natural gas-fired water heaters cannot be insulated on the bottom, where the major heat exchange takes place between the gas flame and the metal tank. But electric heaters don't have that disadvantage. They can — and most are — fully insulated on the top, bottom and sides.

That means they typically lose less heat when in standby, so that the energy you use to heat your water is used more efficiently, and less of your water heating dollars are wasted.

