

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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1-800-343-2559

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OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO Ending on a positive note



by Craig Eccher

WHAT A momentous year 2008 turned out to be.

On the national level, we witnessed a meltdown on Wall Street that shook our faith in financial institutions, prompted a \$700 billion government bailout package and wreaked havoc on our personal savings plans. We saw crude oil prices hit \$100 a barrel for

the first time in history in February before rocketing to \$147 a barrel by mid-July. With gasoline prices exceeding \$4 a gallon, everyone was feeling pain at the pump, and many in the Northeast were wondering how they would heat their homes this winter as prices for heating oil, propane and natural gas soared heading into fall.

And fall turned out to be a fitting name for the season. In October, the Dow Jones experienced its largest weekly decline in history — 18 percent. The silver lining: With the stock market in free-fall, a slowing economy and a global drop in petroleum demand, gas and oil prices fell to levels we haven't seen in well over a year. Which direction energy prices are headed in the weeks and months ahead is anyone's guess.

So on the eve of a new year, we are left to wonder about the future of energy costs and the impact of a new presi-

dential administration. I think it's safe to say we can expect 2009 to bring with it a new set of challenges and change for the nation.

We did see some positive change on the legislative front in the waning months of 2008. There was a tremendous boost in federal dollars available through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which should help struggling families across the nation keep up with their heating bills this winter.

At the state level, recently passed legislation will provide grants, tax credits and low-interest loans to homeowners who seek to reduce their energy costs through energy efficiency and conservation measures and alternative energy projects. Look for details about these programs, expected to be available in early 2009, on the state Department of Environmental Protection website at www.depweb.state.pa.us.

As always, if you have questions about energy efficiency and conservation projects, please contact our member services department. Our staff would be more than happy to provide you with information about the various programs and technologies that may be able to help you save on your energy costs.

On behalf of all of us here at Tri-County Rural Electric, I'd like to wish our members and their families a safe and joyous holiday season. ☀

Taken by Storm

A battle plan for conquering winter outages

BY JEFF FETZER

WINTER'S ARRIVAL always brings heightened chances of wet, heavy snow and ice storms. Toss some high winds into the mix, and you have the perfect storm for power outages.

When nasty weather slams the region and causes widespread outages, an all-out effort ensues at Tri-County to restore power as quickly and safely as possible.

Leading the charge is Tri-County's engineering and operations team. Department director John Lykens, along with manager of field operations Gary Dunn, field operations supervisor Gerald Duffee and engineering technician Phil Plumley, work together to assess the scope of the outage, coordinate personnel and map out a strategy for getting the lights back on.

When major storm-related outages strike, the team's first action is to assess what parts of the distribution system are without power. This task is accomplished with the aid of Tri-County's outage management system (OMS), a sophisticated, computer-based software package that reliably predicts the portions of the co-op's electric distribution system that are without electric service based on telephone calls from members reporting they are without power.

During the hectic initial hours of a major storm-related outage, Lykens determines if any of the outages are related to loss of transmission supply to cooperative substations, monitors the scope of the outage and keeps an eye on the weather.

"Our first priority is to keep our three-phase up and running because they tie our substations together and allow us to do switching," says Lykens.

**To report a power outage, call
Tri-County at
1-800-343-2559
or
570/662-2175**



COORDINATING THE PLAN: Tri-County engineering technician Phil Plumley dispatches line crews during the early stages of a winter storm outage that struck the cooperative service territory late last winter.

"Next, we concentrate on getting the largest number of members on in the shortest amount of time."

While the line crews begin making repairs, the cooperative's staking engineers and other employees with knowledge of the electric system are tasked with patrolling the lines to assess the extent of the damage and responding to 911 calls regarding wires that have fallen across roadways.

"They can tell the crews if there is a tree down, a broken pole, wires on the ground, etc.," reports Lykens. "They are our eyes out in the field."

The so-called "bird dogs" are utilized for storm assessment the first 24 to 36 hours of an outage. After that, they serve as guides for work crews from outside companies, flag roadways and transport materials.

Back in the office, Lykens and his staff monitor reports from the outage management system and listen to observations from the field in order to determine if crews from outside the organization will be needed to assist with restoration efforts.

"It's my job to make the call to get outside help and coordinate that," notes Lykens. "We always look internally first, to our C&T-affiliated companies — Citizens' Electric Co., Wellsboro Electric Co. and Claverack REC. We are all in the same area, so the response time is quickest when we bring in crews from our own family of companies."

But because all of the C&T operating companies are located in the same region of the state, major storm outages can affect all of them simultaneously. When that happens, Lykens contacts the cooperative's statewide organization, Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, and asks for its help in summoning assistance from other Pennsylvania cooperatives.

While every storm outage is different in scope and size, Lykens said the general battle plan for restoring power usually looks like this:

- ▶ Restore power to substations
- ▶ Repair three-phase lines, followed by three-phase tap lines
- ▶ Repair single-phase taps
- ▶ Restore individual residential services,

and finally, restore seasonal services.

In the early stages of a major outage, the cooperative utilizes two employees, Phil Plumley in the eastern portion of the service territory and Gerald Duffee in the west, to dispatch crews to outage sites. During extended restoration efforts, the dispatchers compile a list of outages for the co-op's five service districts — Liberty, Mainesburg, Westfield, Coudersport, and Germania — first thing each morning. Those lists are faxed to the district crew chiefs so they can direct their crews' work activities for the day.

"When you get into a major storm outage," Lykens notes, "you need to really know the distribution system in order to dispatch crews. And nobody knows the individual district systems better than our line crew chiefs."

Lykens noted that safety is always the top priority when battling storm-related outages, which typically require crews to work long hours in adverse conditions.

"I always likened big storm outages to controlled chaos," Lykens says. "Even for those of us in the office, the adrenaline level is way up. We place a lot of pressure on ourselves because we want to get members restored as soon as possible."

Members can also help speed along the



MR. FIX-IT: Co-op lineman Todd Rumsey prepares to re-string electric wire that had been pulled to the ground in the Westfield area during a snow-induced outage in early March.

restoration process by calling the cooperative to report they are out of power.

"Members need to call in," Lykens emphasizes. "They should never assume their neighbor called in. And when they do call to report an outage, we appreciate any additional information they can give us that may help us restore power more quickly." ☀

Reporting a power outage

Even with the advances of our computerized outage system, members still play a vital role in the co-op's power restoration efforts.

The more information you are able to provide, the sooner Tri-County can have you and your neighbors back in service.

Here are seven simple steps to follow when an outage occurs:

1. Never attempt to fix or move an electric line yourself. Fallen lines often remain energized. Contact with live wires can result in injury or death.

2. Check your circuit breakers and fuses. If nothing appears out of the ordinary, see if your neighbors are also out of service.

3. Call 1-800-343-2559 or 570/662-2175 to report an outage. These numbers are answered by our operators 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

4. Provide the telephone number of

the account that is out of service. Our operators can quickly pull up your account information and map location by typing your telephone number into the outage management system.

5. Report when you lost power. If you are unsure of the exact time, please tell us and offer your best estimate. Also report if all or only some of your lights are out, or whether your lights are flickering or dim.

6. Check on your neighbors. Tell the Tri-County operator whether or not your neighbors have electricity.

7. Give us the details. Be sure to tell our operators any additional information that may be related to the outage or helpful to our crews. Report the occurrence of downed lines, trees on electric wires, sparking transformers, flashes of light, explosions or unusual noises, broken poles, tree-blocked roadways, car accidents, etc. ☀

Taking stock of your outage preparedness

Power outages can strike at any time, but they are particularly challenging — and potentially dangerous — during the winter months when accompanied by severe weather.

Will you be ready if the lights go out this winter? Maybe it's time to do a little preparation so when the next winter storm-related outage occurs, you're not totally left in the dark.

A home survival kit and emergency food and water supply can go a long way toward ensuring your safety during extended power outages that leave you confined to your home.

In the confusion of severe weather accompanied by an outage, you'll want to be sure to have the following items on hand:

- ▶ Portable, battery-powered AM/FM radio
- ▶ Flashlights
- ▶ Extra batteries
- ▶ Manual can opener and bottle opener
- ▶ Cellular or standard telephone that does not require electricity in order to function. (Most cordless phones require electricity.)
- ▶ First-aid kit, medications and prescriptions
- ▶ Three to five-day supply of non-perishable foods that need little or no cooking and are high in nutrition. Be sure to pack any special dietary foods, baby food and formula, if needed.
- ▶ Water: One gallon per person per day for drinking, cooking, washing and sanitation. Store as much clean water as possible in clean, nonbreakable containers.
- ▶ Extra pet food
- ▶ Personal hygiene and sanitary supplies, diapers
- ▶ Ice chest and ice or frozen ice packs
- ▶ Camp stove or canned-heat stove and enough fuel for three to five days
- ▶ Candles and matches or a lighter

SAFETYzone

**Season's Greetings from all of us at
Tri-County Rural Electric**

President and CEO: Craig Eccher

**Board of Directors: Donald Blackwell, Alfred Calkins,
James Davis, Lowell Geiser, Ferd Irish,
Gerald Kite, Nick Reitter, Barbara Seeley, Alston Teeter**

**Employees: Annette Bender, Jim Boyden, Steve Brewster,
Rosemary Bryan, Bryan Berguson, Thomas Campbell,
Judith Dickerson, John DeWitt, Gerald Duffee, Gary Dunn,
Kristie Earle, Jeff Everett, Mike Filer, David Gibson,
Duane Gross, Ron Hagar, George Harer, Mary Higgins,
Greg Inman, Barbara Johnson, Betty Leet, Mike Lewis
John Lykens, Brenda Main, Bob Mathers, Joe Mickey,
Tim McCurdy, Eric McRoberts, Chris Payne, Jason Perkins,
Phil Plumley, Anthony Rachiele, Forrest Rathbun, Penny Root,
John Rotello, Heidi Roupp, Todd Rumsey, Steve Salada,
Ron Sawyer, Ron Scott, Randy Sickler, Shawn Simonds,
Randy Smith, Wade Snyder, Gerry Songster, James Succowich,
Rick Tavares, Lorraine Thompson, Brian White, Rocky Wiedman,
Mark Whitney, Donald Williammee, Lori Wojnarek**

**Decorate safely
for the holidays**

Holiday decorations help make this a magical time of year, but they must be handled with care. Each year, fires during the holiday season injure 2,600 individuals and cause more than \$930 million in damage, according to the United States Fire Administration. This is largely due to the misuse of electrical products and decorations.

Here are some tips for using electrical products safely during the holidays:

- Use lights and other electrical decorations certified by recognized, independent testing firms such as Underwriters Laboratories.
- Carefully inspect each light before plugging it into a socket. Cracked, frayed, loose or bare wires may cause a serious electric shock or start a fire.
- Never nail or staple light strings or extension cords or support them in any way that might damage the cord's insulation.
- Do not connect more than three light string sets together.
- Do not overload extension cords.
- Do not allow children or pets to play with electrical decorations.
- Always turn off decorations before leaving home or going to bed.

**Co-op gift certificates
make great stocking stuffers**

Still looking for last-minute gift ideas? Gift certificates from your electric co-op make an ideal holiday stocking stuffer. Give the gift of electricity to that hard-to-buy-for relative or to the family down the road struggling to make ends meet. A Tri-County gift certificate could brighten the holidays for someone in your life.

Simply fill out this form and return it to Tri-County with your check for the amount of the gift.

Recipient's Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Tri-County Account Number: _____

Amount of Gift: _____

From: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Mail the certificate to: _____

Holiday Closings

Tri-County's offices
will be closed on the
following days during
the holidays:

**December 24-25 –
Christmas
January 1 –
New Year's Day**