

WEC CO-OP CURRENTS



In These Times

Looking Out For Each Other

The theme song from the TV crime/comedy series “Monk,” written by Randy Newman, contains a familiar line: “It’s a jungle out there.”

But as cold weather and economic insecurity settle into our part of the world simultaneously, it’s a good time to forget about “the law of the jungle” and act like civilized folks who look after one another. Both formally and informally, workers at Washington Electric Co-op are making that effort.

Susan Golden, WEC member services supervisor, and Operations Director Dan Weston, have had discussions with their staffs about this. As the department that handles members’ bill payments and usually answers the phone, Member Services has something of a window into how people in the community are doing. Similarly, the Operations staff – linemen and engineers who are out in the community every day – are the eyes and ears of the Co-op.

“We had a discussion last week during a morning crew meeting,” said Weston, who meets at 7 a.m. each day with the linemen and operations workers to hand out job assignments and go over the day’s work plan. “We talked about how the economy is not too good, people are out of work, there’s less money to pay bills. Times are hard for a lot of people. You could say it’s not their job, but I’ve let our crew know that when they’re out in the countryside working and they see something that concerns them, they

shouldn’t ignore it.

“Our priority is maintaining our electric system,” Weston continued. “But in addition to the work of state agencies and other groups, when it gets right down to it it’s neighbors and people taking an active role that I think makes all the difference.”

An important part of that concept is neighbors taking a moment to think of each other. Except in major storms, Washington Electric doesn’t have a way to know about outages unless we hear from someone. One morning in early December the weather was so cold (5 degrees below zero) that a splice in one of the power lines snapped. A small number of people lost power – just the kind of circumstance that can cause hardship but which can take a while for the Co-op to find out about. Outages might affect as few as three, two, or even one person.

“That’s why we hope people will just have their eye out for each other,” said Weston, “especially if the neighbor is someone who’s elderly or in a difficult situation.”

When bills are unmanageable

Susan Golden has had similar conversations with her Member Services staff.

Sometimes they pick up signals – missed payments, a pattern of late or incomplete payments – that indicate a household is having trouble. WEC

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The Co-op held the first of its annual community meetings at the Methodist Church in Middlesex, in October when there were still leaves and six o’clock sunsets.

Good Food, Good Company, Good Rates Big Turnouts at Middlesex and Waits River Community Meetings

WEC went visiting again in October, as it does every fall, choosing two towns in the Co-op’s 41-town service area, throwing a dinner, and inviting members out to socialize and talk electricity. It’s amazing how hot a topic electricity is these days – enough to draw a crowd of 58 people in Middlesex on Thursday, October 9, and a full house of 96 (our largest ever) the following week (October 16) in Waits River.

Or maybe it was the chicken pie. WEC has held community meetings every October since 2003 at two locations each year, recognizing that the owners of a company – in this case, a cooperatively owned electric utility – have a right to know what’s going on, and to ask questions and register their opinions for board members and

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Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

The Co-op is in good shape as the new year arrives, but the path is not always easy. See Barry Bernstein’s annual recap on page 2.

A mighty storm, but not for us. WEC escapes major damage in severe Northeastern storm. Page 3.

Quick turnaround. Be ready for electronic check processing, starting in January. Page 3.

Don’t place your bets on fuel costs. WEC’s Energy Coach says the smart money is on conservation. Page 6.



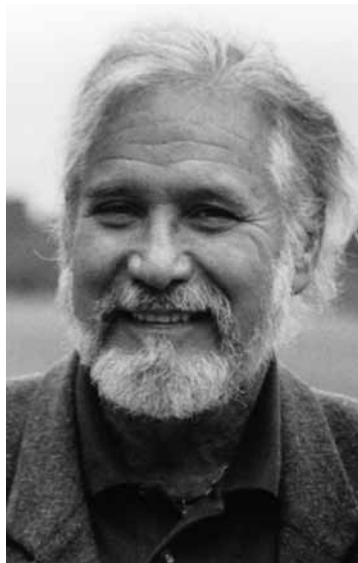
The Board of Directors has appointed Andrea Colnes to fill a board vacancy. Andrea is pictured here with her daughter Jesse.

President's Report

Recapping The Highs And Lows Of A Significant Co-op Year

By Barry Bernstein

2008 will be memorable for many of us as the year when we lost a long-time friend, Wendell Cilley of West Topsham. Wendell was a Vermonter of several generations, and a Co-op member most of his life, and served on the Board of Directors from 1993 until his death in September.



2008 also marked the greatest U.S. and worldwide economic collapse since the Great Depression. In the spirit of Wendell's commitment to the Co-op and to our greater community, and his belief that every person deserves respect and that we're all each other's neighbors, I ask that we each keep an eye on our neighbors, friends, family, and anyone who will feel the pressure not only of a difficult winter but also of what's shaping up to be an extremely difficult economic turndown.

With this in mind, my New Year's resolution, as the president of your board and on a personal level, is to not lose sight of those in our community who need a helping hand, and not to forget how important it is that we take action at the local and state level to meet the challenges of global warming. This involves tasks as small as replacing all the lights in our homes and

businesses with compact fluorescent bulbs, buying the most efficient new products when our appliances need replacing, and being conscious of our driving patterns.

Our Co-op has made a conscious effort since the early 1990s to be more environmentally aware as we make decisions that affect our future. We will continue to be diligent in our decisions concerning long-term planning for power, the equipment we purchase

for our distribution and transmission infrastructure, in our internal operations, and in reaching out to our membership to offer help in their efforts to conserve and use electricity efficiently. We need each other to meet the challenges of a changing world.

Highlights in 2008

New Board director: On behalf of your Board and the WEC membership I want to welcome Andi Colnes, from East Montpelier, as a new director. I know she will be a valuable addition. Andi, who was selected to fill Wendell's seat on the board, will serve until the May elections, as explained on page 8 of this issue of *Co-op Currents*. I also want to sincerely thank the four other WEC members who put their names forth for consideration as candidates. We were truly blessed to have such a qualified group of members to make our decision from.

Cycle Billing: The Co-op instituted a new billing regime – three billing cycles per month, rather than trying to bill all members at the same time. While we know that the changeover caused confusion for some people, Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden and the member service representatives worked with people to minimize the inconvenience to any members affected. The changeover has spread out the workload for our staff, making their duties more manageable; it also enables each member's bills to more accurately reflect their usage in real time, rather than a month later (as had been the case). Special thanks to our Member Services Department for their work during the transition, and to our

members for their understanding and cooperation during the changeover.

New staff: Apprentice linemen Jason Preston and Doug LaPierre began work in March. New lineman Amos Turner is starting on December 15, coming to us from Barton Village Electric Department.

Finances: It has been a year and a half since Cheryl Willette joined the Accounting Department as our new director of finance. Her expertise and skills have been a great addition to an already excellent department, as was evidenced when Cheryl conducted a daylong retreat for the board on WEC finances, including the 2009 capital and operating budgets. Like other utilities, WEC is experiencing a trend in decreasing kWh sales, which we are tracking monthly. We had been projecting a 1.3-percent average growth in our retail power sales, but instead sales have followed a flat trajectory. We know this is due to several factors, including better energy efficiency in products, weather variance, and the economy as evidenced by fewer new-member hookups.

WEC's Construction Work Plan (CWP): We have ended the first year of our four-year (2008-2011) construction plan, which will guide continued upgrades of our distribution system. In 2009 we will begin the process of rebuilding our substation in East Montpelier, slated for completion in 2010. We will then have rebuilt and modernized five or our eight substations – the heart of our distribution system.

Right-of-Way: As part of your Co-op's comprehensive efforts to improve reliability under the direction of Director of Operations Dan Weston, Right-of-Way Coordinator Mike Myers, and with the help of our WEC employees and right-of-way contractors, your Board of Directors has continued to approve increases in our ROW budget.

Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.
www.vermontcooperatives.coop

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The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Deborah Brown, 802-223-5245.

Members Write

Co-op Currents welcomes letters to the editor that address any aspect of the Co-op's policies and operations, or any matters related to electricity. Readers can write to *Co-op Currents*, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651. Letters to the editor will not be published in the Annual Meeting (April) issue.

'Sort of Magnificent'

(Co-op member and former WEC Director Dan Wing, of Cookeville, forwarded the following letter to *Co-op Currents*, which was written to him by a friend living in Kiel, a port city of 240,000 on the Baltic Sea in northern Germany.)

Yesterday I took a bike ride north along the fiord. At the Baltic I went east with the wind at my back until I came to a series of wind turbines. You see these everywhere in Europe. I don't know how much they contribute to the power grid here, but I've come to think that they are far from unsightly. Instead, they seem sort of magnificent and grand.

By the way, I drove up to the closest one. No dead birds (and the birds are flocking and flying south right now in Kiel). And the noise is minimal; the cars passing by make more noise than the wind turbine.

Love to all,
Jim (Sullivan)

We have also continued to support our danger tree-removal program and an accelerated systematic examination and treatment of the system's 24,000 distribution poles. These programs reduce outages and extend the life of our system's infrastructure. The pole-treatment program – an eight-year project – will be completed in 2011. It will extend the lifecycle of WEC's pole plant, saving our members thousands of dollars. We extend special thanks to our employees who have been involved in this effort, which will help keep our lights on during storms and the rest of the year.

Storms: We had a very wet spring and summer but were lucky in not getting hit with a seasonal storm when the leaves were still on the trees in October. Non-storm-related reliability at the Co-op continues to improve. WEC experienced moderate to below-average storm-related outages in 2009, with the month of May having accounted for 25 percent of "consumer-hours out" (approximately 24,000 hours total).

Coventry plant – increased production and a new (fifth) engine: After 95 percent of voting members on October 7 supported an expansion of the Coventry generating plant and installation of the fifth engine, your Co-op immediately began work on the project. We hope to have the new engine in operation next spring (2009), leading to an increase in power production of additional 10 million kilowatt-hours over the next two years. This will bring our generation to at least 60 million kWh/year at the plant in 2011.

Special thanks to Dan Weston and to Denise Jacques, director of administrative services, for their continued commitment to the Coventry plant and its successful operation.

It takes a team to make any project successful, so our thanks also go out to all the WEC employees who work on the project, to Jack Friedman and Scott Wilson of IES (Innovative Energy Solutions), our plant operators; and to Lenny Wing and the Casella folks at the Coventry landfill who work to keep the production up to feed our hungry engines. The project also would not be possible without the help of our general counsel Joshua Diamond, WEC's engineering consultant John Murphy of Stantec, and Brian Beaudoin of Casella's consulting firm Sanborne & Head (who is also a WEC member).

Wrightsville: Power production from our hydroelectric plant on the Winooski River in Middlesex in 2008 will exceed 3,100,000 kWh – the total as of November 31 was 3,100,407 – well above our 10-year average at the plant of 2,683,812 kilowatt-hours. For this, we thank the weather, but also our WEC employees Steve Anderson and George Mears, who oversee the operation of this facility.

First Wind's Sheffield wind project: The wind electric-generation proposal in the Town of Sheffield received approval by the Vermont Public Service Board (PSB) on August 8, 2007, becoming the first commercial-scale wind project approved since Green Mountain Power's Searsburg project in 1997. We are still awaiting a final decision from the

Vermont Supreme Court on the appeal filed by opponents, and are hopeful that the court will uphold the PSB decision and that construction of this important renewable-energy resource can get underway this summer.

WEC's new rate design: A reconfigured rate design and a cost-of-service study, the first in over a decade, will be re-filed in early 2009 with the PSB and reviewed by the Vermont Department of Public Service. We hope the rate design will be approved before summer, as we believe it represents the fairest allocation of costs among the various classes of Co-op members. It also sets a framework that reflects what our energy costs are and will be as global markets recover from the present downturn and wholesale energy prices (and demand) inevitably go back up.


Taking the 'Pledge': We launched our Pledge program in April to help members improve energy efficiency and conservation measures in their homes, providing savings and lowering the Co-op's energy requirements and peak load. Some 900 members thus far are participating – installing efficiency measures, replacing older appliances with more efficient ones, and measuring the reduction in their monthly energy usage. The information from this initial group should help us better understand how to best serve our membership in the future.

Legislation: We continue to advocate for an increased effort at the state and federal levels to help Vermonters make their homes and businesses more energy efficient in their use of fuels, and to ensure that Vermont's power supply becomes more renewable and less dependent on fossil fuels and nuclear power.

Special Thanks And Seasons Greetings

I want to thank my fellow board members, and our board officers – Vice-President Roger Fox, Treasurer Don Douglas, Secretary Marion Milne – our general manager, Avram Patt, and our management staff for their work which helps our Co-op run effectively. The many hours, and the thought and planning that goes into their decisions is often unseen and unrecognized. We owe them our gratitude

Please remember that we look forward to hearing from you, our members. WEC is your Co-op. We are fortunate to have a great Co-op and a team effort which I am proud to be a part of.

As 2008 winds down and we move into the New Year, I want to thank all our WEC employees – and their families, who support the work they do – for their work and commitment to our Cooperative. In closing I would like to wish all of our members, your families, and our employees and their families a very healthy and happy holiday season and a great New Year. 

Close Call, And A Coordinated Effort Following December Storm

On Friday, December 12, New England and New York State experienced a "nor'easter" that cut off power to 1.5 million homes and businesses and in some places rivaled the damage caused by the infamous ice storm of 1998. The region spent several days thereafter recovering from the storm and attempting to reconnect customers who were disconnected.

Damage for Washington Electric Co-op was mostly limited to a pocket of towns in the southeastern part of our service territory – Vershire, Tunbridge, Topsham, and Corinth. WEC made service calls through the night on Friday. In all, 760 Co-op homes and businesses were affected, with 274 the maximum out at any one time.

"We were fortunate that the freezing rain stopped when it did or the damage to our system would have continued to grow," said WEC Operations Director Dan Weston.

It was the kind of storm that called for a coordinated, region-wide response. Weston and WEC General Manager Avram Patt participated in several statewide emergency-coordination calls with other electric and telecom utilities, along with state officials and local meteorologist Roger Hill. Utilities also pitched in to help each other in the field, some companies sending crews long distances to restore power. The Hardwick Electric Department sent a crew to assist Washington Electric on Friday, "which we greatly appreciated," said Weston.

In turn, the Co-op sent two crews to New Hampshire for the weekend to help the New Hampshire Electric Co-op, where more than 30,000 members were out of power. The crews returned on Sunday, and on Monday night WEC dispatched more workers to NHEC. On Tuesday (December 16) the Co-op put its off-road track digger on a truck and sent it, along with operators, to assist Central Vermont Public Service in southern Vermont. Repairs and clean-up were ongoing when *Co-op Currents* went to press.

WEC To Begin Electronic Check Processing

Washington Electric Cooperative is moving to an electronic check-processing system, which will mean that for members who pay their electric bills by check – currently the majority of our members – the checks will usually be cleared at the bank more quickly. The Co-op expects to make this change effective with the January 2009 billing cycle.

"This technology streamlines the process for us," explains Member Services Director Susan Golden. "We're doing it to become more efficient and cut down on extraneous time we've been spending by processing all the checks manually."


Another beneficial aspect of electronic check-processing will be to provide the Co-op images of both the checks and the stubs when they are returned. When members call with questions about their payments, the electronic record will enable our member services representatives to respond immediately and accurately to their concerns.

"We'll have the information right in front of us," says Golden.

Primarily, though, it will be important

for members, managing their checking accounts, to be aware that the Co-op will be charging their accounts more quickly.

And here's a timely reminder of an alternative: WEC offers an automatic payment option in which the member authorizes the Co-op to debit payment of the electric bill from his or her checking or savings account. Members receive, ahead of time, a mailed statement from the Co-op that informs them of the amount to be withdrawn at a later date. Automatic payment is an alternative that many members find easier, more convenient, and less expensive than mailing their checks, and it guarantees that there will be no missed payments. Coupled with budget billing – our program that establishes year-round payments for the same amount each month, based on a member's average electricity use – the automatic payment option enables people always to know how much money will be withdrawn and when, a convenience that users of these plans find helpful.

People interested in direct payment are encouraged to contact the Co-op to learn more and sign up. 

Community Meetings

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management to hear. In September the Co-op provides a bill insert notifying members when and where the meetings will be held. Most folks come for dinner, too, which requires a \$5 reservation per person, one of the last great bargains. This year Greg and Patricia Whitchurch, who live in Middlesex, decided to drive over to the Waits River meeting instead, because, Greg said, "We liked the menu better."

At every location a community group provides the food and keeps the proceeds.

This year's meetings were hosted by the Middlesex United Methodist Church and the Waits River Methodist Church.

The October 16 meeting in Waits River seemed particularly poignant. Many Co-op members, and much of WEC's staff, had been at the church just a month earlier for the memorial service for Co-op board member Wendell Cilley. The location had been selected before Wendell's unexpected death on Labor Day.

"We're glad to see so many people coming out from Wendell's community," said General Manager Avram Patt after a dinner in the church's packed dining room. "Because that's what Wendell was all about. We're glad you came out to share a meal, and to support the Co-op. As many of you know, the Co-op brought electricity to your community almost 70 years ago."

Some people actually remembered. Estelle Jackson, 98, of Corinth Corners, sat in one of the pews with her daughter Lois by her side. Both could recall when power reached their remote community in the 1940s, when Lois was a small child.

In Middlesex, Gertrude Murphy of Moretown had similar long memories of Co-op service. A member since 1946, Mrs. Murphy has been a customer of rural electricity long enough to appreciate how much labor and attention it takes to maintain a power infrastructure in the rugged countryside. So when she spoke up to praise WEC's

linemen at the Middlesex meeting – "They do a good job," she announced – people applauded heartily.

Rates steady for now...

Longtime Co-op members like Estelle Jackson and Gertrude Murphy, and a great many of the folks at both community meetings, have seen significant changes at Washington Electric. One of those changes concerns how much Co-op members pay for their power compared to the customers of other Vermont utilities. That comparison has changed in the Co-op's favor over the past decade.

"We were well known for having the highest bills in the state of Vermont," said Patt at the Middlesex meeting. "There were many reasons, mostly having to do with the cost of serving rural areas. But it was not a great honor."

However, Washington Electric hasn't filed for a rate increase since 1999. Meanwhile, other Vermont electric utilities have had, in some cases double-digit, increases. "I don't think any other utility in the country has not raised its rates in that time," said Patt. "Our rates and bills are now more comparable to other utilities in Vermont, and in some cases they're lower."

Patt distinguished "rates" from "bills" because bills are what we pay.

"The critical thing is how much electricity you use," Patt explained. WEC has worked hard to help its members bring their usage under control, through demand-side management programs in the 1990s that helped people move away from costly electric heat, to the Pledge program today, which helps participants identify energy inefficiencies in their homes and provides assistance and incentives to help them lower their usage. (See "Energy Coach," page 6.)

"But the biggest reason our rates

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"But the biggest reason our rates

"The biggest reason our rates have held steady is Coventry. Our wholesale costs have gone down. That's unheard of in today's power economy."



The community meeting at the Waits River Methodist Church attracted several generations of Co-op members. At top, Estelle Jackson, 98, of Corinth Corners attends with her daughter Lois, while (bottom) a few rows ahead of them sat a younger WEC couple.

have held steady is Coventry," said Patt. In 2005 WEC constructed an electric-generating station that runs

on methane gas produced by organic decomposition at the NEWSVT landfill in the Orleans County town of Coventry. It is the state's largest landfill, and it has proved to be a source of abundant power – supplying more than half of

WEC's electricity – at a production cost below today's average market rates.

"Our wholesale costs have gone down," said Patt. "That's unheard of in today's power economy."

The Coventry plant has produced other benefits, as well. The landfill's methane output has increased, which was expected because the landfill held state permits allowing it to expand. Still, the increase has come more rapidly than WEC's consultants expected, so Washington Electric has added more methane-fueled engines at its power house to generate electricity. The October community meetings followed, by mere days, the latest membership vote, which approved the installation of



Washington Electric Co-op is a community institution that is owned by the people it serves. With energy an important issue these days, members turned out in record numbers in Middlesex (above, left) and Waits River (right) to participate and remain informed.



Members listening to presentations from WEC managerial staff in Middlesex.

a fifth engine to take advantage of the available methane gas.

This power output has actually produced an electricity surplus for the Co-op, when combined with power sources under contract.

What to do with the extra electricity? Sell it!

“WEC has been selling about 9.5 percent of its supply into the New England grid,” Patt informed the folks in

Waits River.

This is one of two sources of financial income created by Coventry power. The other is renewable energy credits (RECs), which the Co-op sells in Massachusetts, where electricity retailers must comply with Massachusetts rules requiring them to obtain a portion of their power from renewable energy sources.

And as WEC President Barry

Bernstein said in Waits River, Coventry can be expected to keep on giving.

“The landfill will continue to expand,” said Bernstein. “Eventually we’ll want to construct another building – a new generating station – near another section of the landfill. We would probably purchase a new engine and move one of the engines over from the existing building.”

Any such project would require


approval by the state Public Service Board and another vote of the membership. Bernstein speculated that this could happen “around 2013 to 2014.”

But...

So does all this spell out a future for Washington Electric with no rate hikes? In the long term, no. As Patt reminded listeners in Middlesex, “Nothing lasts forever.”

“Costs of materials go up, costs for our trucks go up, the cost of fuel generally goes up, costs for staff go up,” said Patt. Yet revenue from the sale of electricity has been flat. “We add about 100 or 200 new Co-op members most years, but Vermonters and Co-op members are conserving.”

Nor can the Co-op count on selling renewable energy credits forever. For example, if Vermont institutes a “Renewable Portfolio Standard” requiring utilities to prove that a portion of their power comes from renewable resources, WEC would need some of those RECs itself.

Certainly it’s been a good ride – coming on 10 years without a rate increase – and it’s not over yet. The message to the good folks who came out to join their Co-op leadership at the Methodist churches in Middlesex and Waits River was that these are good times for the Co-op, which has steered its course well in the power market of the early 21st century. 

WEC’s Pitch Man

Powell Plugs Protection at Community Meetings

“How many people have satellite TVs?”

Bill Powell, WEC director of member services, posed the question to a roomful of Washington Electric Co-op members at the Waits River Methodist Church on October 16.

Dozens of hands went up. Even people who weren’t previously moved to purchase satellite systems are doing so now because of the approaching end of analogue broadcasts on February 17, 2009. That deadline is also spurring rural people, as well as sports bars and city dwellers, to purchase high-definition, flat-screen TVs.

Surveying the raised hands, Powell followed up with another question.

“How many people have their televisions plugged into a surge protection device?”

All the hands went down.

“Okay folks,” said Powell, shrugging. “You’ve got a lot of money invested in those TVs...”

Powell was pitching surge-protection devices that are available through Washington Electric Cooperative. WEC invests money and technology in “power quality” – the effort to keep the voltage steady on its power lines – but any electric distribution system is susceptible to incidents that can cause surges. Surges can also occur within a home’s own wiring. And a surge can fry a television’s circuitry – or a computer’s, or any electronic device.

Powell used his moments at the Middlesex and Waits River community meetings to encourage members to safeguard their investments. He held up a “whole house surge protector,” a device about the size of a gumball dispenser, which fits under the Co-op’s meter. Rather than attaching separate protective power strips around the house, a whole house surge protector can be installed at the meter to do what its name implies – check power surges everywhere.

(Information on this product can be found in the “WEC Co-op Store” in each issue of *Co-op Currents* and on the Co-op’s website, www.wec.coop. The Co-op sells them to members at a discount, and will install them for \$50 above the purchased price; because installation requires a connection to the electric meter, residents should not install the whole house surge protector themselves.)

A less-expensive alternative are today’s “smart strips,” which, like conventional multi-plug power strips, protect equipment from surges. However, an advantage of smart strips is that they make it easier to conserve energy.

If people turn off their power strips when the attached equipment is not in use – for example, after shutting off the TV at bedtime – it saves electricity

because the stand-by power that keeps such equipment ever at the ready is effectively turned off. But it’s easy to forget to turn off your power strips.

So the smart strip does it for you. When it senses that the major device plugged into it has been out of use for a period of time, it shuts everything off (although one or more of the outlets will remain on, such as for a lamp or clock). Standby power can account for 10 percent or more of your total electric usage, so smart strips pay for themselves by largely eliminating that cost. These, too, are available through the Co-op.

Members can contact Powell to determine which sorts of devices make the most sense for them – in particular, where there are additional pathways for transient voltage in signal cables, such as Internet provided by a cable company or pay-per-view from a satellite dish service where the installer did not provide surge protection.

Testing, testing...

Powell also demonstrated another way WEC helps its members reduce their energy costs. He held up a small, digital test meter for people to see. The meter measures the amount of electricity drawn by each appliance and electronic device. It’s easy to use, and helps people make informed decisions about conserving energy.


Before making assumptions, Powell said, “Measure first. Figure out where your electricity is going.”

At Waits River he reminded people that decades ago the front office of the Co-op’s East Montpelier headquarters was an appliance showroom. Those days it wasn’t easy for rural people to get to appliance stores in Barre, Montpelier, St. Johnsbury, and Burlington. So in addition to selling bulk tanks to farmers, WEC sold washers and dryers, refrigerators and freezers, and delivered and installed them at Co-op households.

“That was a long time ago,” Powell said, “but I’ve measured the usage of some of those appliances that are still in members’ homes.”

It’s wonderful that people got so many years of service from those machines. However, technology has advanced, and a new, more energy-efficient appliance might pay for itself within a few years.

Even in those cases, however, Powell pleaded, “Measure first. Here’s our test meter. You can borrow it. I’ll put it in the mail if you want it.”

Take him up on it. Give Bill Powell a call at the Co-op. 

AN OCCASIONAL COLUMN FOCUSING ON PERSONAL ENERGY USE AND TAILORING CONSERVATION TO YOUR NEEDS.



Chasing Fuel Prices – An Illusion of Progress

If you take the long view of home heating in Vermont you find a sort of historic hop-scotching around, people modernizing their equipment and fuels in search of the next great thing. As the pioneer days receded behind us, the fireplace was out and the Franklin stove was in; then the open-front Franklin was out and the ornate, cylindrical Warm Morning was in; next, the Warm Morning was out and more utilitarian heating stoves like the Atlanta were the rage. Atlantas and their ilk gave way to Vermont Castings, Hearthstones, and other stoves with baffle systems for reigniting gases. For most Vermonters wood and

coal stoves and furnaces – used as a primary heating source – eventually yielded to other central-heating solutions. One step in this evolution was electric baseboard heat, which in the 1950s seemed like an ideal solution – clean, cheap, and unobtrusive. But when that became not-so-cheap, electric heat was out and fossil fuels were in. Now the worm is turning again. Well, two worms, really. The more promising worm is renewable energy, primarily from home-based solar installations (although the majority of solar installations thus far are for hot water and photovoltaic

electricity, rather than space heating). The advent of net metering in Vermont, and its recent regulatory expansion to include hydropower and group net metering, points in a direction that an increasing number of Vermonters may choose. However, not everyone is attracted to the prospect of making their own energy. In light of volatile fossil-fuel prices, some people now are suggesting a worm we've seen before – returning to electric heat. It's not that electricity is cheap; it's that fossil fuel prices are wildly unpredictable, supplies to Vermont could be interrupted or diminished as

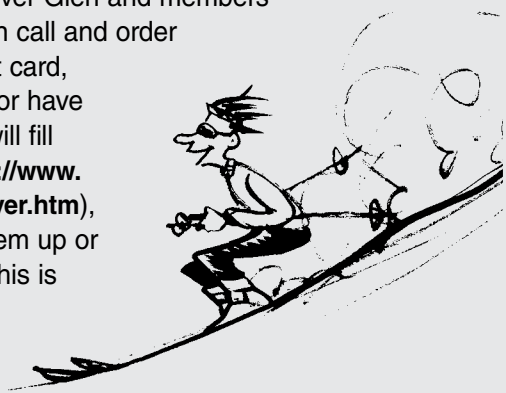
global competition for finite supplies increases, and "peak oil" threatens an actual end to fossil fuel resources within the lifetimes of the younger folks among us. To some people, this makes electricity look good. It shouldn't. Electricity is still an inappropriate, inefficient energy source for space heat: when we collectively use electric space heating, the aggregate impact of our individual heating decisions can lead to a higher peak demand, and potentially stress the transformers and distribution lines needed to deliver this "heat" along the

It's easy to be distracted by fuel prices, but if we reduce our consumption we'll reduce our costs, no matter what fuel choice we make.

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Now, Call WEC for Mad River Glen Tickets

The geese have flown south, the temperatures have plunged, and ski season is coming! This year the Co-op has an improved deal for WEC members who ski at Mad River Glen – which is also a cooperative. You can now purchase day passes at the Co-op office. The ticket price varies depending on the day; weekday adult tickets are \$35. WEC is a ticket retailer for Mad River Glen and members are eligible for special prices. You can call and order tickets by phone, paying with a credit card, then either pick your tickets up here or have us put them in the mail. The Co-op will fill orders placed from the website (<http://www.washingtonco-op.com/pages/madriver.htm>), but members must still either pick them up or have them mailed to your address. This is not an electronic ticket offer. See you on the mountain!



Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc. Statement of Non-Discrimination

Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc. is the recipient of Federal financial assistance from the Rural Utilities Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and is subject to the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended. In accordance with Federal law and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, status as a parent (in education and training programs and activities), because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or retaliation (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). The person responsible for coordinating this organization's nondiscrimination compliance efforts is Avram Patt, the Cooperative's General Manager. Any individual, or specific class of individuals, who feels that this organization has subjected them to discrimination may obtain further information about the statutes and regulations listed above from, and/or file a written complaint with, this organization; or write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call, toll free, (866) 632-9992 (voice). TDD users can contact USA through local relay or the General relay at (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (866) 377-8642 (relay voice users). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Complaints must be filed within 180 days after the alleged discrimination. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible.

PUBLIC NOTICE PUBLIC NOTICE

HERBICIDE USE NOTIFICATION

The Vermont Public Service Board requires all electric utilities to publish this Herbicide Use Notification periodically. Members of WEC are reminded, however, that it has long been the policy of this cooperative not to deploy herbicides in its right-of-way management program.

Vermont utilities maintain electric line rights-of-way with several methods, including the selective use of herbicides on trees and brush. They also encourage low-growing shrubs and trees which will crowd tall-growing species and, thus, minimize the use of herbicides. The application of herbicides may start as early as April 1. **Requests to utilities for notice by mail, however, must be made by February 15.**

The Public Service Board requires Vermont utilities to carry out vegetation management techniques which allow maintenance of electrical systems in a cost-efficient manner.

The types of herbicide treatment used to keep utility lines clear are: stump, injection, basal, soil and foliar. These are the common methods used, although they may not all be used by the utility in your town. Landowners have the options of requesting herbicide treatment on cut stumps only, or that no herbicide be used at all. In the latter case, an administrative fee would have to be paid to the utility. Only electric utility rights-of-way which have tall-growing tree species with the potential of threatening the electric utility system are treated.

Utilities advertise by radio and newspaper prior to herbicide applications on all lines. Lines usually are treated only once in a four-to-six year period depending on the specific management cycle of the utility. Please check with your utility regarding the cycle of a particular line.

Some utilities use metal letters and numbers on distribution and transmission line poles. Others use them only on transmission lines. The letters, such as V.E.C. (Vermont Electric Co-operative), or V.E.L.C.O. (Vermont Electric Power Company), are not found on every pole. A check of several poles on a line should aid you in determining whether poles are marked and which utility is the owner.

Persons owning or occupying land within 1,000 feet of a utility right-of-way may request in writing that the utility notify them individually by mail anytime, but at least 30 days prior to treatment of the line with herbicides. The landowner or resident is responsible for contacting the utility, in writing, to request placement on the mailing list. The utility should be provided with sufficient information as to the exact location of the residence and land. It is the duty of each landowner or resident to make the utility aware of the location of any potentially affected water supply, and any environmentally sensitive areas where herbicide application ought to be avoided.

CONTACT YOUR ELECTRIC UTILITY WITH QUESTIONS OR SUBMIT THE COUPON PROVIDED

If you have further questions or concerns contact:

Plant Industry Division, Agency of Agriculture
Phil Benedict, Director
116 State St., Montpelier, VT 05602
1-802-828-2431

Consumer Affairs & Public Information
Dept. of Public Service
112 State St., Montpelier, VT 05620
1-800-622-4496 or 1-802-828-2811

COUPON FOR PERSONAL REQUEST

Name	Town/City of Affected Property
Street Address	Telephone Number (Home)
Town	(Work)
State	Zip Code
Electric Account Number	O.K. to use Work Number: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Property of Concern: <input type="checkbox"/> Year Round Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Summer Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Property	Best Time to Call
<input type="checkbox"/> Water Supply <input type="checkbox"/> Land <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Line and Pole Identification: Utility Initials	Numbers
We need all of this information in order to determine if you qualify for personal notification. If information is unobtainable, please state why. Use an extra sheet of paper if you need more space.	
RETURN TO YOUR LOCAL UTILITY	
VELCO09	

Chasing Fuel Prices

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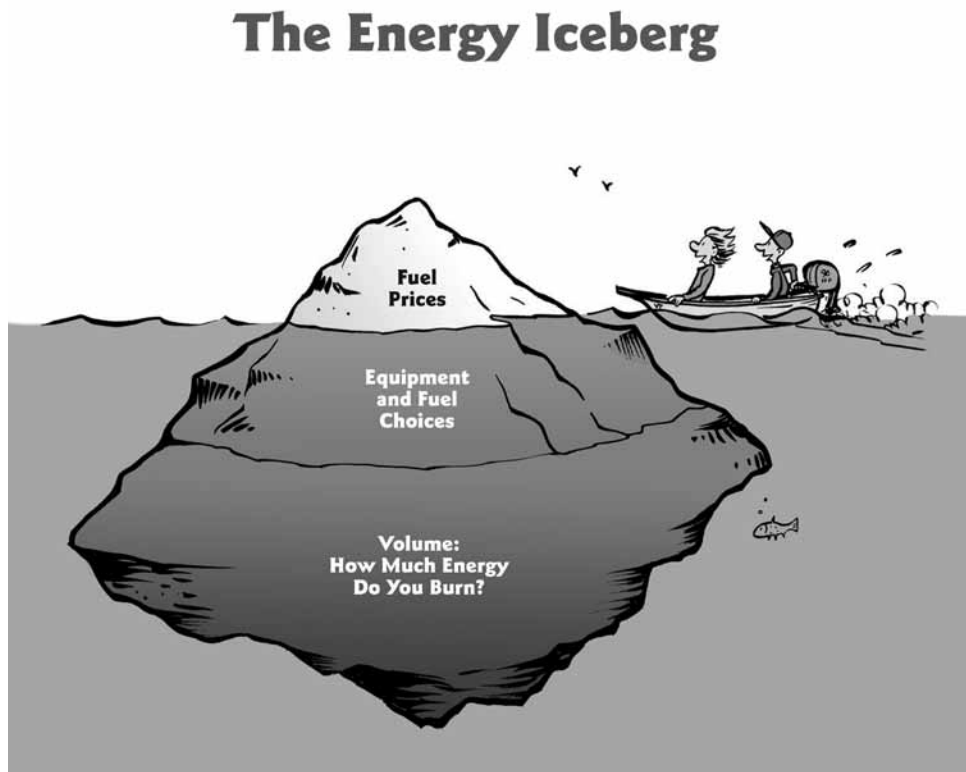
1,250 miles of Co-op lines.

WEC tries to moderate or avoid peak demands, both in winter or summer, by encouraging lower use year-round. Keeping our system from hitting new peaks is one of the best ways to keep your Co-op's costs down.

Home, sweet home

As this sketchy history suggests, we tend to concentrate on two considerations when making our home-heating decisions: the cost of the fuel we're using – our primary consideration – and other kinds of fuel (and equipment) that we could choose instead. And the second consideration is really only a variant on the first: we are most likely to switch fuels based, again, on the consideration of cost.

Here's what the Energy Coach says: We, as energy consumers in little ol' Vermont (and the Washington Electric service territory), are unlikely to influence the price of fossil-fuel energy,



nuclear-generated energy, or any other kind of energy. We can spend a lot of time and effort chasing the lowest energy dollar by changing our fuel source – from oil to fuel oil, propane, or electricity. But the one way we can

really control our destiny is by looking at a common denominator among all our choices, which is "How Much Energy Do We Consume?"

It's easy, and natural, to be distracted by fuel prices. But it's wiser to

focus on consumption. If we reduce our consumption we'll reduce our costs, no matter what fuel choice we make.

Lowering our fuel consumption obviously means improving the efficiency of our homes and of the equipment we're using. Here again, though, we encounter a common distraction: it's easier to focus on our equipment than on the energy-related condition of our homes. The equipment is important – vital, in fact. But buying a new boiler is not money well-spent unless we address the condition of our homes.

There are several expert resources in central Vermont to help people analyze and then change their home's energy performance. If you call us at the Co-op we'll help you find the resources that work best for you – starting with an analysis of your electric usage, and including a comprehensive home energy audit.

The Energy Coach says that Nirvana will not be found by fuel switching. It turns out that "the next great thing" is your house itself. Call Bill Powell at the Co-op and we'll talk about it.

WEC CO-OP STORE

WHOLE HOUSE SURGE PROTECTION

Protect individual appliances, valuable equipment with a meter-based SURGE DEVICE. Be Safe, Not Sorry! Special Member Discounts!



A Full Line of "Plug & Play" (DIY installation) Surge Devices

Panamax MAX 2 SPECIALS!

Highest protection, compact size. Three models, all in stock. Offer good through February 2009.

Product	List price	Member discount price
Max2	\$39.95	\$32.95 (save \$7.00)
Max2 Coax	\$49.95	\$34.95 (save \$15.00)



If you own a single item such as a TV, a VCR, a computer connected to the internet by a cable or satellite provider, audio equipment or pay TV service, without surge protection you'll have to make up the replacement cost out of pocket in the event of a surge striking. Full protection, and an iron-clad warranty for all connected equipment.

Your equipment is exposed to power surges until you connect your equipment to one of the Panamax heavy-duty Max2 family of products. Be safe, not sorry!

Home Performance with



HOME PERFORMANCE WITH ENERGY STAR

ENERGY STAR® is a fee-for-service program designed to improve home comfort, durability, health & safety and to reduce homeowners' energy costs.

Services provided as part of a Home Assessment?

- A comprehensive home audit, which may include an evaluation of your heating system, lighting, appliances, windows, building tightness and insulation effectiveness (blower door test, infra-red/thermal scan test)
- Professional advice on ways to improve the comfort and durability of your home, as well as to solve problems and lower your energy bills
- Assistance in prioritizing improvements
- Information on energy-saving products

Contact the Co-op (1-800-932-5245) or Efficiency Vermont (1-888-921-5990) for more information on Home Performance with ENERGY STAR®

Co-op Long Distance Telephone Service

- 6.9 cents per minute (outside VT)**
- 8.9 cents per minute (within VT)
- No per-call minimum
- 6-second billing interval
- No gimmicks

Billed by Powernet Global. Call to sign up today: 1-866-216-0332, or www.washingtonelectric.coop/pages/phone.htm or call the co-op with questions: 1-800-932-5245.

** 4.9 cents per minute if billed online.



Call the Co-op at 800-932-5245 or visit us on the web at: www.washingtonelectric.coop/pages/prod.htm

Looking Out for Each Other

continued from page 1

urges people with financial difficulties to call the Co-op, because Golden and her staff will go out of their way to establish a workable payment plan that avoids disconnection. WEC also offers budget billing, which could be a solution for people struggling with high seasonal bills.

But even if someone doesn't ask for help a member services representative might sense their difficulty and inquire whether there's a problem. The idea isn't to be nosy – it's to spot trouble before it's too late.

The staff can also steer people to other resources. One of these is 2-1-1, an all-purpose telephone hotline for people in need.

"2-1-1 can refer people to Community Action, to local churches and food shelves, and all kinds of places we don't necessarily know about," said Golden. "That's where I recommend people start, actually."

Thus far, Golden hasn't spotted signs that WEC members are experiencing unusual difficulties. The drop in heating-fuel prices and gasoline may have given some folks financial breathing room. But typically more people begin to fall behind in their electric payments as winter sets in. If that happens to an unusual degree, WEC's member services representatives will be the first to know – and, perhaps, to help.

"If we know someone is alone or in a vulnerable situation," Golden added, "we'll try to stay in contact during extreme weather or outages, just to make sure they're okay."

WEC's Medical Needs List

WEC has institutionalized one form of assistance. The Co-op maintains a Medical Needs List of people who

depend on electrically operated equipment within their homes. The list currently has 110 names on it, and those names and locations are entered into the Co-op's computerized Outage Management System.

"When we're doing a storm response, the system will flag those locations and indicate that these people may be out [of power]," said Weston.

That's not a guarantee that WEC will drop everything and divert a repair crew to a location on the Medical Needs List. The Co-op maintains enough power line to extend from here to Georgia (1,250 miles) and must concentrate its resources where they will do the most good. If a crew is repairing a "feeder" that will restore power to several hundred people, and a Medical Needs member is many miles away on a damaged line that supplies a dozen members, chances are that the Operations personnel will make sure the main feeder is repaired first.

"Nevertheless, the Medical Needs List brings a heightened awareness about that member, and the need to restore their power sooner rather than later," said Weston. "It's a factor we take into serious consideration during our storm response."

The Co-op encourages people who have medical equipment to be prepared to do without electricity for a while – for example, by having extra oxygen tanks in their home – and to have a backup source of power if they can afford it.

For the moment, Vermonters appear to have dodged the bullet of frighteningly high heating-fuel prices that nearly caused panic last fall. But state government and other local employers are laying people off; "food insecurity" and other indicators are rising; and winter is coming. If we don't care about each other, who will?



Colnes Appointed to WEC Board of Directors

Washington Electric Co-op has filled a vacancy on its nine-member board of directors, with the interim appointment on October 29 of Andrea Colnes of East Montpelier. Colnes will serve in place of Wendell Cilley of West Topsham, victim of an accidental death in September shortly after he was re-elected by Co-op voters to a sixth term on the board.

Colnes was selected from a field of five WEC members who applied for the interim directorship. She will serve until the Co-op's 70th Annual Membership Meeting next May, when WEC members will vote to elect four directors – choosing candidates to fill the three seats that will expire in 2009 and a director to complete the remaining two years of Cilley's term. Colnes will be eligible to run for election in May if she chooses.



Andrea Colnes

Andrea Colnes lives with her seven-year-old daughter Jesse in East Montpelier. She has been a Co-op member since she moved to Vermont in 1990, living on WEC lines first in Middlesex, then Moretown, and at her East Montpelier home since 2001.

"We are very pleased to have Andrea fill this vacancy left by Wendell's death," said WEC President Barry Bernstein. "She brings a background working in energy and forestry issues, with an emphasis on policies that affect rural communities. With those qualifications and her experience working with boards and organizations, it's an excellent fit for Washington Electric Co-op."

"We had five highly qualified WEC members come forward and offer their services to the board," Bernstein added. "It means a lot to us that members are following what we're doing and want to be a part of it. In the end, we had to make a selection and choose one person. We thank the other candidates most sincerely and hope they will continue to be involved."

Andrea Colnes did an interview with *Co-op Currents* sitting on the brightly finished wood floor of her rural home, with a purple cloth spread beside her to provide a surface for a game of Pick Up Stix with Jesse. Her résumé details an impressive career relating to the nexus of energy, conservation, and social policy. She was the primary author of Vermont's first Comprehensive Energy Plan under Gov. Madeleine Kunin. She

was executive director for 10 years (1992-2002) of the Northern Forest Alliance. Her employer since 2006 is the Carsey Institute, which is affiliated with the University of New Hampshire. In her role as policy leadership director, Colnes works with nonprofit organizations in Northern New England to study and promote economic policies supportive of rural communities. Her current concentration is on the effect of energy issues on low-income, rural Northern New England families.

"Our whole culture and way of life

is profoundly dependent on energy," Colnes said, explaining her concern with current issues and why she put herself forward for a seat on WEC's board. "We'll soon be seeing the end of oil as a primary resource, and we have to find peaceful alternatives or we're looking at oil wars and profound devastation. Plus,

energy is central to the environment and the integrity of the planet – climate change, in particular, and I say this with a personal involvement, lover-of-life in winter that I am.

"And," she said, glancing at her Pick Up Stix adversary, "I'm a mom."

An expansive worldview about energy is not misplaced on the board of a small rural electric cooperative, especially given Colnes' focus on policy that affects and sustains rural communities.

"The Co-op has been innovative and creative," said Colnes. "We're not a wealthy utility. We serve a small rural area and population. Nevertheless, the Co-op has been able to put in place strategies that provide its members with renewable energy and that benefit the communities it serves."

Andrea Colnes has seen a lot of the world. In the early 1980s she and her former husband took a two-and-a-half-year bicycle tour that encompassed the British Isles, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, much of the Middle East, Asia, and Australia. Several years later they did an additional year's journey, and in 1989 Colnes spent time in Nepal developing an education and conservation program for the World Wildlife Fund.

Nowadays her professional concentration is more regional. And with her appointment to WEC's board of directors, part of her focus will suddenly be very local. Like a fresh pile of thin, colorful Pick Up Stix, it's all interdependent.



Vermont As Seen By 2-1-1

Vermont's 2-1-1 monthly call statistics provide a window into the circumstances our fellow Vermonters are encountering that cause them difficulty. 2-1-1 is a service provided by the United Ways of Vermont; it refers callers to local health and human service organizations, categories that are large enough to include a wide range of services issues.

Here's a look at 2-1-1 activity in November. Last month 2,309 calls were made to 2-1-1, marking the fifth consecutive month that the number exceeded 2,000. Referrals for basic needs – food, housing/shelter/fuel, temporary financial aid, and transportation – ran higher than other categories of need. Vermont 2-1-1 made 84 referrals to food pantries and 10 referrals for home-delivered meals. The service reported 444 referrals in the broad category of housing and shelter, including 210 people needing utility assistance, 67 needing rent-payment assistance, and 42 referrals to community-based shelters – which have seen a rise of 150 percent in 2008 over the previous year. There were 168 referrals for temporary financial assistance, which can include bus fare, gas money, medical transportation, ride-sharing programs, automobile loans, and other needs.

At Vermont 2-1-1 callers speak to a real person every time. Call specialists can refer callers to government programs, community-based organizations, support groups, and other local resources. 2-1-1 is a local call anywhere in Vermont. Assistance is confidential and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Translation services are provided on the phone, and 2-1-1 can transfer emergency calls to 9-1-1.

If you don't need services, but are interested in helping people who do, 2-1-1 is looking for volunteer call takers. Trainings are held monthly, which prepare people to join response teams during emergencies. People interested in volunteering can contact Cathy Nellis at 802-861-7849.

