

WATT'S HAPPENING

SCENIC RIVERS ENERGY COOPERATIVE

LANCASTER, DARLINGTON AND GAYS MILLS, WISCONSIN

Fixed Charges

Recently we have been getting a number of calls from our members in regards to our fixed charges. Everyone that uses electricity has this charge listed on their bill. The purpose of the fixed charge is to cover the actual costs of providing and maintaining reliable electrical service to members. Our goal is to provide members with safe, reliable and affordable electricity. Because it costs the same to maintain a line no matter how much electricity is used, the fixed charge ensures that everyone pays their fair share of what it costs to build and maintain our 3,471 miles of distribution line. Those fixed charges cover trucks, wire, transformers, meters, and power poles. And they include the labor costs to build and maintain the lines; administrative costs which include insurance, interest and taxes. Because we serve rural areas that have less member density than a municipal or investor-owned utility, we don't have 30-40 members per mile of line. We have 3.9 members per mile of line. Since there are fewer members per mile of line, we have far fewer people to spread our fixed costs over.



SREC's Responsibility to Our Members

As an electric cooperative, we have a greater responsibility to our consumers than do investor-owned utilities. That's because our consumers are much more than just customers to whom we sell electricity—they're members, each with a financial and personal stake in this cooperative. It is our job, as employees and directors of this cooperative, to protect our members' investment by operating in the most reliable and cost-efficient way possible. In doing so, it is also our responsibility to keep members informed of any issues that will affect not just their investment, but also their quality of life.

That's why we've been speaking out against the Obama administration's plans, unveiled about a year ago, that direct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set controls on new and existing fossil fuel-burning plants. These plans, if enacted, would basically remove coal from the mix of fuel options. That's a huge concern in Midwestern states like ours. Wisconsin relies on coal for about 60 percent of in-state energy production, and we simply aren't at a point where we can substitute all of that baseload generation with another source and still provide constant, reliable electric service. We've already invested millions of dollars retrofitting our existing coal-fired power plants with state-of-the-art equipment to meet environmental standards, but the EPA plans call for standards that cannot even be commercially met yet. Unfortunately, harsh winters like the one we just endured won't wait for technology to catch up. Bottom line: These plans, if enacted, will cause our rates to go up—a lot. It's inevitable.

For those who can afford the rising costs, or who have the property and the means to install their own renewable energy sources, the inevitable rate hike may not be an issue. But that's not who most of our members are. We live in a sparsely populated region of the state, and all three counties within our service territory have median household incomes below the state's average, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. But I don't need facts and figures to tell me that; I talk to many of our members face to face, either in the office, out in the community, or at one of the events we host for the very purpose of bringing our members together. And this is what I hear—most of our members simply cannot absorb a huge rate increase without making some very tough choices when it comes to household expenses.

Of course, that's most of our members, but not all. I heard from a member recently who takes issue with our opposition to the EPA's plans. There are others who believe a significant rate hike is a worthy trade-off for the complete removal of coal from energy production.

We don't disagree that renewable energy is better for the environment. If we did, we wouldn't, as an industry, be constantly investing in the development of new renewable sources. Electric cooperatives have led the way in this regard; we even got a shout-out by President Obama at his recent announcement at a Walmart in California regarding executive actions to advance solar installations. Our own wholesale power provider, Dairyland Power, has consistently been ahead of state mandates regarding renewable energy requirements, with about 13 percent of the energy currently delivered to members coming from a mix of renewable resources. Just recently, Dairyland was nominated to participate in the White House Solar Summit and Champions of Change, recognizing local leaders who are taking action to advance solar power. Heck, I even have solar panels on my own home.

The key word in this whole conversation, we believe, is mix. By advocating an all-of-the-above strategy, we are not asking anyone to abandon renewable energy in favor of coal. We are simply asking for common sense in crafting an energy policy that's economically sound, technically feasible, and fair.

It's our responsibility, as a cooperative, to keep you informed of issues in the utility industry that will affect your investment and your quality of life. It's your responsibility, as members and as citizens, to keep yourselves informed by following a broad spectrum of sources, including ours, and forming your own opinions. Then it's our responsibility together—not just as co-op members but as members of the greater community—to listen to each other and work together for the common good. That's the cooperative way.



Light Shopping

Bulbs, brands, lumens, and labels—oh my!

If you have been gradually making the switch to the new energy efficient lighting choices, you've noticed that more changes have come to the light bulb aisle. Remember when the odd looking corkscrew compact fluorescent (CFL) bulb was introduced to consumers a few years ago? It's still there and so are most of the classic pear-shaped incandescent bulbs. But today's lighting choices have expanded and gotten serious makeovers—their packaging labels and lingo included. There are LEDs, CFLs, halogen, lumens, CRI, and more, and there is a host of lighting brands. But in recent years, the focus has been on making all bulbs more energy efficient and cost effective.

End of an Era

We've basked in the golden glow of Thomas Edison's incandescent bulb since the 1800s, but this January marked the end of its run. That's when the federal government finalized its mandated phase out of selected general-purpose light bulbs and Edison's less energy efficient incandescent ones. While you still may find 100- and 75-watt bulbs on store shelves, manufacturers in the U.S. stopped producing them. The old 40- and 60-watt bulbs, which represented over half the market, are following suit. What brought about the lighting change? In 2007, the U.S. Department of Energy estimated that home and commercial lighting was consuming more electricity annually—about 300 billion kilowatt-hours of lighting or the equivalent of about 100 power plants—but most of it was wasted. Old-fashioned incandescent bulbs used plenty of energy to produce only 10 percent light, with 90 percent of the energy given off as heat. In comparison, today's more energy-saving incandescent light bulbs use 25 percent less energy to do the job of lighting the same spaces in your home.

Look on the Bright Side

Prime replacements for the traditional incandescent light bulb are the higher-efficiency CFL and LED or light emitting diode bulbs. But be prepared to pay more upfront for some of the bulbs you choose. Lighting experts say that LEDs are the best choice for energy efficiency and if price is not a concern—they can last for up to two decades, save you 75 percent or more in energy costs, and offer superior color and brightness. However, they can cost an estimated \$10 to \$60 per bulb.

The Energy Department assures consumers that there is a bright side—lower electricity bills over the longer term. These are their estimates: using a traditional incandescent bulb adds about \$4.80

per year to the average household electric bill, but a CFL bulb adds just \$1.20 a year and an LED about \$1 per year. That means that a typical household could potentially save about \$50 per year by replacing 15 old incandescent bulbs.

Lighting the Way

Since lighting accounts for nearly 20 percent of the average home's electricity use, don't stay in the dark when shopping for new bulbs that save on energy and your electric bill. Things to know before you go:

- Lumens are the new watts. It's all about the lumens or the amount of light a light bulb emits. Remember this formula: The higher the lumens, the brighter the light—to replace a 100-watt incandescent bulb, choose a bulb that offers about 1,600 lumens. There are handy charts at www.energystar.gov/ that help you compare the old measure of watts to lumens.
- Three-steps to your new bulbs. STEP 1: Choose the amount of lumens you need based on how bright you want a room; STEP 2: Determine which bulb has the lowest estimated energy cost per year. This will save you the most money; and STEP 3: Choose bulbs based on your needs—how long it will last and light appearance.
- Read the label. Always check the package, making sure that it carries the U.S. Department of Energy's ENERGY STAR® logo. New Lighting Facts labels on boxes will also help consumers understand what they are purchasing—amount of lumens, estimated annual operating cost, and light color.

By B. Denise Hawkins. B. Denise Hawkins writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.



Recipes

Correction: In last month's newsletter, please note that the Coconut Lemon Cookies use $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (1-1/2 sticks) of Butter.

Thanks again to Cathy Skaife (Platteville) for sharing another of her favorite recipes!

Holiday Dream Brownies

- 1 (19-ounce) box Brownie Mix
- 1 (7-1/2 ounce) jar Marshmallow Crème
- 1 cup prepared creamy chocolate frosting
- 1 cup Creamy Peanut Butter

Prepare brownie mix according to package directions for 13x9 baking pan. Let them cool. Using a spoon, evenly drop marshmallow crème on cooled brownies. In a small bowl, microwave frosting on high 30 seconds or until smooth. Repeat with peanut butter. With spoon, drop frosting, then peanut butter over marshmallow crème. Gently swirl with knife to marble. Cool completely in pan. To serve, cut into 24 bars.

This recipe comes from Rita Kruser (Cuba City). She says that these Grilled Flank Steaks are so good that you might want to double the recipe!

Grilled Flank Steak

- 2 (1-1/2 pound) Flank Steaks
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Soy Sauce
- 3 Tbsp Honey
- 2 Tbsp Red Wine Vinegar
- 1-1/2 tsp Garlic Powder
- 1-1/2 tsp Ground Ginger
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Salad Oil or Olive Oil
- 1 Green Onion, finely chopped



Combine soy sauce, honey and vinegar in a mixing bottle or jar with a tight lid. Add garlic powder and ginger. Then add salad oil and onion and mix well.

Prepare meat by stripping off excess fat. Slash lightly on the diagonal (each side) in a diamond shaped cuts. Place meat in a small pan just big enough to hold it. Pour marinade over it. Either allow to stand at room temperature for 4 hours or longer or place in the refrigerator, covered, overnight. When ready to cook, remove steak from marinade and place on grill using medium heat. This meat cooks fast, about 6 minutes per side for medium rare.

To serve, slice thinly on the diagonal. This amount should serve 4. Or serve on buns as sandwiches.



Energy Efficiency *Tip of the Month*

When replacing incandescent bulbs from recessed light fixtures, use energy-efficient bulbs that are rated for that purpose. For example, the heat buildup in downlights will significantly shorten the life of the spiral CFLs.

- Source: Department of Energy



Vegetation Management

Zielies Tree Service Inc. is finishing up tree trimming on the Castle Rock Substation in Grant County and continuing to work on the Prairie du Chien Substation in Crawford County.

SREC is taking a more diligent approach in maintaining our right-of-way corridor's for the following reasons:

- 1) Safety for the public and our employees.
- 2) Help reduces tree related outages.
- 3) Reduces outage duration.
- 4) Reduces future vegetation management costs.

***Thank you
for your cooperation!***



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Watt's Happening is published monthly as an information service to the member-owners of Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative.

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