

WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

Safety, Survival, And Comfort During The Winter

Precautions for the Winter-Outage Season

There are storms, and there are storms – the average, run-of-the-mill, a few inches of snow and slower driving-type storm; and then the destructive storm, perhaps with high winds or with wet, heavy snow. The kind of storm, in short, that causes power outages. The weather in late January reminded us that there can also be extreme cold. Frigid temperatures can cause outages, and that's the worst time to lose power. Ice storms are another danger to power systems, though they are not common in this climate. Mostly, it's wet, heavy snow and/or winds that we have to worry about.

WEC has diligently invested in right-of-way management and danger-tree removal, and we have people patrolling our almost 1,300 miles of power line looking for trouble that we can prevent. But there are going to be power outages in Vermont in the winter.

Therefore it's best for people, especially those in rural areas where power lines are more subject to extreme weather and tree damage, to be prepared to go without electricity for anything from a few hours to a few days – and possibly longer on rare occasions.

Our staff members who answer the phones during outages are often dismayed by the circumstances people describe, such as frozen pipes, no heat in the house, darkness, isolation, and even an inability to operate life-supporting

Your phone should be ready to use, and the best way is to have a landline to your house and a phone with a cord to the receiver.

equipment like oxygen machines or to use the powered beds and stair elevators in their homes. It's important that we know about those problems, but we can't always solve them quickly for everyone, considering

that there are 10,500 members to serve in 41 different towns, and that if our electric system were stretched end to end it would reach from Montpelier to Louisville, Kentucky. That's a lot of distance for a 16-man line crew to cover.

Still, the Co-op tries hard to help those in need.

"We have a medical-needs list," says WEC Operations Director Dan Weston. "And we remind and encourage everyone with life-supporting equipment or other special circumstances to call us and make sure they are on the list. We do our best to prioritize those lines."

"But being on the list doesn't ensure that we can always respond immediately. Because of the nature

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There was a lot of this going on from Sunday, January 23, through Tuesday, January 25, when temperatures in central Vermont sank into the 20s-below zero. The worst was Monday morning, when the Co-op fellow above, in Barre Town, had to jump start his car. Temperatures recovered, to the mid-20s above zero, by midweek.

Think Now About Running For The Board

Deadlines Approaching For Candidates, Bylaw Changes

Washington Electric Cooperative will hold its 72nd Annual Membership Meeting on Wednesday, May, 25, 2011. For the occasion, WEC will return to a familiar location – the Montpelier Elks Club – where many previous Annual Meetings have been held, including last year's.

Although the Annual Meeting is still four months away, it's time now for members to begin thinking about running for a position on WEC's nine-member Board of Directors. Directors are elected to three-year

terms, and each year three board seats expire. The incumbents who hold those seats can run for re-election if they choose to, but the process is equally open to qualified challengers. "Qualified" basically means Co-op members in good standing. Beyond that, the best qualification is an interest in serving on the board of an important community institution – the consumer-owned, not-for-profit utility that provides electric power

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

TVs Gone Wild! High-def, flat screen, bells, whistles... Still, the industry has improved on the energy efficiency of these high-tech devices. Some tips on shopping for a (relatively) efficient model, on page 4.

E-Waste is now the largest tributary to the American waste stream. A new Vermont law on electronic waste went into effect this month. Page 5.

Staying safe in winter. Carbon-monoxide poisoning and other dangers are associated with snow accumulation and electricity outages. Our page-one story continues on page 3.

It's about teamwork, and finding the best ways to achieve it. See Linemen's Corner, page 6.



Elizabeth Miller of Burlington is Vermont's new Commissioner of the Department of Public Service. She met with the Co-op's Barry Bernstein and Avram Patt on January 26. Page 5.

President's Message

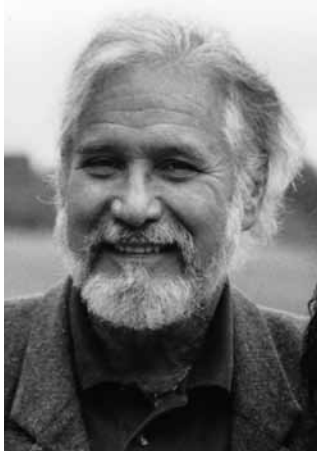
Rate Increase: Why It's All At Once

And a Greeting to Vermont's New Leaders

By Barry Bernstein

Burr! It's cold outside, at -22°F early this morning, as I sit writing my President's Message to our Co-op members. The arctic air that has swept down on us as we begin 2011 is surely a wakeup call to remind us to pay attention to the new year. I know as I fed wood to my hungry furnace in the basement, watching my wood pile shrink and wondering if I will have enough wood to make it through spring, I am reminded of how much warmer it was last year.

I want to take this time to address two issues – the new administration in Montpelier and the newly begun legislative session; and the WEC 23.81-percent rate increase that will be appearing as a surcharge on members'



WEC applauds Gov. Shumlin on focusing on energy as a key element to Vermont's economic future.

January electric bills that they are starting to receive in the mail.

A Co-op Welcome

WEC wants to welcome our new governor, Peter Shumlin, and his administration, and the new 2011 Legislature. Gov. Shumlin has made energy – efficiency and renewable – a keystone issue in this year's platform. The House Natural Resources & Energy Committee, led by Rep. Tony Klein, a Co-op member from East Montpelier, has already been working on a new omnibus energy bill,

H.56. The governor has also appointed a new Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Public Service, Elizabeth Miller, an attorney from Burlington.

WEC applauds Gov. Shumlin for focusing on energy as a key element

to Vermont's economic future. Our Co-op has been committed to energy efficiency and renewables for more than two decades, building our Wrightsville hydroelectric and Coventry landfill-methane electric-generating plants, committing early to working with First Wind in developing the Sheffield wind farm, and working with our members on efficiency and conservation at their homes, farms, and businesses.

We also welcome Commissioner Miller to her new position. We look forward to her leadership at the DPS and to working with her in addressing Vermont's energy future.

Special Message

I, your Board of Directors, and your Co-op management know that the implementation of our first rate increase in 11 years has been on the minds of many of our members. Over the past few weeks we have received letters from a few Co-op members, and I have also had several meaningful conversations in town with some of our members about our 23.81-percent rate increase. I really appreciated them taking the time to share their concerns with me.

The two main points that were made by people were: 1) the fact that the rate increase was not spread over a longer period of time; and 2) their concern about the impact the increase would have on some members who are already stressed and economically overburdened by other bills.

Everyone the Co-op has heard from has expressed their appreciation for the work the Co-op does, the Coventry generating plant, and for the Co-op not having had a rate increase for the past decade. We appreciate your support and understand your concerns.

As a result of my discussions with Co-op members I felt it would be helpful to again outline the three major areas that affected your Co-op Board of Directors' decision to institute a rate increase sooner and larger than had been anticipated. These factors caused us to abandon our original plan to spread a rate increase over a two-to-three-year period.

Coventry Plant/Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs). Over the past several years, since the Coventry plant started generating electricity, WEC has been selling RECs to Cape Light Compact, a Massachusetts public electricity retailer. Your Co-op (with Public Service Board approval) has placed revenues from these sales in a reserve savings

account, using those reserves to draw from to cover some of our annual operating expenses. This enabled WEC to push out the need for a rate increase, until now.


However, in 2010 the price for our certificates dropped by 50 percent from the price we were getting from Cape Light – a \$1.3-million loss in REC revenue in 2010. The loss of this revenue makes up more than half (12.2 percent out of the almost 24-percent increase) of WEC's need for higher rates. The rapid change in the value of the RECs depleted most of our reserve savings, making it unworkable for your Board to follow through on our plan for a phase-in of the rate increase.

Power-Related Costs. Although our own power-generation costs (Wrightsville and Coventry) remain stable, projected increases in 2011 of purchased power from other sources, ISO New England transmission, and other related market costs represent nearly one-third (7.6 percent) of the 24-percent increase. This increase is since 2009 and thus represents a rise in costs over a two-year period.

Unfortunately, many of the ISO New England costs will continue to rise as major projects are completed in New England. These are to prevent congestion in the flow of new energy sources coming on line.

Administrative Costs. This area is responsible for the remaining nearly one-fifth (4 percent) of the dollars-increase in costs. It includes such costs as salary and benefits, property taxes paid to the towns we serve (for distribution and transmission lines, poles, substations, and our two generating plants), interest expenses (short and long term), and more.

Your Co-op management, employees, and elected directors have been diligent in trying to continue to find savings in our operations while still ensuring that the quality of electric service to our members remains high. If in the course of reviewing our costs with the Department of Public Service, ways can be found to reduce our costs below what we have projected, an adjustment can be made before the rate increase is finalized. At this point in the process we have not identified such reductions.

We do appreciate our members' patience and understanding that your Board of Directors and management will do our best to continue to contain costs while ensuring reliability and quality of service. 

Co-op Currents

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

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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.

Reminder:

Turn off the lights when you leave a room.

Safety, Survival, And Comfort During The Winter

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of our distribution system being so extensive and widely scattered, and the randomness of where our medical-needs people live, individuals in many circumstances find themselves out of power as long as anyone else."

Therefore, they should be prepared. For example, if they take medications that need to be refrigerated, they should have a cooler and ice packs handy in case a power loss disables the refrigerator.

"We do what we can," Weston said, "but we encourage people to take other steps as well. Having a support network is important, especially for seniors and people with medical needs or other special circumstances. In storms or severely cold weather there should be someone thinking of them. Weather-forecasting technology is so good these days that most of us hear about weather events approaching two or three days before they occur. Whether it's by the internet, radio, or television, people should pay attention to those forecasts and think about how an outage would affect them, and be as prepared as they can be to come through it safely and comfortably."

Checking the list

Yes, we're halfway through winter, but we can't coast the rest of the way. As we face the end of January, then February, March, and April, think about

precautions you can take in these areas.

Water. Probably the most important thing you can do to prepare for a winter power outage is to lay in a supply of water – for drinking, washing, and flushing the toilet – because an outage will shut down your pump. People in rural Vermont ought to have a half-dozen or so five-gallon water containers, filled and set aside somewhere where they won't freeze.

If a major storm is approaching, you might also fill your bathtub, which will provide you with plenty of water for your important needs.

Food. You may lose your ability to cook if your power goes out. Certainly an electric range won't work, and many gas stoves have electric ignition. A camp stove and a few cylinders of propane could get you through – though you should use it outside so the fumes can dissipate. You should also have a supply of foods that need no refrigeration – canned vegetables and meats, canned soup,

cereal, pasta – but make sure you also have a manual can opener.

Light—candles, flashlights, and a supply of batteries. We all have candles and flashlights around, but it's easy to run short of batteries because we don't think about them in terms of preparedness. Everyone should stock up on batteries in rural Vermont in the wintertime.

Heat. With the volatile price of fuel oil in recent years, many Vermonters who had gotten away from wood stoves have gone back to having a stove installed and using wood as a primary or back-up source of heat. That's good,

because in Vermont having heat that's not dependent on electric power is critical, even if it means living in one or two rooms for a few days. Besides, wood heat provides income for local people and keeps our heating dollars in Vermont. For safety's sake, please consider the importance of having a heating source in your home that does not require electricity. And keep an extinguisher, and know where it is.

Communications. Your phone should be ready to use, and the most likely way of assuring that is to have a landline to your house and a phone with a hard-wired receiver. Many people prefer cordless phones because of the freedom they provide in walking around the house as you speak. Fine... but we advise at least keeping a spare telephone in a closet or drawer, one with a cord to the receiver. A wireless telephone uses electricity to broadcast the signal to the receiver; if you're out of power you're out of luck. People are often surprised that losing your power usually does not mean losing your landline telephone connection. Your phone very likely will work, and a phone with a cord is your best bet.

It's also advisable to keep your cell phone charged if you have one, especially if you hear of a storm coming. It's true that in rural Vermont cellular signals are not strong or even available in some places, but people in isolated spots can often find someplace on or near their property where a signal can be picked up. Being able to call your Co-op, or emergency services, or your town highway department, or neighbors you're concerned about, is important. A cell phone could be a backup plan.

Backup Power. Of course the best way to gird against a power outage is to have the means to provide your own emergency power. This is a larger investment, but there are many Vermonters who couldn't conceive of living without their generators. Another source of backup power is the UPS – uninterruptible power supply, a battery-operated system that activates automatically when the power goes out and which you can program to provide electricity for your most important needs, including, if you have a home-based business, your computer system. WEC members are invited to

call the Co-op for more information about both of these systems, including cost and availability.

Safety. There are many safety considerations to be mindful of in Vermont during the winter, some associated with outages and others not. Regarding **generators**: they must always be operated outside because their combustion engines produce fumes and exhaust. You might wish to protect your generator by putting it in some kind of enclosure, but that enclosure should never be connected to your living space (for example, an attached garage or storage room). And don't forget to keep fuel on hand – again, being mindful of safety and storing it away from your house, perhaps in an unconnected garage or outbuilding. Finally, WEC asks to inspect all generator installations to ensure that they are properly installed. We then make a note of it in our records. This is to protect the safety of our linemen.

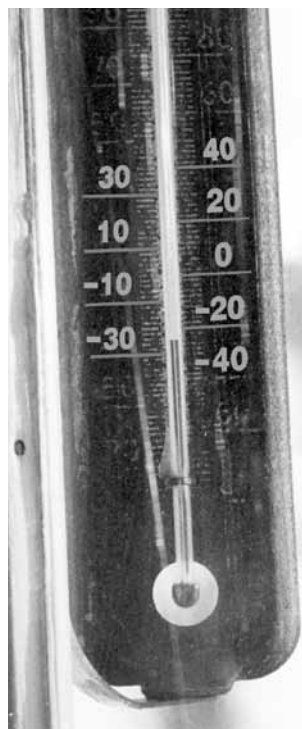
Other winter precautions.

Storms can cause outages, but we must not forget other possible dangers in winter. Accumulated snow can block the **vents** on people's roofs, or on the sides of their homes if they have wall-mounted heating units. This can prevent gases from escaping and cause potentially deadly carbon monoxide poisoning.

There's also the matter of the **roof rake**. People who use those devices with the long, extended handle to loosen up the snow on their roof edges should remember that they may be reaching into the area where the power line comes to the house. They could make contact with the service wire, which presents the danger of electrocution. Or the tongs of the rake might pull off the covering of the service connection – an immediate danger, but also potentially a longer-term danger if those connections are exposed (adding to the possibility of an outage).

We've had some storm-related outages in WEC's territory already this winter, and it's highly likely we'll have more. Please think of yourself as a partner with the Co-op in keeping you safe and comfortable over the next few, cold months.

And another thing. It's a beautiful time of year. Enjoy your winter!



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.

Wood-Fired Hot Water, With a Caution

Editor, Co-op Currents:

It was great to see the article about the wood/solar hot water project ("Hot Water 4 Less," Co-op Currents, March 2010). I am installing one myself. After some research, I decided not to put in a pre-heating coil around the stovepipe out of my woodstove. There is a big risk of taking too much heat out of the chimney and increasing the creosote, thus increasing the chance for chimney and house fires.

I used high-BTU copper pipe (for hot-water baseboard) mounted on my chimney. The high-BTU copper transfers the heat from the back of my woodstove. It is connected to an old hot water tank upstairs via a thermosiphon. The cold comes in the bottom, and leaves the top.

My goal is a less-than \$1,000 solar/wood pre-heating system for my hot water. So far, I'm on track. I love the idea of wood-fired hot water, but I wanted Co-op members to be mindful of the increased fire risk from creosote buildup by taking the heat off of the chimney, rather than the body of the stove.

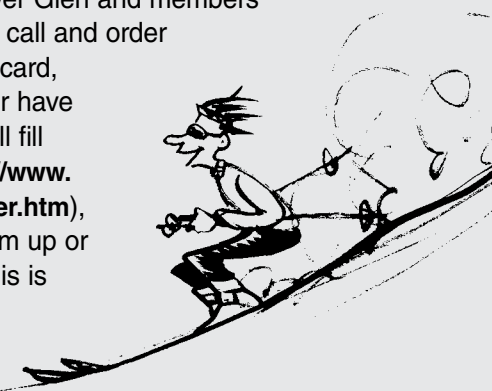
— Lori Barg, Plainfield

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!



The Brave New World Of Television

The 'Tube' Is Not a Tube Anymore

Maybe it's a good thing, maybe it's a bad thing. But it's a sure thing: television plays a big role in the lives of most Americans – and there's no reason to think it's any different for Washington Electric Co-op members. In fact, the technological improvements in the television industry yield not only better, more compelling pictures than just a few years ago, they also provide more uses for the "tube." (Actually, there aren't many tubes any more, as the flat-panel models have taken over and Sony and other makers have stopped producing cathode-ray televisions with those large, funnel-shaped "tubes"; if you have one, chances are it will be your last.)

Today's TV is an extension of our computers, and, with WiFi, it is capable of extending our entertainment and communications options.

You can use its vivid plasma or LCD screens with gaming consoles; you can stream movies directly to your home rather than buying or renting DVDs; you can do your internet business or pursue your internet hobbies and pastimes (such as social media) on your TV screen. In fact, like the telephone, the television is melding with other electronic technologies and has grown away from its history of performing a single and unique function.

What's more, 3D TV is upon us. In its December 2010 issue, *Consumer Reports* notes that owners of 3D sets will mostly be watching 2D programming for a while, pending the production of more 3D content. There's also the inconvenience and the cost (around \$150 a pair) of needing 3D glasses to view three-dimensional programs in all their glory – but the glasses accessory might in fact enhance the appeal for people looking for that "special" experience. Each 3D-TV manufacturer produces its own glasses (and some reportedly

include up to two pairs with the purchase of a new TV), but universal 3D glasses are said to be just around the corner.

In this brave new world, presumably we're "over" 2008. In February of that year analog broadcasting for general TV-consumer usage ceased, by order of the federal government.

There was a great deal of run-up to that February 17, 2008, event, and the U.S. Department of Commerce provided \$40 coupons to defray the cost of converter boxes for people dependent on analog signals.

Not long ago big-screen, high-def TVs were terrible energy hogs. Since then, the industry has improved the energy efficiency of these TVs, and a significant reason is that ENERGY STAR has entered the picture.

But that was then. Analog is behind us, and CRT (cathode ray tube)

with the accessories people used with them, accounted for about 10 percent of the average household's annual electricity bill.

Since then, the industry has improved the energy efficiency of these TVs, and a significant reason is that ENERGY STAR® has entered the picture (so to speak).

The hazards are still out there. The ENERGY STAR website points out that "some of the largest high-resolution, direct-view TVs (versus rear-projection products) can use as much electricity each year as a new conventional refrigerator, or roughly 500 kilowatt-hours every year." (Let's digress for a moment and point out that you can do much better than getting a "conventional" refrigerator that uses 500 kWh per year. You probably already know that.) Comparatively, ENERGY STAR-qualified TVs use at least 40 percent less energy than standard units.

And while some of those approved models exceed 40-percent energy savings, it's also important to note that ENERGY STAR's famous star-shaped sticker does not mean that a product is cheap to run; the comparison is to standard models of a device that by definition draws a significant energy load. And if your household, like many, has more than one TV, the fact that high-definition sets are becoming the norm has further implications for your energy usage and bill. Remember, too, that additional features cause additional electric "load," so rather than shooting the moon, ask yourself whether some of those features really are so important to you.

By taking time to research the alternatives – not just for picture quality, accessory potential, and other variables, but for operating costs – people will find they can make choices to conserve power. Research will also reveal that certain assumptions are not always true: that screen size is less of a factor in energy consumption than one might expect, and that the difference in energy-consumption between some LCD and plasma models is negligible.

EnergyGuide steps in

Just as February 17, 2008, marked a watershed of sorts for television owners, another date of some significance is looming. On May 10, 2011, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) will require TV manufacturers to affix EnergyGuide labels to their products.

EnergyGuide is different from ENERGY STAR. The latter, as noted, is an assurance that a product uses at least 40 percent less energy than standard TVs of the same type. EnergyGuide makes no comparable claim. The sole purpose of its labels is to provide information to shoppers about the facts of the product's energy usage. According to the FCC, the label will require two main disclosures: "first, the television's estimated annual energy cost" – this will be based on a consumer electricity cost of 11 cents per kWh, with five hours of use per day – "and second, a comparison with the annual energy cost of other [similar] televisions with similar screen sizes."

Beginning July 11, the FTC will also require websites that sell TVs to display an image of the product's EnergyGuide label. This will assist you as you undertake the research that a purchase of this signif-



televisions are phasing out, so people in the market for a TV have other, newer questions before them. In the context of global, national, and local energy realities, these should not be taken lightly. What kind of high-definition flat-screen TV do you want (the basic choices, besides manufacturers, are between LCD, or

liquid crystal display, and plasma)? What size screen do you prefer? And how much energy will it consume? People should also ask themselves what steps they can take to mitigate energy consumption by their new TVs.

And there is good news on that score. Not long ago big-screen, high-def TVs were terrible energy hogs, yet they were so novel and appealing that people purchased them with little or no thought about the impact they would have on the monthly electric bill. In 2008 the Environmental Protection Agency estimated that TVs, when combined

Sony and other makers have stopped producing cathode-ray televisions with those large, funnel-shaped "tubes," if you have one, chances are it will be your last.



icance merits, both financially and in terms of your energy footprint. Don't expect the EnergyGuide label to save you money; it simply provides information – but it's information you can use to make better-informed choices.

And if you're a WEC member, consider the following:

We recently had a discussion in these pages about the Co-op's new rate design (different from the rate increase WEC has instituted, provisionally, this month). The rate design went into effect in October. It continued the Co-op's two-tier electricity pricing policy: those rates are now \$.09561 per-kWh for the first 200 kWh per month, and electricity above that basic-needs amount costs

Do you really need the largest bath towels? Try a smaller size; they save energy by drying more quickly when washed.

(Thanks for the tip, WEC member Mary Gilbert.)

\$.21349 per-kWh.

In reality, each Co-op member's bill reflects a "blend" of the two rates, resulting from how much electricity the household used during the previous month; the less overall power consumed, the closer your blended rate will be to the lower-cost block for the first 200 kWh; the more power consumed, the closer you'll be to the 21-cent/kWh level. You won't be precisely at either. You may not want to go this deep as you project a TV model's impact on your bill, but it is perhaps notable that the 11 cents/kWh cost that EnergyGuide uses for its calculations is approximately in the middle of WEC's first-tier and second-tier rates.

Night-night

Whatever you purchase, it's important to put your new high-def unit to sleep every night, or when you're away or not using it during the day. That doesn't mean just turning it off, because TVs draw phantom power even when their switch tells you they're not on. Here's what Wikipedia – an unreliable source, admittedly, but interesting – says about that: "The average American home uses 11,040 kWh of electricity per year. Unplugging a modern TV when not in use could save as much as 9 kWh per year . . . a savings of only 0.08 percent." On the other hand, your reaction might be, "Eight percent works for me!"

To actually turn your TV off – really off – you can plug it into a power strip and turn the power strip off. An even better option is to use a Smart Strip, because with these you don't have to remember to take the extra step of turning off the power strip. The Smart Strip detects when the appliance is

no longer in use and stops the flow of current to it and to the associated devices (such as game controllers) that are used with it. To learn more about the Smart Strip, and how it operates and simultaneously protects your costly electronic equipment, contact the

Co-op.

The future is here when it comes to TVs, and the old cathode ray tubes are going away. (Remember, if you're discarding a CRT device, that it now qualifies as "e-waste." See "Waste Not," below.)

It's a pretty cool future, with lots of lights and bells and whistles. But don't go into it blindly. Save yourself money, and save everyone energy. Look into it – and then have fun.



Elizabeth Miller, above, is Gov. Peter Shumlin's appointee to the post of Commissioner of the Department of Public Service. Prior to her DPS appointment, Miller worked as an attorney, first with a law firm in San Francisco, then as an associate attorney with Dinse, Knapp & McAndrew, PC, in Burlington. More recently, she co-founded the civil litigation firm, Spink & Miller, PLC, also in Burlington. She received her B.A. in Classics from UCLA, and graduated from Yale Law School in 1995, then served as a law clerk with Hon. James L. Oakes, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Commissioner Miller lives in Burlington. She is pictured here with WEC President Barry Bernstein, left, and WEC General Manager Avram Patt.

WASTE NOT

Reducing solid waste is a goal most WEC members can agree on. The Co-op reduces the waste stream's harmful impact by collecting the methane gas at the NEWS landfill in Coventry and using it to generate electricity, which avoids flaming this greenhouse gas into the atmosphere.

In this space, we help Co-op members find their own ways to reduce Vermont's waste stream, with tips about recycling, composting, the proper disposal of hazardous materials, and how to avoid generating some kinds of waste in the first place. Readers can submit ideas or questions for Waste Not by contacting Washington Electric Cooperative.

E-Waste. TVs (see "The Brave New World of Television," page 4) fit into the category of "e-waste," which is growing ever broader as more sophisticated electronic equipment is invented and older models, including cathode ray tube TVs, are relegated to the proverbial trash heap. Electronic waste is the fastest-growing component of waste. In 2008, the state's solid waste management districts collected more than 1.6 million pounds of e-waste.

On January 1, 2011, a new state law went into effect in Vermont, banning the disposal of e-waste – including all types of TVs and cathode ray tubes, computer monitors, keyboards, and mice, printers, fax machines, telephones, cell phones and many other items (a list can be found at www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/e-waste/pdfs/e-waste/) – in Vermont's solid waste facilities. Electronic devices "contain toxic materials including lead, mercury and chromium,



Time is running out for cathode ray tube (CRT) TVs, like the one pictured here (with WEC General Manager Avram Patt on camera). Sony and other makers are no longer manufacturing them. If the time comes to replace yours, or any other kind of TV, note that they are a form of e-waste and subject to Vermont's new E-Waste Recycling law.

that should be managed responsibly, as well as precious metals, such as gold, that should be recovered and recycled," according to the state's Department of Environmental Conservation, which administers the new Vermont E-Waste Recycling Program.

The ban is in effect now. You can discard e-waste at designated collection sites and transfer stations or through private waste haulers who agree to accept it, but local solid waste management districts are subsidizing the costs of e-waste collection, which means you may have to pay a fee when you drop off your e-waste. However, **free disposal of some of these products** – specifically computers and computer monitors, CRT-containing devices, TVs, and printers – will begin on **July 1**, when electronic manufacturers will begin paying the costs of the collection-and-recycling program. To be certain that it's free, however, you'll need to make sure that the collection site you visit is one of the (so far 51)

locations designated for participation by the DEC, or there may continue to be a fee for the service.

Thus far, the DEC lists four collection sites in Caledonia County, one in Orange County, and 11 in Washington County. Your best resource for more precise information is the Central Vermont Solid Waste Municipal District (802-229-9383; www.cvsdmd.org).

Vermont was the 24th state to institute an electronic-waste recycling law.



Putting The Best Team On The Field

Modernization and technical improvements to WEC's electric-distribution system are an important part of improving the Co-op's reliability. But they're not the only consideration. It may be just as important to find the best way to organize the crew – Washington Electric's staff of 16 line workers – so that they work efficiently, are best prepared to accomplish their tasks, know their roles in the organization, and are comfortable and knowledgeable as they go about their work.

There's nothing new or unique about that; it's the same principle that guides the managers of baseball teams as they seek the best batting order for their players. The players may bring terrific skills to their work, but the manager's job is to figure out how to organize them to get the best performance out of the team.

For Washington Electric's Operations Director Dan Weston, the challenge is similar. The Co-op puts significant resources into training its line workers in what is a difficult and demanding profession – although a satisfying one for people who like to work outdoors, are good at figuring things out and working with their hands, and have a spirit of adventure.

Rich will be on call for one week, and in the event that he has to go out on a trouble call he'll take Kyle. When it's Hans' week to be on call he would go out with Amos. You're never wondering who's paired with you; it's a two-man team on call 24/7.

But training and skill-development isn't the end of the story. Good management means always thinking about which aspects of the lineman's work experience can be improved, with the Co-op and its members ultimately reaping the benefits.

Last year Weston decided to make a few things more dependable and routine for his crew members. For one thing, rather than the foremen or himself assigning which trucks people would use for the day when the staff got together at the morning meeting to go over that day's work plan, Weston tried a different approach: he assigned specific trucks to specific linemen, on a permanent or at least semi-permanent basis. It's a small thing, but he quickly noticed the benefits.

"It's more efficient for the linemen themselves, because they don't have to move their personal gear from one truck to another; they're not constantly changing trucks. That also makes it more efficient for the Co-op because there's less of a chance of stuff being left behind or misplaced and holding things up."

Weston also noticed another benefit of assigning trucks more permanently: he calls it "pride of ownership."

"I believe the trucks are being kept up better; it's more like people having their own spaces, and that's a good thing," Weston said. "Also, they get to know their trucks better because they use them every day, like they know their own cars or pickups. I think that has benefits, because they're more keenly aware of how the equipment is running and whether anything mechanical needs



attention."

Rich Hallstrom, a maintenance foreman who has been with Washington Electric Co-op since 1999, is the principle foreman for the off-road crew. (However, everyone is trained to work off-road, and there are times, winter and summer, when they need to.) It's Hallstrom's crew that works its way back to power line sections that are hard to get to and hard to work on. They frequently use the Co-op's track digger – a rugged vehicle that moves on tracks, like a tank, and also has a digger-derrick like the large utility trucks so the crew can set poles in terrain where otherwise they'd have to do much of the work by hand.

Aside from the track digger, Hallstrom's personal vehicle is Truck 21. He can count on it. And another thing Hallstrom can count on is who he'll be working with. Teamed with Rich in Truck 21 is one of the crew's younger members, Apprentice Line Worker

Kyle Harper. Accompanying Rich and Kyle on the off-road construction crew are First Class Line Worker Hans Pope-Howe and Second Class Line Worker Amos Turner, in Truck 22. When a group is accustomed to working together each knows what his primary responsibilities will be when they get to the worksite; they can go about their business more efficiently, and probably get the job done more quickly and, most important, more safely.

On call

This pairing of line workers extends to another important matter for the Co-op – staffing the "off-time" hours in the event of an outage or emergency.

"Rich will be on call for one week, and in the event that he has to go out on a trouble call he'll take Kyle," said Weston. "When it's Hans' week to be on call he would go out with Amos. You're never wondering who's paired with you, and who you'll be able to reach. It's a two-man team always on call twenty-four/seven, and it rotates Wednesday to Wednesday."

The other crews, of course, also take their turns on call.

"This is an improvement in organization that fosters an improvement in service," Weston said. "Last year we tried it and this year we've continued it. It used to be difficult sometimes for the on-call lineman to reach a partner in the odd hours that trouble calls sometimes come in. Now people know. They'll always have the same partner and they'll always have the same truck."

Maybe it's not rocket science. It's not rocket science to put together a good batting order, either, but the little things can make a big difference.

Training and skill-development isn't the end of the story. Good management means thinking about which aspects of the lineman's work experience can be improved, with the Co-op and its members ultimately reaping the benefits.



Maintenance Foreman Rich Hallstrom, left, is paired with Apprentice Line Worker Kyle Harper, right, on most jobs, under a line-staff reorganization meant to achieve improved efficiency in Operations.



An imposing piece of machinery. The Co-op's track digger, above, goes where no truck can go, helping Rich Hallstrom's crew with off-road repairs and construction.

Think Now About Running for the Board

continued from page 1

to some 10,500 rural homes, farms, schools, and businesses in 41 towns in central Vermont. Like all democratic institutions, Washington Electric Cooperative functions best when more members participate.

If you would like to serve your Co-op and community, you must begin taking action soon because there are deadlines involved. Anyone interested in running for the board

should contact Administrative Assistant Deborah Brown at Washington Electric's office in East Montpelier. She will send out a packet of information that includes a petition and other materials needed to become a candidate. Completed petitions must contain the signatures of at least 25 WEC members, and will be **due on Friday, March 4, 2011.**

For example, you will also be asked to provide a photograph and some basic biographical information for publication in *Co-op Currents*. Debbie will provide all the details you need when you call.


Like all democratic institutions, Washington Electric Cooperative functions best when more members vote and participate.

Be assured that new directors are not expected to have specialized knowledge about electric utilities; service on the WEC board is a learning experience, and there has never been a more important time to participate in decisions relating to energy.

Bylaws petitions due sooner

Washington Electric Cooperative is governed by legally binding bylaws, and the annual election process provides members an opportunity to amend those bylaws. You don't need to be a lawyer to draft an amendment proposal. However, you do need to know whether the subject that interests

you is addressed in the current bylaws, and what those provisions are. You can obtain a copy of WEC's bylaws, also by contacting Debbie Brown at the Co-op's office.

Along with your bylaw amendment proposal you need to submit a petition for its adoption with the signatures of at least 50 Co-op members (the petition form can be obtained from the Co-op's office). These materials will be due on or before **February 10, 2011.** *Co-op Currents* will publish your amendment proposal just as it does when amendments are proposed by the Board of Directors. It's your Co-op. Think now about participating. 

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Deliberations Get Under Way

WEC's Rate Case Under Review at PSB

The increase in electric rates that Washington Electric Co-op's board and management have been planning and preparing for since early in 2010 is now in effect, for members' electricity usage as of January first.

For WEC's directors and management staff, the new reality of the higher electric rates – 23.81 percent over the rates that held steady at Washington Electric for 11 years – means entering into the nitty-gritty of the regulatory process that will lead either to approval by the Vermont Public Service Board or to some adjustment of the Co-op's request. If the latter should occur, WEC members will receive a one-time retroactive adjustment on their bill following that ruling, and then the rates approved by the PSB will be in effect going forward.

The regulatory process may take many months, perhaps more than half a year, to play out. It's not a function of "government red tape and delay," but, on the contrary, of regulatory agencies and the Co-op itself doing their due diligence to arrive at a decision that meets the utility's financial needs while also being fair to WEC members. (And the PSB and the Department of Public Service, which represents the public in issues regarding regulated utilities, have a lot on their plate besides Washington Electric's rate-increase proposal.)

Along the way, the regulatory process provides opportunities for Co-op members to make their opinions known to the Public Service Board.

"The Public Service Board opened a docket after we submitted our request on November 15 [2010]," said WEC General Manager Avram Patt. "We had a pre-hearing conference on January 4 [2011]. That's essentially a scheduling conference that lays out a timetable of dates and events that would lead to the Board issuing an order in September. That's not extraordinary; that timeframe would be normal in a case like this one."

Patt said that utilities and the Department of Public Service are sometimes able to narrow down the issues and reach an agreement that they then mutually ask the PSB to approve. Were that to happen, the rate case might be resolved earlier, but at this point, Patt said, he has to assume that the PSB will not issue a final decision until September.

During the remaining winter and spring months both sides, starting with the DPS, will do "discovery," which means formulating questions that the other must answer with documentation. That will be followed by technical hearings before a PSB hearing officer, probably during the summer.

"After those hearings the hearing officer issues a 'Proposal for Decision,' which is taken to the full Public Service

Board," said Patt. "The Department and the Co-op have two weeks to respond to the proposed decision. Then the PSB takes all that information – the proposal and the parties' feedback – and issues its final order."

In early January Peter Shumlin replaced James Douglas as governor of Vermont, and appointed Burlington attorney Elizabeth Miller to head the Department of Public Service, replacing Douglas' DPS commissioner, David O'Brien. Patt did not think that the change would affect WEC's rate case in any significant way.

"While there may be some policy issues that come up in a rate case, it's mostly about the numbers," he said. "They'll be looking at the numbers, examining our processes, and they'll determine whether they feel our costs are justified and reasonable. Since we haven't been in for a rate increase for

The lengthy time frame isn't a function of "government red tape and delay," but of regulatory agencies and the Co-op itself doing their due diligence to arrive at a fair and appropriate decision.

so long, we've always expected that our regulators would be taking a close look."

A significant rate increase like the Co-op's is bound to draw some attention, particularly by those who pay WEC electric bills. Patt said that even before the PSB opened its docket

it received some e-mail messages from people requesting the Board and Department to open a case, which they intended to do and have done. There have been a few letters to the editor of *The Times Argus*, and the newspaper published an op-ed by Patt on the subject of the rate increase.

"We expect there will continue to be public feedback from our members – some supportive and some not so," said Patt. "We've been explaining to our members at every opportunity why we need to do this, and we're hopeful that most people understand."

The amount Co-op members actually

pay on their bills is determined by two equally important factors: WEC's rates, and the amount of electricity they use each month. One way to lessen the impact of a rate increase is to be even more mindful of using energy as efficiently and wisely as possible. Little things can help, like getting in the habit of turning off lights, TVs, and computer equipment when they're not in use; making sure you've changed all your light bulbs from the incandescent kind to compact fluorescents. Larger projects also might be in order. WEC members are encouraged to make full use of the information and financial incentives provided by Efficiency Vermont. And they can always contact WEC's Products and Services Director Bill Powell with questions and for advice about their energy usage.

In the meantime, WEC members will begin adjusting to the new reality of higher rates. And the Co-op's leadership will spend the next eight months or so providing everything that state regulators need to reach their final decision.



On Getting Here

More than one visitor to the Co-op has been puzzled about the surrounding roads since the Agency of Transportation made major changes to the intersection of Route 2 and Route 14 last fall. You can see the Co-op's building, right where it always was, but how do you get to it?

The answer is that you turn off of Route 14 onto Kelton Road, just north of the new intersection (and close to the East Montpelier Town Clerk's office). If you're coming from Route 2 you must first turn onto Route 14, which now has a stoplight – and be careful because both of these state highways are now three-lane roads at the intersection and it can be a little hard to tell what lane you're in. After turning onto Kelton Road (a left if you're coming from Route 2, and a right if you're headed south on Route 14), turn left immediately onto an unnamed access road that leads to the Co-op and to the Old Brick Church, where it dead-ends. The access road is actually a short section of the old Route 14. There's parking along this brief access road and beside WEC's office, but there are plans for a safer and roomier parking lot between the access road and the state highway; construction will wait until the warmer weather.

Also on this short access road is a bus stop for the GMTA Route 2 Commuter bus, with a few parking spaces that bus riders can use. Consider taking the bus to town. It's convenient, inexpensive, and reduces traffic and emissions.