

Revised Co-op Policy Addresses Home Energy

Requires Registration of Generators

Washington Electric Co-op is as proactive as any electric utility in Vermont in terms of encouraging its members to find ways to produce their own electricity. In Co-op Currents, on its website (www.washingtonelectric.co-op), and in discussions with individual Co-op members, WEC recommends standby generators for back-up and emergency power, UPS (uninterruptible power supply) systems to safeguard electronic equipment and keep it operating during outages (UPS systems are now made for whole-house applications, too), and net-metering for members interested in home-generation.

What WEC asks – actually, requires – in return is that people who own and use stand-alone generators and PTO-driven generators contact the Co-op and register the generators for the our data base. Please do so even if you believe you've done it previously. We need to be certain we have an up-to-date record of all such systems, and to double-check that they possess modern and reliable safety switches.

The Board of Directors recently updated its 1983 policy, which previously addressed only generators, to require that UPS and net-metering systems comply with code.

The concern is that all three kinds of equipment have something in common: they potentially pose a risk for WEC's line workers.

During power outages line workers typically disconnect and isolate damaged sections of line from the utility's electric system prior to making repairs. If electricity generated by the consumer should come from the opposite direction, they could be seriously injured.

Remedy

Technology provides a simple solution. Home generating equipment of all three types noted above is, or should be, installed with switches that

disconnect the home from the utility's electric system.

UPS systems that comply with code are equipped with switches that sense a power outage and automatically break their connection to the utility. While many generators must be intentionally started by their owners, some models also have an automatic "on" switch that simultaneously disconnects from the utility.

Net-metering systems are a little different, because they are designed to interact with the utility. They enable the customer who generates his or her own electricity to stay connected to the grid, and actually provide small amounts of usable power to the utility if they are producing more electricity than they're using. All net-metering installations must be approved by the Vermont Public Service Board, which ensures that legal net-metering systems have both automatic and manual disconnection switches – again, for safety reasons.

Nevertheless, the Co-op can't assume that all the installations owned by members are up to code and equipped with reliable protections.

"There has been an evolution in home power-producing equipment since we last visited this issue 21 years ago," said WEC General Manager Avram Patt. "As a result, we need to know exactly what our members have out there in the way of power-producing equipment. We can then enter the information into our computerized outage-response system, so when we're experiencing an outage we will know immediately where, within the affected area, people own these devices. Our workers can then take steps to ensure their safety."

People who own standalone or PTO-driven generators must complete a short form and return it to Washington Electric Cooperative, even if they have done so before. Readers can use the form above.

Washington Electric is still a booster of home generation, for the members' safety, comfort and convenience, and to promote energy and environmental conservation.

But if you decide to take that step, or if you've done so already, make sure you let the Co-op know about it.

Generator Registration Form

Member name _____

Account number _____

Map location _____

Type of back up system:

Stand alone generator _____ (manufacturer) OR

Power Take Off (PTO generator) _____ (manufacturer)

Horsepower rating _____ (hp) Generator size _____ (watts)

Transfer switch _____ (manufacturer)

Installation complies with National Electric Code (NEC): _____ (Yes)

(If you are unsure whether your installation complies with the NEC, please contact the Co-op and we will visit your installation to confirm or assure NEC compliance)