

GCEA News



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Touchstone Energy®

Paying Your Electric Bill on Time

BY MARCIA WIREMAN, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

It is no surprise to anyone that times are economically tough right now at both a national and local level. Here at Gunnison County Electric Association, we have noticed the increased economic pressure placed on our membership through a substantial increase in delinquent bills. We recognize things can happen that make it difficult to pay bills, and we do care about our members in those situations. However, at the same time, we are a not-for-profit, member-owned cooperative, and unfortunately when some members don't pay their electric bills, the good, paying customers are left to cover unpaid bills in the form of higher rates.



Marcia Wireman

At GCEA, we have a responsibility to make prudent business decisions on behalf of the membership as a whole. That means we sometimes have to make the tough decision to disconnect a member's electric service for nonpayment. Below are the answers to frequently asked questions I hope will provide some useful information about GCEA's billing and collection process, as well as encourage members to communicate with us about their past due accounts prior to a disconnect situation.

When is payment for my electric service due?

GCEA processes and mails your electric bill on a monthly basis. Your bill mailing date depends upon the substation from which you are served. Generally, bills for consumers in the Lake City area are mailed on approximately the 11th of the month; bills for consumers in the rural Gunnison area are mailed on approximately the 22nd of the month; and bills for consumers from Almont north to Crested Butte are mailed on approximately the last day of the month. The due date for an

electric bill is 20 days after the bill has been mailed.

What happens when I don't pay my electric bill on time?

It is extremely important that we **receive** your payment within five days after the due date, or a delinquent notice will be mailed

advising you of the date your service will be disconnected should we not receive your payment before that date. The scheduled disconnect date will be 15 days after the date the delinquent notice is mailed. If we haven't received your payment by the disconnect date, a \$10 late fee will be assessed to your account to cover administrative costs for servicing your past due account, and your electric service will be subject to disconnection.

Should we have to send a GCEA representative to your premises to either collect a payment or disconnect your service due to nonpayment, we will charge you the actual costs involved, but not less than \$35. This charge applies for visits made from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on normally scheduled workdays. All other hours, as well as Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, the minimum charge will be the actual cost involved, but not less than \$50. Once your account has been disconnected, you must pay the total amount due in order to have your electric service reconnected. This total includes the past due amount for your electric service, service disconnect and reconnect fees and related service charges, and it may also include a deposit.

I just do not have enough money to pay my electric bill by the disconnect date. Is there anything I can do to keep my service from being disconnected?

We are certainly willing to work with members who tem- *[continued on page 6]*

Caulk Around Windows to Save Money, Energy

Caulk is cheap, and using it can make a big difference in heating and cooling costs. Caulking around the exterior of your windows is an easy way to stop small air drafts.

There are many different types and colors of caulk available. Choose what will work best for your needs and match your home. Some caulks are even paint compatible. You'll need about half a tube per window on average, as well as a caulk gun. Here are a few tips to help you get a good seal:

- Pick a warm, dry day.
- Clean the area. Scrape away any old caulk or peeling paint. Clean the area of dirt and grime.
- Cut off 1/4- to 1/2-inch of the tip of the caulk tube at a 45-degree angle — puncture the seal with a nail if needed — and place the tube in the gun.



- Run a bead of caulk between the siding and window frame. The bead should be about 1/8-inch thick, at least. You may need to frequently clean the tip of the tube to get a smooth line. Make sure to use enough caulk to overlap both sides. Look for any gaps or areas where air could get through.
- You can smooth the caulk if you wish with a small flat object, such as an ice cream stick or flat screwdriver (if you keep wiping it clean). Avoid using your fingers. The caulk could be harmful to your skin.
- If you plan to paint over the caulk, wait 24 hours.

For gaps over a half inch, try expandable foam. It's available in several formulas for different jobs and can be used to fill large gaps around windows and doors, as well as holes where plumbing or wires come into the home and where the foundation meets siding or other materials. Use caution with it because it expands much more than you think and can be difficult to remove once it dries.

Paying Your Electric Bill on Time

[continued from page 5] porarily find themselves in difficult situation, but it is important to let us know early and work with us to establish an acceptable payment arrangement before you get in a potential disconnect situation. As you can see from the charges described in the answer to the previous question, a past due account can become expensive to you as a member because of the additional charges we must assess just to cover our costs. It is certainly in your best interest to do everything you can to communicate with us to avoid a disconnection of your service.

What happens if I no longer need service from GCEA and don't pay my last bill?

If you move on from GCEA's system without paying what you owe, we will continue collection efforts even if we are forced to write off what you owe us. As a part of our collection efforts, your account will be turned over to a collection agency, which will be reflected on your credit report. In addition, you will not be able to receive service again until all bad debts with GCEA are collected. Again, if you are having a difficult time paying your bill, please communicate with us and we will work with you to establish an acceptable payment arrangement.

Are there any other services available that can help me with payment of my electric bill?

The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) is a federally funded program administered by the Colorado Department of Human Services and is designed to assist eligible individuals with their winter heating costs. The LEAP eligibility period runs from November 1 through April 30. You can find out more about this program by contacting the Gunnison County Department of Human Services at 970-641-3244.

We also can help you in finding ways to reduce your electric bill through saving energy regardless of whether or not you are facing delinquency. Our member services department will be happy to assist you in determining how you might be able to save on your electric bill each month.

The bottom line is we know times are tough and want to assist you in any way we reasonably can. Please let us know if we can help. Just give us a call at 970-641-3520.

DID YOU KNOW?

Replacing just four 75-watt incandescent lightbulbs with four 23-watt compact fluorescent equivalents will save almost \$200 over the life of the bulbs.

INSULATE COLORADO PROGRAM EXTENDED TO DECEMBER 2009

Summer is the perfect time to improve the energy performance of your home. Gunnison County Electric Association continues to offer homeowner rebates to members for insulation and air sealing costs until December 31, 2009. GCEA's "Insulate Colorado" program provides members a 25 percent rebate, up to \$375, for insulation work performed by certified contractors. For more information, call GCEA at 970-641-3520 or visit the website at www.gcea.coop.

GCEA EMPLOYEE ANNIVERSARY — AUGUST

Greg Katheiser,
meter reader and vehicle maintenance, 14 years



GCEA journeyman Ron Copenhaver takes safety precautions while working outdoors.

SUN SAFETY PROGRAMS HELP REDUCE SKIN CANCER RISKS

With nearly 300 days of sunshine, Colorado residents proudly boast of their many outdoor recreational activities. But we pay a cost for these bragging rights. Melanoma is rising at an alarming rate in Colorado because of excessive sun exposure. What may be surprising to many is that indoor workers who only receive intermittent exposure to the sun are at increased risk for melanoma, while outdoor workers who are exposed for longer periods of time are at an increased risk for non-melanoma skin cancer.

Gunnison County Electric Association takes this cancer risk seriously. Every year GCEA offers skin cancer prevention training to all its employees. Sun Safe Colorado provides the training, along with a packet of resources, to educate employees about the health effects of overexposure to ultraviolet radiation and strategies for skin cancer prevention.

The different forms of skin cancer can be easily prevented by following cautionary measures, such as reducing UVR exposure, wearing sunglasses and protective clothing and using sunscreen and lip balm with an SPF of 30 or greater. We encourage all our members to take similar precautions. For more information, visit www.sunsafecolorado.org.

GCEA's Country Kitchen

Gunnison County Electric Association Operation Assistant Sherry Booth and her husband, Jason (who is a fly-fishing guide), adhere to the conservation practice of "catch and release" — except when it comes to landing large pike. "They eat our trout," Sherry exclaims. Sherry's mother-in-law, Kathy, raised her family near the Great Lakes and is pleased to share this decadent recipe with us. It is wonderful with fresh-caught lake trout, pike or salmon. With pike, you do have to know how to fillet it so as to remove the Y-bone, and then you discover it has a delicate meat.

Fish Bisque

*From the kitchen of Kathy Booth
(Great with salmon, pike, lake trout or any fresh-caught fish)*

- 1 cup chopped leeks or onion
- 1/2 tablespoon crushed garlic
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter
- 23 ounces chicken broth
- 2 cups crushed canned tomatoes
- 1/8 cup fresh parsley
- 1 teaspoon dried dill
- 1 cup coarsely chopped fresh mushrooms
- 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper
- 2 cups fish (chopped)
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 1/8 cup flour

Sauté onion and crushed garlic in butter until soft. Add chicken broth, tomatoes, parsley, dill, mushrooms, salt, pepper and fish. Cook about 10-15 minutes at a medium boil, stirring occasionally. When fish is cooked through, whisk together flour and half-and-half until smooth. Add flour mixture to the soup and cook gently until thickened.



GCEA's Operations Assistant Sherry Booth shows off a pike she caught at Blue Mesa.

We're Always Thinking of Ways to Help Our Members

Gunnison County Electric Association is always looking for ways to help its members save electricity.

But then we thought, why stop there? To help you save money on goods and services, we have adopted Touchstone Energy's Co-op Connections program. This is a nationwide program that helps local area businesses prosper and grow. We promote businesses that honor the Co-op Connections discount card.

GCEA is mailing a free Co-op Connections Card to all members to use at any business displaying a Co-op Connections sticker. Be sure to look for your card in the mail, and keep it to take advantage of the many discounts offered.



GCEA's Annual Meeting Draws a Big Crowd

A lot has changed in the past 70 years, but Gunnison County Electric Association members can still count on their local co-op to host a summer barbecue before the annual meeting. It is a great opportunity for rural folks to take a break from busy schedules and visit with distant friends and neighbors.

Nearly 200 members and guests joined GCEA board of directors and employees in celebrating a successful year of operations. We were honored to have state Sen. Gail Schwartz (D-Dist. 5) attend this year's meeting. Senator Schwartz commended GCEA for its leadership and hard work in helping Colorado pursue its New Energy Economy.



Mike Wells, GCEA chief executive officer, welcomes Sen. Gail Schwartz (D-Dist. 5) to the annual meeting.

The annual meeting is also a time for presenting GCEA's business report to the membership and providing attendees with the latest energy efficiency information. Chief Executive Officer Mike Wells reported that GCEA remains financially strong despite the slowing economy. Brad Nebergall, Tri-State Generation and Transmission senior vice president for energy and markets, reminded members that rural cooperatives have long focused on the primary mission of providing electricity in a reliable, affordable and responsible way. But, Nebergall stated, "the simplicity ends there."

Today's energy industry is facing many regulatory challenges. Nebergall encouraged GCEA members to keep informed about the issues being discussed in Washington and to express their ideas and concerns to their congressional delegation. Input from cooperative members is important as their leaders shape the policies that will impact all of our lives.



Brad Nebergall, Tri-State senior vice president for energy and markets (left), converses with Marcia Wireman (center) and Chuck Cliggett (right).

An important issue at the state level is whether the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) should regulate Tri-State's resource planning. Typically, public utility commissions regulate investor-owned utilities to ensure ratepayers' interests are balanced against those of utility shareholders. In the cooperative system, ratepayers are members who own and manage the utility, ensuring that ratepayers' interests are protected. As a not-for-profit wholesale power supplier, Tri-State is not regulated by the PUC but files a resource plan with the PUC for informational purposes.

The PUC received over 10,000 comments on this regulatory issue — a clear indication that cooperative members are concerned about energy and how it is managed to meet their needs. Nebergall reported that the comments were divided fairly evenly between those who support regulation and those who do not. Tri-State's position is that PUC regulation is not necessary since the rural electric cooperatives are adequately overseen by their boards and members.

Over the past few years, Tri-State has responded to public interest in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving energy efficiency. Recent efforts include developing 220 megawatts of natural gas-based capacity in eastern Colorado. Tri-State has also teamed up with First Solar, Inc., to develop a 500,000-panel solar power plant in Cimarron, New Mexico. The Cimarron I Solar Project will be the largest photovoltaic project serving a North American public electric cooperative and one of the largest solar power stations in the world. It will produce 30

megawatts — enough electricity to meet the needs of 9,000 homes.

In addition to diversifying its generation mix, Tri-State has teamed up with Xcel Energy to pursue transmission projects in southern Colorado. The San Luis Valley has great potential for producing solar power, but transmission lines are needed to deliver the electricity produced by the sun to population centers where it is needed.

One of the highlights of the meeting is recognizing the recipients of GCEA's student scholarships. According to Dan McDonough, member services manager, GCEA has offered student scholarships for 11 years. Funds are provided from a variety of sources, including contributions from Tri-State, Basin Electric, GCEA board members, unclaimed capital credits and GCEA's Operation Round-Up® program. Eighteen students received a total of \$13,500 from the scholarship fund this year. "Knowing that GCEA is helping local students advance their educational goals has been one of the most rewarding responsibilities of the member services department," stated McDonough.



Dan McDonough (second from left) introduces the scholarship winners who attended the meeting: Dayne Luekenga (far left), Jacob Cadwell (second from right) and Karter Shelton (far right).

No annual meeting would be complete without displays and prizes. In addition to safety displays, the latest LED and CFL lighting innovations were available to check out. This year's door prizes included a shop vacuum, paper shredder, electric thermometer barbecue set, multipurpose tool kit, Cuisinart blender, bird feeder with seed, fire and carbon monoxide detectors, energy efficiency kits and LED holiday lights. Randy Spydell of Gunnison County was delighted to receive this year's \$300 grand prize, while everyone else walked away with a new CFL.