

GCEA News



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Touchstone Energy®

Be Prepared — What to Do If Your Power Goes Out

BY VICKI SPENCER, ENERGY USE/COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

In an ideal world, you would not have to prepare for power outages. But in the real world, where we cannot control the weather, it is better to be safe than sorry. This is why Gunnison County Electric Association wants you to be prepared for the unexpected.



Vicki Spencer

If the power does go out, the first step is to check your service panel or fuse box. If you have a service panel with circuit breakers, check each breaker to see if it has tripped. If all the breakers are in the “on” position, turn off the main breaker then switch it back on.

If you have a fuse box, make sure the fuses are okay. You should always keep spare fuses on hand so that you can replace any fuses that are burned out. After replacing the fuses, turn off the main power

switch and turn it on again. If the power is still off, check the outside disconnect located beneath the electric meter. Not all meters have a breaker switch installed; but if yours does, flip it to “off,” then back to “on.”

If these steps don’t bring back your power, check with neighbors to see if they are also without power. If they have power, a nearby line may be down. If you see a downed line, always assume it is live and keep away. If the line is in contact with a fence or rail, it could energize the fence for several thousand yards, creating a hazard along the entire fence line.

Call GCEA immediately at 970-641-3520 to report power outages and downed lines. When you call, please be prepared to give your address or account number as it appears on your bill. This number helps to quickly identify the location of your individual electric service line.

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ITEMS TO KEEP IN YOUR EMERGENCY KIT

A home emergency kit can be invaluable in an outage, especially if power is likely to be out for some time. We all hope that any outage is short lived, but preparing for longer interruptions is time well spent.

- Portable battery-operated radio
- Flashlight(s)
- Spare batteries for radio and flashlight
- Candles and matches or a lighter
- Wind up or battery alarm clock
- First aid kit
- Water and food
- Freezer ice packs (kept in the freezer)
- Large cooler or ice chest
- Personal hygiene supplies
- Baby supplies, including diapers
- Ziploc-type plastic bags and moist towelettes
- Duct tape

- Sleeping bags or blankets
- Warm, dry clothing

If you know a storm is coming, fill containers with water, including your bathtubs and sinks. Separate water for drinking from that for other uses. Flush toilets sparingly with a bucket of water.

Meals will be a challenge without electricity, so plan on a three- to five-day supply for each member of the family, including family pets. These can include canned and freeze dried meats, vegetables and fruits. Don’t forget to keep a manual can opener on hand, along with disposable plates, cups and eating utensils. A camp stove with fuel can come in handy.

Capital Credits Once Again Returned to GCEA Members

Gunnison County Electric Association is a member-owned, nonprofit cooperative. Although we are a nonprofit organization, as a practical reality GCEA must collect revenue in excess of our costs to remain financially viable. This excess revenue represents our members' investment in the cooperative. It is used to fund capital improvements to the distribution system, such as replacing worn equipment, and whenever it is financially feasible, some of this excess revenue is returned to our member-owners as a capital credit allocation. You can think of this as a dividend that is a benefit of cooperative membership.

At GCEA, we track the capital credit allocations year by year. We have been able to repay capital credits every year for the last 23 years. Over that period of time we refunded approximately \$4.4 million in capital credits to our member-owners. In 2010, we issued refunds to 1989 mem-



GCEA members will once again receive a capital credit scheduled to be paid in 2011.

bers of record which represented 50 percent of the 1989 allocation, or approximately \$160,000.

Although we have not yet determined the amount of the capital credit allocation to be repaid in 2011, you can rest assured that your cooperative will continue to operate to best serve you in providing safe, reliable electricity while meeting the financial challenges ahead.

AFFORDABLE GREEN POWER

GCEA has been offering green power to our members for many years, but now it is much more affordable. The average home uses 700 kWh. At 25 cents per 100 kWh block, the cost would be just \$1.75 to offset the home's energy use.

Call GCEA at 970-641-3520 or go to our website to sign up today.

EMPLOYEE ANNIVERSARIES

Cindy Muirhead accounting assistant
1 year

Wally Baker meter technician
3 years

Paula MacLennan administrative assistant
13 years

Chastity Miller cashier and receptionist
4 years

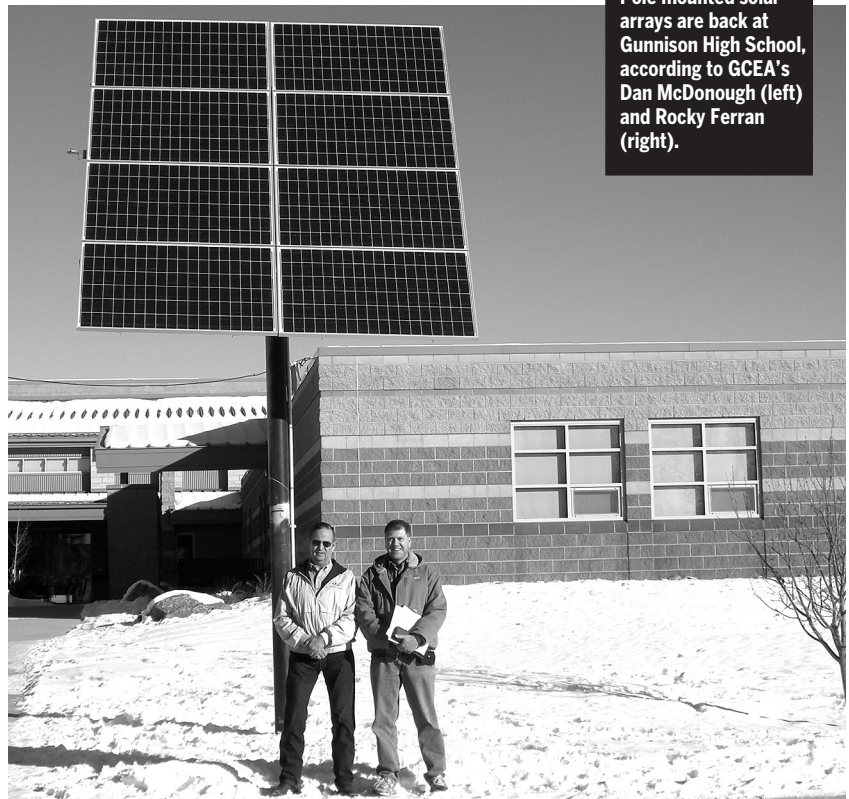
CONGRATULATIONS!

High School Solar Systems Back On Line

Several years ago GCEA initiated solar education projects in our community by donating funds to the Gunnison and Crested Butte high schools. The schools raised matching funds to build the pole-mounted solar arrays. In 2010, each of the schools was involved in construction projects which meant the solar systems were out of commission for much of the year. Now that the construction is done, the solar systems are back online.

The anticipated output over the next six months for each of the schools is about 1.44 megawatt-hours. Not only will the energy generated offset some of the energy that the schools need to purchase, there will be an added benefit. The teachers will be able to use the solar systems to incorporate conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy education into their curricula.

In exchange for GCEA's contribution, the school district has donated the renewable energy credits (RECs) generated by the solar systems to GCEA. Since GCEA did not have an obligation to meet any renewable portfolio standards in 2010, we remitted the RECs to our wholesale energy supplier, Tri-State Generation and Transmission. Tri-State, in turn, will pay GCEA for the RECs.



Pole mounted solar arrays are back at Gunnison High School, according to GCEA's Dan McDonough (left) and Rocky Ferran (right).



If Your Power Goes Out

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If your power is going to be off for hours or even days, there are additional precautions you and your family can take:

- Turn off and unplug electrical equipment. Leave one light on inside so you can tell when power is turned back on.
- Turn on an outside light that is visible from the road so that GCEA crews can see that your power has been restored.
- Close all doors, windows and curtains, and even the doors between rooms. This will help your home retain heat in cold weather. Move to a room on the south side of the home where it is warmer during the daytime.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer closed tightly. If you're not sure food is safe to eat, use the old rule of thumb: "When in doubt, throw it out."
- Know how to manually override your electric garage door opener.
- Conserve water. Water will keep hot in your water heater's tank for up to 3 days.
- Keep warm in layers of clothing and blankets. Wool is especially warm.
- Keep active.
- Use the fireplace wisely and safely. Do not leave the damper open when not in use.
- Pets like tropical fish and birds are sensitive to temperature changes. They will require special care.
- Your phone will probably work — the telephone company uses a separate, low voltage power supply. Use it to keep in touch and stay informed.
- It's a good idea to keep your sensitive electronic equipment protected at all times. Get a surge protector for computers, micro-waves, stereos, televisions, DVD players and anything else that could get damaged by current fluctuations.

Restoring power

GCEA has a list of priorities that we use to determine the best way to restore power after an outage. If it is a localized interruption, like a downed line or pole, the priority is easy. We will send out a crew to fix it. But if we get widespread damage from a storm or other cause, we have to take it step by step. For example, if we restore the lines going to your home before we repair

substations and main lines, you still won't have power, and we will have to come back to test the lines before hooking you up. By restoring power from the distribution points down, we can actually restore your power faster.

1. Substations — In a major emergency, our first priority is to repair the substations that feed power to all our members, if that is where the problem exists.

2. Main lines — If the interruption is on a main line carrying electricity from the substations to each community we serve, many members are affected. They are our next priority. Once power has begun to flow through these lines again, we can focus our attentions on the needs of our individual members.

3. Spurs — These are the lines that bring power to smaller groups of members who live on the same road or share the same hillside. Typically, GCEA will restore spurs that serve the most members first. The lines that serve just one or two members will be restored next. Often, power is restored to these members as the main lines are re-energized. If there is still a problem on a spur or service line, some members may see their neighbor's lights go on, while their power is still out.

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Other priorities

GCEA maintains a database of people with special power needs (such as life support equipment) and emergency service providers (police, rescue, ambulance and fire stations). We make every effort to prioritize your needs.

Members with special requirements are encouraged to let us know in advance and to install backup power sources. You may want to sign up for a Twitter account so you can follow us during an outage and get periodic updates.

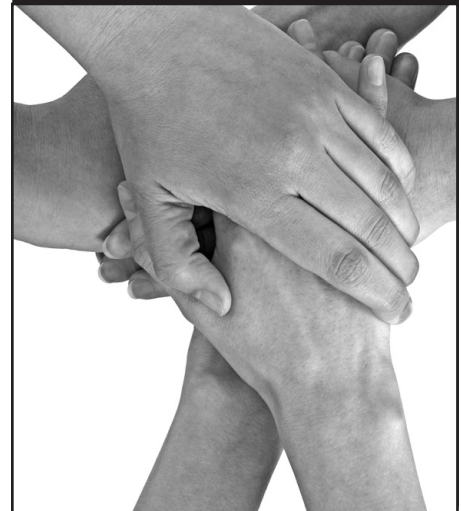
SCHEDULE AN ENERGY AUDIT AND SAVE \$

Residential and commercial customers can save money by participating in GCEA's free energy audit program. Energy auditors can help identify areas where you are losing heat, calculate how much energy your appliances use and provide information on how to avoid phantom loads even when your electronics are turned off. Call member services at 970-641-3520 to sign up today.

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

Nearly one in five Colorado families is struggling to cover monthly expenses. Many will go to bed and wake up cold throughout the winter. This is hard to imagine in our climate. You can help your neighbors get through hard times by donating to Energy Outreach Colorado.

Over the years, this nonprofit has helped hundreds of thousands of families heat their homes. You can make your tax-deductible donation online or through the mail with a one-time or monthly contribution. Just contact Energy Outreach Colorado, 225 E. 16th Ave., Denver, CO 80203-1612; 1-866-HEAT-HELP or www.energyoutreach.org.



Local Libraries Promote Wise Energy Use With Kill-A-Watt Meter

GCEA members can call on their local libraries to help reduce energy costs. Last year, GCEA donated Kill-A-Watt meters to each of the libraries to loan out to library patrons. All you do is plug an appliance into one side of the Kill-A-Watt meter and plug the meter into an outlet. The meter will then display the power consumption of the appliance. You can figure

out the electrical expense of each appliance by the day, week, month or year.

You may be surprised to learn that some appliances use electricity even when they are turned off. If this is the case, you can reduce your electricity usage by plugging the appliance into a power strip that you can turn off when you are not using the appliance.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Daylight-savings time begins on **March 13** this year. Mark your calendars so you don't forget.



Why Does the Power Blink?

At one time or another, we've all returned home or woken up late for work to see a blinking "12:00" on our digital alarm clock. You then have to reset every digital clock in your household that doesn't have a battery backup, from the microwave oven to the answering machine. Usually, this state of "eternal midnight" was caused by a "blink" in the electrical system.

While blinks can be annoying, they show that an electrical system is working exactly as designed. And while GCEA has taken steps to reduce the number of blinks across its power system, there are measures you can take as well.

Let's look at blinks. These momentary power interruptions can occur anywhere along a power system — from the time electrons are generated at a power plant to when they are shipped across transmission lines to substations or during distribution from a substation to your home.

Why blinks?

Blinks are created when a breaker, or switch, opens along any portion of the power system. The breaker usually opens because of a large, quick rise of electrical current. This large rise, called a fault condition, can occur when a tree branch touches a line, lightning strikes or a wire breaks.

When this happens, a relay senses the fault and tells the breaker to open, preventing the flow of power to the problem site. After opening, the breaker quickly closes. The brief delay, which allows the fault to clear, usually lasts less than two seconds.

If the fault clears, every home or business that receives electricity off that power line has just experienced a blink. This could include thousands of accounts if the breaker protects a transmission line or a substation.

Reducing the blink's effects

Your co-op employs methods to reduce blink frequency. Tree trimming is probably the easiest and most common way, and one area where you can help. Make sure your co-op knows of any trees or limbs located close to a power line. Call GCEA immediately at 970-641-3520 to inform the co-op of potential problems.

Meanwhile, you can reduce the frustration of blinks by purchasing an alarm clock equipped with a battery backup. This type of digital clock offers "ride through" ability for momentary outages. It will also keep the correct time and sound an alarm in case of a long-duration outage, provided a charged battery is in place. As an added benefit, these devices only use the battery in the event of a power interruption.

Blinks affect all electrical equipment, not just digital clocks. If there is a blink while you are operating a computer, your computer may crash and you will have to reboot, hoping all the while that there will be few corrupted files.

An uninterruptible power supply (UPS) on your computer can help prevent information loss. A UPS incorporates surge suppression technology with a battery backup and provides you some time to save whatever you were working on and exit your computer properly.

The future of blinks

We at GCEA operate an active system maintenance program and work hard to identify and fix sources of service interruptions. Even though blinks will never disappear from our electrical energy delivery system, by working together we can minimize the effects of the interruptions and the frequency with which they occur.

Objects Commonly Placed in Electrical Outlets

Every year, 2,400 children are injured after inserting household objects into electrical outlets. These are the most common objects placed in outlets:

