

GCEA News



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MAILING ADDRESS

P.O. Box 180
Gunnison, CO 81230-0180

STREET ADDRESS

37250 West Highway 50
Gunnison, CO 81230

970-641-3520 Gunnison
970-349-5385 Crested Butte

gcea@gcea.coop Email
www.gcea.coop Web

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Touchstone Energy®

Rates to Remain Stable for 2010

BY MICHAEL V. WELLS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Mike Wells

Over the last several years Gunnison County Electric Association's cost of purchased power and cost of operations have risen dramatically. These cost factors have translated into higher rates to the membership, and in fact over the last eight years, with a volatile energy marketplace, rate increases have totaled 56.6 percent.

It is with great pleasure that I can report the good news that the GCEA Board of Directors passed a resolution approving the 2010 budget without a rate increase. This is the first time since 2004 that GCEA has not had a rate increase due to either Tri-State Generation and Transmission, Inc., pass-through cost or a general rate increase.

We recognize that many of our members are struggling through these difficult times, so we too are doing our best to hold the line. Therefore, as management prepared the budget for board approval, we set an association goal to cut expenses to a level that would not require a rate

increase. This was not an easy task as we are experiencing declining kilowatt-hour sales and ever-rising cost of operations. To accomplish our goal, we have had to defer many special programs, cut our departmental budgets to the bare minimum, lower operating

margins to just above our debt covenant requirements and freeze wages for our employees. These were necessary measures to keep rates stable.

For budget purposes, we are predicting that our revenue for 2010 will be similar to what we saw in 2009 and estimating kWh sales growth to be at less than one percent. We also estimated our new consumer growth to be 1.8 percent growth on our 10,000-meter base number. Only time will tell how clear our crystal ball is, with the economy and the weather being the largest unknown factors in our predictions.

Other budget highlights include initiating a pilot load control program for residential and large power loads. This is

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Gunnison County Electric Adopts New Identity Theft Prevention Plan

Nearly 9 million Americans have their identities stolen each year. If you know someone who has had his or her identity stolen, you know how it can turn a victim's life upside down. Once your identity is stolen, it can cost hundreds of dollars and take countless hours — even years — to repair the damage to your good name and credit record.

This is why GCEA is taking extra precautions to help protect members' identities. You may have noticed that when you call about your account, GCEA representatives have begun to ask a number of questions to verify your identity. GCEA realizes that this may seem impersonal — especially to longtime members — and it may be an inconvenience when you are in a hurry. But GCEA is implementing these measures with your best interests in mind.

We hope you will bear with us as we try to minimize the risk that you will become the next victim of identity theft or credit card fraud.

Measure Your Energy Use

With all the talk about energy efficiency and conservation, you may be wondering how much energy each of your appliances or plug-in devices uses.

Several kinds of energy monitors are on the market to help you as an average consumer monitor your energy use anywhere a power cord and electrical outlet are used. These monitors take the mystery out of the question, "How much power does this appliance use?"

The devices are portable and relatively simple to use. Plug one into an outlet, then plug in the appliance, light or other device you wish to measure and monitor. An LCD display shows you how many kilowatt-hours of electricity the device or appliance consumes.



The power monitor can help you understand what your individual plug-in conveniences are costing you in electricity.

You can also monitor the energy use in your house with a device called the "whole house power monitor." It hooks to an outdoor utility meter. A signal sends

instantaneous kilowatt-hour usage data to an inside display device.

Kill-A-Watt meters are available on loan directly from Gunnison County Electric Association or from the Crested Butte, Gunnison and Lake City libraries. Please call GCEA or visit your local library to learn more about the program.

Energy-Saving Tips for the Chef

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that cooking accounts for 4.5 percent of the average home's energy cost. And in the winter, most of us spend even more time than usual in the kitchen preparing food and baked goods for our friends and families. Here are some ways to save energy in the kitchen.

- Delete preheating. Roasting or baking meat is a long, slow process. So there is really no need to preheat your oven — despite what the recipe suggests. Chances are, you also don't need to preheat when you bake breads, cakes and pies.
- Don't peek. Opening the oven door to see what's cooking can lower the temperature inside as much as 25 degrees. This not only wastes energy, it also prolongs cooking time. If you must peek, use the oven door window.
- Turn it off. Try turning off the oven five to 10 minutes before the dish should be done. Electric ovens hold heat, and your dish will continue to cook. Just remember to keep the oven door closed until the cooking time is done.
- Size matters. When cooking on top of the range, make sure you match the size of the pan to the heating element. Experts say that using a 6-inch pan on an 8-inch burner can waste up to 40 percent of the electricity.
- Nuke it or "crock" it. Whenever possible, cook foods in the microwave or in a slow cooker. Both appliances use much less energy than a conventional oven or stove top.



HOME WIRING HAZARDS

More of you as home owners are embarking on do-it-yourself projects than ever before. But sometimes that newfound confidence is accompanied by a lack of understanding of the risks inherent in working with electricity.

Increasing electrical safety awareness and the use of electrical safety technology are key factors in reducing deaths, injuries and economic losses due to electrical hazards.

Most shocks and fires from electrical systems can be prevented. Have your electrical system inspected by a licensed electrician. Fix dangerous defects and install smoke detectors, arc fault circuit interrupters and ground fault circuit interrupters. Check lighting and home appliances for wear and tear.

Following are some of the signs you can look for to address home wiring electrical hazards.

- Power outages — circuit breakers that frequently trip or fuses that need replacement.
- Lighting issues — dim and flickering lights.
- Arcs and sparks — flashes of light or showers of sparks in your electrical system.
- Sizzles and buzzes — unusual sounds from your electrical system.
- Overheating — overheated wires that give off an odor of hot insulation; switch plates or receptacle covers that are hot to the touch or discolored from heat buildup.
- Electrical shocks — any shock, even a mild tingle, may be warning of an electrical danger.
- Overrated panel — electrical panels with fuses or circuit breakers rated at higher currents than the capacity of their branch circuits.
- Damaged wire insulation — cut, broken or cracked wires.

If you notice any of these electrical hazards, call a licensed electrician.



Leave No Lint Behind

Household chores like laundry seem fairly safe. But hidden problems like lint buildup in a dryer could lead to higher energy bills due to inefficiency and, ultimately, hazardous conditions in your home.

Clean the lint filter after each load and occasionally remove the filter and wash it with a nylon brush and hot, soapy water to remove residue. This simple chore improves airflow and energy efficiency, and it also reduces the chance of a dryer fire.

Without adequate air circulation, heat flow becomes stymied, clothes take longer to dry and it costs more to operate the appliance. Like ovens and stoves, dryers apply extreme heat on potentially flammable materials.

“You wouldn’t leave something cooking unattended for long periods of time — at least you shouldn’t, for safety and edibility,” says John Drengenberg, consumer affairs manager for Underwriters Laboratories, Inc., a Chicago, Illinois-based not-for-profit firm that tests and sets minimum standards for electric items. “Dryers, though, often run up to an hour or more, forgotten in a basement, garage or utility space.”

This out-of-sight, out-of-mind practice makes it essential that a dryer be maintained on a simple and regular basis.

GCEA EMPLOYEE ANNIVERSARY — JANUARY

- Marcia Wireman**, chief financial officer, 14 years
- Jerry Sharpe**, Lake City apprentice lineman, 5 years
- Tammy Russell**, senior accountant, 3 years
- Chico Dominquez**, engineering technician II, 20 years



GCEA Scholarship Deadline Coming Soon

February 2 is the 2010 Gunnison County Electric Association scholarship deadline. Scholarship sponsors include Tri-State Generation and Transmission, Basin Electric Association, Gunnison County Electric Association (GCEA) and the GCEA Board of Directors. Awards are presented in the following categories: academic scholarships; Western State College scholarships; well-rounded student scholarships; and helping hand financial scholarships. Although awards are given in these different categories, you only need to complete one application form.

The application form is available at your high school guidance office, GCEA’s offices in Gunnison and Crested Butte, and our website at www.gcea.coop. For more information, call Dan McDonough at 970-641-7320.



Invest in Home Safety With Tamper-Resistant Outlets

Hairpins, the building blocks for many fancy hairdos, are perfect for holding back unruly tresses. But these slender, metal objects are also easy for children to manipulate. As a result, hairpins are the dominant household item improperly stuck into electrical outlets.

Each year, approximately 2,400 children — an average of seven a day — receive emergency room treatment for injuries caused by inserting conductive material into electrical outlets, according to a 10-year report released by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. More than 70 percent of these incidents occur at home, with adult supervision typically present.

Hairpins are involved 32 percent of the time, followed by keys, 17 percent, and fingers, 12 percent. Other common culprits include pins, screws, nails, twist ties

and paper clips.

The end result? About 95 percent of the time children receive a burn, according to CPSC. Though ranging in severity, a significant number of serious and fatal burns occur, and even minor injuries can leave emotional trauma. Pediatric burns can be particularly serious, because a child’s skin is thin and offers little resistance to electric flow or heat.

The danger of electrical outlets isn’t new; parents often use plastic outlet caps to cover outlets when child-proofing a home. Unfortunately, the Electrical Safety Foundation, Inc., claims plastic caps are not the safest option since they can easily be removed by a young child. Instead, ESFI suggests installing tamper-resistant outlets.

Although normal looking, these types of outlets include a shutter mechanism to protect against harm if foreign objects are

inserted. The spring-loaded system only allows electricity to flow when you apply equal pressure to both sides of the outlet, as happens when you plug in an electrical device. During unused conditions, both shutters are closed.

For co-op consumers with brand-new homes, tamper-resistant outlets may already have been installed; the 2008 National Electrical Code requires them. However, these outlets are cheap — costing as little as \$2 at some retailers — and can easily be incorporated into older homes.

A video from ESFI explaining how these outlets work can be viewed on YouTube at <http://bit.ly/safeoutlet>. To learn more about tamper-resistant outlets, go to www.childoutletsafety.org.

Electrical Safety Foundation, Inc., U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Uncle Sam Extends a Helping Hand

The federal government is providing two assistance programs, to those who qualify, for meeting the winter heating demands.

LEAP (Low-Income Energy Assistance Program)

LEAP is a federally funded program administered by the Colorado Department of Human Services. It assists with home heating bills; it is not intended to pay the entire cost.

Qualifications:

- U.S. citizen or a legal resident of Colorado
- Heating costs paid directly to GCEA or paid as part of your rent
- Household income (total income of those residing in the household) is based on 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Following is a monthly gross income chart:

Household Size	Maximum Gross Monthly Income
1	\$1,670
2	\$2,246
3	\$2,823
4	\$3,400
5	\$3,976
6	\$4,553
7	\$5,129
8	\$5,706
Each additional person	\$ 577

Gunnison contact: 970-641-3244 (Department of Human Services)

Applications accepted through April 20, 2010, at:

Family Services Center
225 N. Pine St., Suite A
Gunnison, CO 81230

Low-Income Weatherization Program

- Offered through the U.S. Department of Energy, Governor's Energy Office and local agencies
- Free home energy audit
- Assists with energy-saving improvements such as weather stripping, insulation and appliance replacement
- Seeks to reduce energy costs and improve health and safety
- Eligibility automatically extended to individuals receiving the following assistance:
 - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - Old Age Pension (OAP)
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - Medicaid
 - LEAP
- Eligibility also extended to households based on the following financial schedule:

Household Size	Annual Household Income
1	\$21,660
2	\$29,140
3	\$36,620
4	\$44,100
Each additional person	\$ 7,480

Contact: Governor's Energy Office
1580 Logan St., Suite 100
Denver, CO 80203
303-866-2100

RATES TO REMAIN STABLE FOR 2010

[continued from page 7] new for GCEA, and the co-op will be providing more information on this demand reduction project as the year goes along.

We also have budgeted to have a cost-of-service study done to ensure and verify that we have allocated all the costs properly among all the different rate classes in light of the changing energy market. This will be a labor and data intensive study that will evaluate our service availability fee and rate structure. We will continue our offerings of energy audits and energy efficiency programs, workshops and rebates that have been so successful over the past several months. It is our goal to step up our communications effort through newsletters and *Colorado Country Life* magazine along with other media to keep our members informed about what is available in these areas, as well as other news from our inside and outside operations.

One item of particular note approved in the budget is to add to our existing headquarters by putting up a second-story addition above the original 1975 Porter-Allen building. As we have grown, it has become necessary to add additional office space. At the same time the remodel will include replacing the flat roof that has caused so many problems over the last few years. With the cost of building materials down and the labor force available, the board of directors and management see this as the perfect opportunity to make this investment for now and well into the future.

As a closing note, I am pleased to report that our power system has performed well in 2009. As I write this in early December, we have not had any power supplier interruptions or major storm damage, and the distribution outages are well below our average.

We appreciate your support and value your input. Please contact us if we may provide information on any of our programs or for additional association information.

THINK BIG SAVINGS FOR THE BIG GAME

Are you thinking about taking advantage of after-Christmas sales to buy a new television for the Super Bowl? Be sure you get one that meets the federal government's latest efficiency guidelines.

An Energy Star specification kicked in November 1, 2008, with the potential for enormous energy savings. Televisions that meet the standard are up to 30 percent more energy efficient than convention-

al models. The new specification requires energy efficiency when televisions are on, as well as off or in standby mode.

To get information on various models and how many kilowatt-hours each television uses, go to www.energystar.gov and click on **Home Electronics** and then **Televisions**. You can compare different brands and sizes of televisions and learn which are the most energy efficient.