



# GCEA NEWS

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**Summer Projects To Make Your Home More Energy Efficient**

## Landscape for Safety

*By Vicki Spencer, Energy Use Specialist, with assistance from Roger Grogg, Chief Operations Officer, and Jeff Hanggi, Crested Butte Working Foreman*

**It's so easy to take electricity for granted.** We flip a switch and the lights come on. We push a button and our microwave cooks dinner. We hit the remote and our television brings a world of entertainment into our living room. But what about the times when we flip a switch or hit a button and our lights and appliances don't come on?

The first thing we do is call the electric company. We expect them to fix the problem, and not just when they can get around to it, we want them to fix it now! Have you ever wondered how the electric company restores service when you call in about an outage? Does GCEA flip a switch, just like you, and the power goes back on? Does GCEA simply reprogram a computer? Or must GCEA employees actually go into the field to repair lines and equipment?

**The electric grid is a complex system and there are many things that can go wrong.** Although GCEA employs a team of experts to monitor the system and tries to predict potential shortcomings so we can resolve issues before they cause disruption in service, we cannot prevent everything that might happen. This is why our linemen are so important. They are the men in the field who monitor the equipment and make repairs when necessary. They are the ones who work in below zero temperatures and during hot summer days to keep the system working. They are the ones dispatched in the middle of the night during a blizzard to repair fallen lines caused by inclement weather. The linemen cope with all kinds of adverse conditions so you can have electricity when you need it.

Working directly in front of a transformer or meter is one of the most dangerous parts of a lineman's job. If something goes wrong, the enclosure forces all the energy towards the lineman. The risk of getting burned is the reason all linemen wear protective clothing. But even the best clothing cannot guarantee protection when a lineman is working within three feet of a 24,900-volt short circuit. This is why an escape route is mandatory.

**Did you know that there are ways that you can help protect the linemen while they do their jobs?** The most important thing you can do is to provide easy, safe access to the electrical equipment that serves your home or business. You may not know what a transformer, meter pedestal, or junction box is, but I'm sure you have seen them. Utility boxes are usually found on the corner of your property. Electric, phone, and cable television are the most common services associated with utility boxes.

Sometimes these utility boxes have been obscured by landscaping making them difficult to access, open, or even find. But proper access is important for ensuring safe and effective operation of the utility.

**Have you ever thought about how your landscaping might interfere with reliable electric service?** I don't think that most of us do. But when your electricity goes out, GCEA's linemen need to be able to access transformers located on or near your property. Sometimes they have to remove fences, trees, and shrubs to

*(continued page 2)*

## Landscape for Safety (continued from page 1)

access the equipment and restore your power. This can take time, and can cause delays. The linemen also need a quick escape route in case something goes wrong when they are working on the transformers. It could be a matter of life or death. This is why we encourage you to think about ease of access and a quick escape route when you plan your landscaping. *Some common landscaping problems and recommended solutions that will help the linemen are listed below:*

- 1. Trees** – When planting trees, it is common to forget that the trees are going to grow. Although a sapling may seem fine placed a few feet from the transformer, when it grows taller, its trunk also expands. You need to keep this in mind. **Allow adequate space so that there is enough room for the lineman to open the transformer and work on it after the tree trunk and branches are fully grown. Another good practice is to avoid planting trees directly beneath overhead power lines.**



- 2. Flower Beds** – Landscapers often create raised bed gardens to hide transformers, and pile mulch on top to conserve water. But if the dirt and mulch are piled too high next to the transformer, it can cause the transformer to rust, and can prevent the lineman from opening the door. He will have to dig out the dirt and mulch, and this is not an easy task when the ground is frozen. He might also have to dig up some of your flowers and ruin your landscaping. **Allow adequate ground-level clearance between the transformer and your flower bed. Keep excess dirt away from the transformer so it won't rust.**

- 3. Boulders and Rocks** – Large boulders and rocks add variety to gardens and give them an attractive, natural look. The larger the rocks, the more difficult they are to remove when linemen need to get to the transformers. When the ground is frozen, it is nearly impossible to remove even the smallest rock! **Place boulders and rocks at least 3 feet from the transformer and be sure to leave walking room between them so the lineman can escape quickly without falling.**



- 4. Fences** – People often build a fence right next to the transformer in an attempt to block it from their view. If fences are too close to transformers, linemen cannot access them. This means that when your power goes out, the lineman may have to remove your fence in order to restore your power. **Don't build your fence too close to the transformer, and never build a fence that completely encircles the transformer. This creates an enclosure and the lineman has no quick escape route if an arc happens.**



- 5. Flagging** – GCEA places fiberglass poles, or poles with flags, around transformers and some people remove them. The main purpose of these poles is to serve as snow markers, but when they are removed, snow plows may pile snow against the transformers and as the snow gets deeper, the transformers get buried. As a result, snow plow drivers don't know where they are and may hit them and cause your power to go out. Last year, 30 electrical boxes were hit by snow plows and they are expensive to replace. In addition, damaging transformers creates potentially dangerous situations in which people may get injured. **Do not remove flags placed next to the transformers. Even if you intend to replace them at the end of the summer, you may forget.**



**Call GCEA Before Landscaping** – Our best advice is for you to call us for a “locate” before you plant trees or landscape. This way, you will know if there are any buried cables. If a cable fails underground, we have no choice but to remove landscaping to make repairs. This policy also applies for trees planted on the easement or under an overhead line located in the easement. Trees that interfere with overhead lines or pose safety hazards will be trimmed or removed. GCEA does not reimburse you for landscaping that interferes with the utility easement, so planning in advance will save both you and the utility time and money.



## *Saving Energy*

Over the past year, women in Gunnison, Hinsdale, and Saguache counties have been showing they have what it takes to make their homes more energy efficient. GCEA's last **Weatherization Workshop for Women** for the season will be held on **February 27th** near Gunnison. If you are interested in improving your energy use awareness and finding ways to save money, call Vicki at 970-641-7359 to register. All participants will be given a free tote bag loaded with materials and supplies to use at home.



*Engineering Technician Chico Dominguez received a 20-year service award from Roger Grogg, Chief Operations Officer. Chico started working at GCEA on January 16, 1990.*

## *Insulation Rebate Program Extended*

January was a great month for GCEA members who took advantage of the Insulate Colorado Program. A dozen members collectively received over \$2,500 in rebates for insulating and sealing their attics and walls. These members (and others who have participated in the program) have reported that they can definitely tell the difference with additional insulation in their homes – both in their comfort level and in their utility bills.

Originally, the Insulate Colorado grant was set to expire in December 2009, but since we have some money left for the program, the Governor's Energy Office gave us an **extension until March 31, 2010**. Funds are limited, so we encourage you to talk to an insulation contractor soon if you would like to see how you can save energy. The list of eligible contractors may be found on GCEA's website, [http://www.gcea.coop/EE/Insulate\\_colorado.cfm](http://www.gcea.coop/EE/Insulate_colorado.cfm).

## *Would you like more frequent updates from GCEA?*

We are now offering all our members a **free monthly subscription** to the *Colorado Country Life* magazine. *Colorado Country Life* is the official publication of the Colorado Rural Electric Association. Each issue includes a four-page GCEA News insert, along with stories about Colorado's rural personalities, historic sites, wildlife, and more. It's a great way to find out what is happening in other areas of the state.

To receive your free subscription, just send an email with your name, GCEA service address, and phone number or email address to [cclyes@gcea.coop](mailto:cclyes@gcea.coop). If you don't have access to the internet, please call us at 1-800-726-3523 or stop by the office to get on the mailing list.

## *GCEA Donates Kill-A-Watt Meters to Local Libraries*

Have you ever wondered just how much electricity each of your appliances and electronic toys uses? GCEA has the perfect solution for you. We have donated a Kill-A-Watt meter to each of our local libraries in Crested Butte, Gunnison, and Lake City for you to borrow. The monitors are easy to use. All you do is plug the Kill-A-Watt meter into an outlet, and then plug in the appliance, television, light, or device you want to measure. The meter has an LED display that will show you how many kilowatt-hours of electricity each of your devices consumes. This will help you understand how much each device costs you. The Kill-A-Watt meter is a handy tool for deciding whether to replace appliances with more energy efficient ones, or for deciding whether you should put the computer or television on a power strip and turn it off when it's not being used.

## *Daylight Savings and GCEA Summer Hours*

It is still winter in the high country, but it's not too soon to plan for spring. This year, daylight savings starts on March 14<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 a.m. and shortly afterwards, GCEA will begin our summer hours. Starting April 2<sup>nd</sup> the office will be open on alternating Fridays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and will be closed every other Friday. The office will be open every Monday through Thursday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

## Celebrating Another Birthday at Jorgensen Park

By Chastity Miller

GCEA is gearing up for another year of fighting for a cure and we need your help. All of us are affected by cancer, whether it is a family member, a friend, or just someone in the community that we know. We can really make a difference in people's lives by joining other communities across America in the **Relay for Life on June 4, 2010.**

Relay for Life raises funds to help with research and also helps patients with other important expenses like wigs and hotel rooms when patients are getting treatments. The Gunnison community is one of the biggest supporters of the Relay and raised over \$63,000 last year.

In 2009, GCEA formed the Happy Feet team and entered the Relay for the first time. We may have been novices, but our 10 team members raised nearly \$3,900. This was amazing and we could not have done it without your help!



Back Row L to R: Vic Dean, Clint Smith, Jerry Sharpe, Dan McDonough  
Middle L to R: Mary Wood, Josie Casebolt, Vicki Spencer, Laura Sharpe,  
Karen McDonough  
Front L to R: Marni Joslyn, Chastity Miller, Holly Palmer, Alantha Garrison  
Not Pictured: Cynthia Gunderson, Sherry Booth

This year there has been so much interest that GCEA is pleased to have two teams. If you would like to join the fight against cancer, we would love to have you on our team! If walking in a relay is not your thing maybe you have a few extra dollars that you can donate.

We hope you will help support us in celebrating yet another birthday!

To join our team or donate to this worthy cause,

**please call me at 641-7308 or 641-0567.**

## GCEA Energy Efficiency Rebates

Rebates are still available for members who replace old appliances with Energy Star® appliances. Eligible appliances include refrigerators, freezers, dish washers, and clothes washers. Other rebates include electric ground source heat pumps, electric thermal storage units, and electric water heaters. Call GCEA or visit our website for details.

## Taylor Park Dam Hydropower

The feasibility study of hydropower from the Taylor Park Dam which was commissioned by Gunnison County Electric Association, the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District, and Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association has been completed. Look for more information in the future as each of the respective boards begins reviewing the study results.

Corrections and comments are always welcome. Please contact the editor, Vicki Spencer, Energy Use/Communications Specialist:  
**vspencer@gcea.coop or 800-726-3523 or 970-641-7359.**

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