



By Michael P. McMahon

Fall Co-op Meetings Focused Debate on Several Key Issues

As electric co-ops across the country conducted their fall meetings, several large issues were discussed and debated. Topics on co-op agendas included increasing demand for electricity, renewable energy, the lack of capacity on transmission

lines, and climate change, which is directly affecting the funding and permitting of coal-based electric generating facilities. This growing demand is being seen throughout the nation and these issues will need to be addressed by not only Vernon Electric and Dairyland Power, but by all power companies.

With the ever-increasing need for electricity, we are now working with renewable energy efforts — especially wind generation — and in some areas we are seeing expansion of wind farms. Some states, including Wisconsin, are implementing a requirement that a percentage of power being used must come from a renewable resource. It is good to see diversification in power production, but with wind, we still need firm power to back up wind generators for the days when their electric production is down.

Wind farms will continue to grow and new wind farms are being planned and will be built to help serve the demand for electricity, and this leads to the next issue, transmission lines. Existing transmission lines need to be upgraded and new lines need to be built. The issues that will need to be addressed are the costs to upgrade existing lines and the cost to construct new lines and where to site

them. In today's environment, we encounter some who don't want poles or towers crossing their land, or in some cases, in their front or back yard.

However, the issue getting the most media coverage is the prospect of climate change. I don't believe we can ignore this, but this isn't an issue for just the United States alone — it's a worldwide issue. New technology is being developed for coal-based generators, making them cleaner and more efficient, but if rules and laws are passed that exceed the limits of this technology, it will take time and more resources to overcome the resulting hurdles. The problem we see now, and perhaps even to a larger extent in the future, is the time and effort it takes to obtain financing and permits prior to starting and finally completing construction on a new generating plant.

Another issue, conservation, has proponents on both sides. Some believe we shouldn't build any new coal- or gas-based generating plants. Instead, we should motivate people into conservation using economic and other measures. Although we all need to do our part to conserve all our natural resources for the next generation, I believe we should consider sensible tried and true applications.

One rather disturbing trend that is beginning to become evident across the nation is the effort to stop the government from helping to fund any new coal-based generating plants. I have to believe this is irresponsible in light of the growing needs, and a "just say no" approach is not justified.

I'm sure these issues will be resolved over time and after many hours of discussion and debate. Our hope is that these matters be mitigated within the realm of reason and by using good old common sense. ■



**Enjoy
Now...**



PAY LATER!

That sounds like some sort of pitch for a vacation trip or a major purchase, doesn't it? Most of us don't stop to think that our electric service is an "enjoy-now-pay-later" consumer commodity.

We pay for groceries before we make dinner. We buy clothes before we wear them. Of course, we make installment payments on some things while we use them, but we know how much the payments will be and how long they will last. Electricity is one of the few things we completely consume before we pay for it.

Electricity is a necessity, and so wonderfully convenient that we may forget how hard it's working for us, even when we are away from home. Electricity is so dependable and requires so little of our attention that we may sometimes use it needlessly. When our electric bill arrives, the power has already been used. If we bought more than we meant to, it's too late to do anything about it.

The key to avoiding electric billing surprises is to be aware of our electricity use. Our electric meter is very accurately measuring all our kilowatt-hours, whether we use electricity wisely or waste it. So, we need to plan ahead. We all enjoy the convenience electricity brings to our lives, but we must use it wisely. We will have to pay for it later. ■

**Having Trouble
Paying Your Bills?**

If you meet financial eligibility requirements as established by your county's Department of Human Services, you could qualify for a supplemental payment through the Commitment to Community program. This program is funded by the members of Vernon Electric Cooperative through the state-mandated Public Benefits charge on our electric bills and has been established to assist low income-eligible members with weatherization and bill paying. If you feel you may qualify, please contact the Department of Human Services for the county you live in.

- Crawford County DHS 608-326-0248
- La Crosse County DHS..... 608-785-6001
- Monroe County DHS 608-269-5021
- Richland County DHS 608-647-8660
- Sauk County DHS 608-356-8887
- Vernon County DHS 608-637-7434
- Juneau County DHS..... 608-847-5988

If you have questions about the above information, please call Vernon Electric's office at (608) 634-3121 or 1-800-447-5051. ■



E-Billing Now Available

Go to
www.vernonelectric.org
to sign up.

The Importance of the Load Management Program

Through Vernon Electric Cooperative's wholesale power supplier, Dairyland Power Cooperative, our cooperative utilizes an energy conservation technique called load management.

Load is the measure of demand placed by consumers on an electric system at any given time. The load management program is a tool used to balance electrical supply and demand. The goal is to keep the amount of electricity used in balance with the amount of power generated.

This program is always important, but even more so when power supply is reduced as a result of a particular event, such as the planned fall outage at Dairyland's Genoa facility. Other factors that can strain the power system are extreme heat or cold, and problems with a plant or with transmission lines.

Members who participated in load management this year should know they had a real impact on energy

conservation. It's easy to say conservation is a good idea, but to become involved through load management is really walking the talk.

Vernon Electric Co-op is very grateful for your help.

How does Load Management work?

Dairyland estimates that its load management program saves the system 60 mw (megawatts) of power in the summer and 150 mw in the winter — the equivalent of a sizable power plant. It does so by reducing the system's total demand at a time of peak use hours — generally between 4 and 10 p.m. That timeframe taxes the power supply because people are commonly at home running washers and dryers, dishwashers, heaters, air conditioners, and so on.

Load management can involve several techniques: interrupting water heaters or electric heating systems for short periods of time, and controlling when agricultural loads such as irrigation pumps or grain drying systems run. Commercial and industrial facilities may use generators or simply reduce load for a special rate during load "crunches."

If operators think the demand for electricity will exceed the established limits, they will broadcast control messages to energy management switches. This will interrupt the load that is connected to the switch. The operators select loads to turn off that are most readily interrupted and have the least effect on customers.

Load management is the definition of energy conservation. The load control program is an efficient and modern way to conserve electricity and maintain the safe, reliable, and cost-effective electric power you depend upon. ■

By allowing the co-op to install a load-management receiver like this one in your home, you help the co-op control its power costs and save energy.



Did you know co-op members can help minimize power costs by conserving energy during periods of peak electric demand?

The increasing demand for electricity is causing electric costs to rise, since power needs must be met by high-priced generation. To help save money, we ask that members voluntarily reduce their energy consumption between the hours of 4 and 8 p.m. Please wait until after 8 p.m. before using major appliances.

Wait 'til eight is not an emergency alert indicating a shortage of electricity or line overloading. We simply want you to be aware that you can make a difference by using energy wisely. ■





TRANSFORMERS

Beware of the Big Green Box

Electric pad-mounted transformers, better known as those “big green boxes” scattered through your neighborhood, deserve more attention than you might think. The purpose of a transformer is to change (transform) high-voltage electricity to a lower voltage needed for supplying power to your home. Typically there are 7,200 volts running into the transformers. This high voltage can make for potentially dangerous situations.

One of these situations happened not so long ago at another electric cooperative not too far away. A vehicle inadvertently backed into a transformer. The driver got out of her vehicle, looked, and mistakenly thought she had backed into a snow bank. Not only had she dislodged the transformer, she dragged it several feet as she drove away. Luckily in this instance no one was hurt, but it certainly could have been disastrous.

Please take great caution if you collide with a transformer. If at all possible, stay in the vehicle and call 911. If you don’t have a cell phone, wait for another vehicle to come by. Upon notice, we will send a crew immediately to secure the area. Leaving the vehicle could be fatal as electricity is looking for a path to ground, and making contact with the vehicle and ground could create the path if live wires are exposed. If it is dangerous to stay in the vehicle, take great caution in exiting the vehicle by placing both of your feet together and hopping as far from it as you can, making sure you don’t touch the

vehicle and the ground at the same time.

Children can view pad-mounted transformers as playground equipment and not understand their dangers. Parents need to explain to their children that transformers are not meant for playing, climbing, or disturbing.

Transformers can be a potential danger if they become damaged due to vandals or landscaping equipment. Warn your children not to put their fingers, sticks, or other objects through cracks in a transformer, and teach your child about the yellow or orange hazard stickers located on the boxes. Children should never play in areas where they see these hazard stickers.

Always report broken locks on transformer boxes to us.—*Photo courtesy of Greg Brooks, Walton EMC* ■

VERNON
Electric
Cooperative

110 N. Main Street
Westby, WI 54667
(608) 634-3121

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Michael McMahon, Manager
Dave Maxwell, Editor

vec@mwt.net • www.vernonelectric.org