



By Michael P. McMahon

Take Advantage of E-Bill

For awhile now Vernon Electric has been offering our members the option to receive their electric statements online, known as E-Bill, and many of you have taken advantage of this free service. However, there are still many of you out there who are missing this opportunity.

Many businesses now offer this service and it is becoming more and more popular. As a matter of fact, many people receive all their monthly statements online. This may include not only their electric service, but also their telephone, cable or satellite service, water and sewer (if they have it through a utility), credit card and other financial services, gas, insurance, paycheck, and other similar, recurring services they receive.

The reason online statements are becoming so popular is that they provide many benefits not only for the customer, but also the vendor. Benefits include:

24-hour service—Your statement is sent to your e-mail and is available to you any time of the day or night.

Reliable—You never have to worry about your statement getting lost in the mail or in your house.

Lessens your environmental impact—Eliminates the need for paper and the resources needed to make it and deliver it.

Better record keeping—You can file your statement on your computer's hard drive for future reference, and/or you can access any of your past statements online through our secure server.

Better service—Your E-Bill will have links to other information and the monthly newsletter, and it allows you to e-mail the cooperative in case you have any questions instead of having to wait until the next business day to ask your question.

Saving money—This is a benefit to both you as a member and the cooperative, which essentially is one and the same. The cooperative saves money because there is less material, labor, and mailing costs to deal with. Just the processing fees for paper statements alone cost the cooperative over \$5,000 per month. E-Bill savings are passed on directly to our members (you) to

help keep your electric rates stable.

Some other important information to remember with E-Bill is that you can either pay your bill online or send us a check by mail. If you pay online with a credit card there is a small service fee. This brings me to the point where I suggest a way you can save even more time and money. By combining E-Bill with our Automatic Payment Plan, you become completely paperless and pay your electric bill each month, with no additional charges, without having to do anything. Not only are there no service fees, but you save money immediately by not having to put a stamp on an envelope. Furthermore, you save time because your electric bill is withdrawn automatically from your savings or checking account each month on the 20th. This allows you to earn more interest on your money because it spends more time in your

account. It also ensures that your payment will never be late or get lost in the mail. Even if you are on vacation or away, your bill will always be paid on time. Research has proven that automatic payment plans and e-billing are more secure than sending a check by mail.

Another way that is growing in popularity is to pay your bill through your financial institution's Bill Payer program. This has the advantage of allowing you to pick the date that your bill is paid. If, for some reason, you don't like having your money withdrawn on the 20th, you can pick another date that might work out better for you.

By signing up for E-bill, we will give you a \$5 credit on your next statement. If you also sign up for the Automatic Payment Plan, we will give you another \$5 credit for a total of \$10. Currently, over 25 percent of Vernon Electric's members use the Automatic Payment plan. The E-Bill program, which has been in place since last fall, already has almost 500 members taking advantage of it. It's safe, secure, fast, convenient, money saving—it's really hard to find any reason not to take advantage of these excellent programs. Why not sign up today? To sign up for E-Bill, simply visit our website, www.vernonelectric.org, click on E-Bill and follow the directions.

Feel free to give our billing department a call at 634-3121 or 1-800-447-5051 if you have any questions. You can also e-mail your questions to vec@mwt.net.



New Building Update

As I write this (late July) we have finalized building plans with a lot of hard work from the architects, general contractor, and the employees and directors who have served on the building committee. Land has been acquired, loans have been approved, and most legalities and details have been considered. Bids will be coming in soon for the work on the project, and depending on how that process goes, digging might be happening soon. The original goal was to start construction the first week of September.

The new headquarters facility will include office space, warehouse, storage and pole yard, all in one location. Right now we have separate locations in the City of Westby for all these areas. Not only will it improve our space needs, it will be much more efficient to have all our



sites in one location. The new facility will also have room to expand in the future, if needed. Right now all our current buildings are land-locked and cannot be expanded.

All of Vernon Electric's current buildings, land, and pole-yard are for sale. You can view the current buildings and brief descriptions by visiting our website at www.vernonelectric.org and clicking the "Buildings for Sale" link at the top of the home page.



Our Energy, Our Future
A Dialogue With America
www.ourenergy.coop

Vernon Electric Cooperative, as your provider of safe, affordable, and reliable electric service, is fighting to protect our members, fighting to minimize the cost impact of legislation currently being discussed by lawmakers—legislation that could otherwise go wrong for consumers, and go wrong for the country.

Between now and 2030, consumer demand for electricity is expected to increase by 30 percent. To meet that, our nation must add about 264,000 mw in expected demand. But construction cost increases and the need to develop climate change policy is preventing new coal and nuclear power facilities from coming online. Power suppliers are forced to use fuels such as natural gas, which is subject to wide swings in price, to generate electricity. Coal, a once inexpensive fuel, has recently shot up in cost as well. The impact of these mounting fuel issues is being compounded across the country as dramatic electric rate hikes are announced, driven by steady cost increases.

These are no longer far-away problems reserved for backroom discussions in Washington, D.C., or state capitals. What has been described as a perfect

storm—the clash of growing demand, skyrocketing power plant construction and fuel costs, and climate change policy constraints—has hit home.

To ensure that co-op members' energy needs are met, electric cooperatives across the country are engaged in a grassroots campaign called "Our Energy, Our Future: A Dialogue With America." This campaign seeks to engage policymakers on critical energy questions, such as how to reconcile growing electricity needs and environmental goals, and how much of all this will increase electric bills. Please visit www.ourenergy.coop to get the conversation started.

Major questions to ask elected officials and candidates for office are:

- Experts say that our nation's growing electricity needs will soon go well beyond what renewables, conservation, and efficiency can provide. What is your plan to make sure we have the electricity we'll need in the future?
- Our country faces a crisis as electricity use increases faster than available supply. I believe that by unleashing American ingenuity we can solve this problem. What are you doing to speed the development of new technology that will allow me to have the electric power I need while meeting national climate policy goals?
- Balancing electricity needs and environmental goals will be difficult. How much is all this going to increase my electric bill, and what will you do to make it affordable? ■

Weston 4 Power Plant Achieves Commercial Operation

The Weston 4 power plant, of which Dairyland Power Cooperative has a 30 percent ownership interest, has achieved commercial operation. Wisconsin Public Service Corp., the majority owner, constructed and will operate the plant, which is located near Wausau.

The newly constructed 525 mw (nominal rating) power plant will use clean-coal technology, a high-efficiency boiler, and low-sulfur coal as fuel, and it will feature sophisticated emission controls to minimize environmental impacts.

“Despite continuing emphasis on conservation, demand for energy in Dairyland’s four-state service territory is projected to continue increasing. Our partnership in the Weston 4 facility helps to ensure that our cooperative membership can count on a dependable, clean supply of electricity for generations to come,” said Bill Berg, Dairyland president and CEO.

Construction on the \$774 million project began in October 2004. The massive project required nearly 1,000 construction workers, who built the plant safely and on-schedule.

The Weston 4 facility features a state-of-the-art emission-control system to bring another source of clean, reliable and competitively priced electricity to homes and businesses. “It was designed to be one of the cleanest fossil-fueled power plants in the nation,” said Charlie Schrock, president of Wisconsin Public Service Corp.

With headquarters in La Crosse, Dairyland provides



wholesale electricity to 25 member distribution cooperatives and 19 municipal utilities in 62 counties in four states (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois). Dairyland’s generation resources include coal, natural gas, hydro, wind, landfill gas, and animal waste. For more information, please visit www.dairynet.com.

Wisconsin Public Service Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of Intergrys Energy group, Inc. (NYSE: TEG), is an investor-owned electric and natural gas utility headquartered in Green Bay. It serves approximately 420,000 electric customers and 309,000 retail natural gas customers in northeastern and central Wisconsin, and an adjacent portion of Upper Michigan. For more information, visit www.wisconsinpublicservice.com. ■



Thanks for Coming to our Picnics!

Vernon Electric Cooperative held three Member Appreciation Picnics this summer. One was held at the Community Arena in Viroqua, one was held at the Fireman’s Park in Hillsboro, and the last was held at the Genoa Park in Genoa. Altogether we served nearly 2,700 people. The relaxed atmosphere of the picnics allowed for a great place for our rural members of the cooperatives to get together with their country neighbors, who they may see frequently, but don’t very often get a chance to sit down and chat awhile.

We look forward to having some more picnics next year and seeing your smiling faces. ■

Prepare Now for Winter Storms

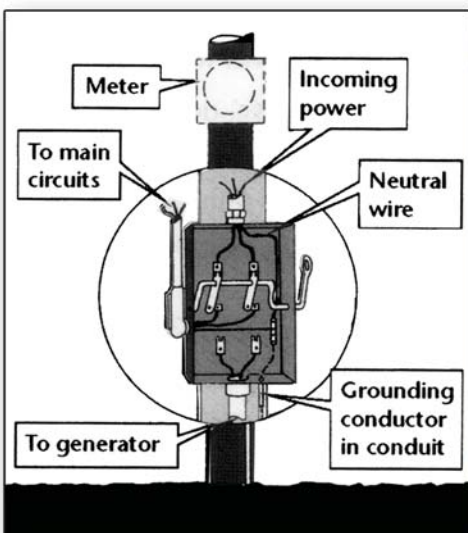
Scenes like the one in the picture at right may be a distant memory, but now is the time to prepare for the next big storm.

Vernon Electric Cooperative does everything possible to keep the lights on and to restore service as soon as possible when there is an outage. Hundreds of Vernon Electric members lost power in the severe storms we had in June and last August. Some were without power for several days. The bright side is that these outages were in the summer and not in the dead of winter.

Consider your own situation. If you lose power for several days, can you still operate? Do you have a business to run, cows to milk, or livestock in a confinement facility? Has your operation grown, making your old generator insufficient for your needs?

If you have or are considering purchasing a standby generator, remember that it is absolutely vital to follow proper installation procedures. If used incorrectly, a standby generator can cause serious harm or even death. The safe transfer of your power needs to an emergency generator is your responsibility. Here are some important things to know.

Generators can produce power for a home, farm, or commercial service. However, if a generator is not properly installed or connected, the “backfeed” can result



It is a requirement of the NEC that a double-throw switch be installed where a standby generator is connected.



in an output of 7,200 volts on the cooperative’s distribution line. As a result, an unsuspecting line crew working on the system would be in danger.

For the sake of everyone—you, the cooperative, and its line crews—generators need to be isolated from the cooperative’s power lines. It is a requirement of the National Electric Code that a double-throw switch be installed on your service where the standby generator is connected. When installed properly, the double-throw switch ensures there is no “backfeed” when running your generator.

Also remember to determine the wattage output you need before buying a generator. Manufacturers rate the size of a generator in terms of wattage. The generator’s wattage output should meet or exceed the total rated wattage of the equipment you plan to operate in the case of an outage. Always follow the manufacturer’s recommendations on how to use your generator, and contact your electrician for professional installation of the double-throw switch.

Perhaps it’s time to call the cooperative. Ask for a load profile that will help you determine what size generator you need. Don’t wait until it’s an emergency. ■

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