

Monthly Co-op Progress Report - March 2020



SMART MANAGEMENT. SMART LIFE.

SMARTHUB.

- Manage Your Account
- View and Pay Your Bill
- Monitor Usage 24/7
- Receive Important Updates
- Report Service Issues

SIGN UP TODAY AT WWW.VEC.ORG

Planting the Right Trees in the Right Place

In this part of Tennessee, we are blessed with an abundance and variety of trees. It is one of the many things that make South East Tennessee a beautiful place to live. But it can also be quite a challenge for Volunteer Energy Cooperative in meeting our responsibility to deliver a reliable flow of power to 119,000 customers in all or part of 17 counties.

Summer storms create saturated soil, which can cause trees to fall. Arcing and flashovers between power lines and nearby branches – branches that may not even be coming into contact with power lines – can cause serious safety risks. For those reasons, VEC has an aggressive right-of-way clearing program to reduce power outages and to minimize safety risks.

A solution preventing a tree from extensive trimming or removal is to plant the right tree in the right place. The University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension office prepared the following guidelines for power line-friendly tree planting:

- Small trees – 30 feet or less in height – should be planted at least 10 feet from buildings and 20 to 25 feet away from power lines.
- Medium trees – 30 to 70 feet in height – should be planted at least 15 feet from buildings and 30 to 35 feet from power lines.
- Large trees – those reaching 70 feet or more in height – should be planted at least 25 feet from buildings and 40 to 45 feet from power lines.
- No tree trunk, no matter how small the tree, should be within 10 feet of a utility pole.




The trees in this photo are planted with the powerlines in mind, when they mature they will not be close enough to touch or create an arc.



UPDATE YOUR PHONE NUMBER TODAY

When you update your phone number(s) you will become eligible for a prize drawing.

You can update your information by calling your service center, using SmartHub, or by logging into your account at vec.org. You can also use the form on the back of your bill.



Tennessee Valley Authority

Residential & Outdoor Lighting

Fuel Cost Adjustment
Effective **May 1, 2020**

1.533¢

For the most current FCA information, visit www.vec.org

Volunteer Energy Cooperative is an Equal Opportunity provider and employer.



Your Trusted Energy Advisor

The energy industry is undergoing rapid change, and technology is paving the way for innovation in the way energy is used, produced, stored and shared. Consumers are interested in more green energy alternatives while smart homes and apps make managing energy use and paying your electric bill more convenient than ever.

While the changing energy market has created more options for consumers, it has also resulted in more utility scams and misleading information surrounding solar installations in particular. That's because of two factors.

Utility scams are common because of the vast number of utilities that exist, and consumers are understandably anxious with the threat of disruption to their electric, heating or water service. Second, new products and services in the energy industry provide an opening for scammers and pop-up companies to provide misleading information or shoddy products and services.

Avoid Phone Scams

A common phone scam typically begins with a phone number that appears to be from a valid utility company. The scammer will claim you have a past due account and threaten to disconnect service or take legal action. The scammer will typically demand that you use a prepaid debit card or money order, often within a very short, urgent time frame to pay the "past due" amount.

You can combat this scam by being aware of the status of your account. Never give your banking or personal information over the phone to someone you did not call. If you have a question or concern about your energy bill, call us directly. Do not use the phone number given by the scammer.

Avoid Solar Scams

Another scam we see from time to time is connected to rooftop solar. Homeowners with rooftop solar may receive a sales call offering an accessory, upgrade or extended warranty to their solar array. The calls could be from crooks claiming to represent a solar company, promising to replace faulty or broken parts or improve efficiency. Again, if you are not expecting the call, don't be fooled. These calls



*Rody Blevins
President/CEO
Volunteer Energy Cooperative*

(continued on page 3)



As I put together this month's powerlines, America and the world are in the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been given a Stay at Home order from Governor Bill Lee, and the daily news is full of heartbreaking statistics. Many families in our communities have lost jobs or a severe reduction in income. Taking into consideration current events, VECustomers Share Board Members decided to give the money collected to food banks.

VECustomers Shares is a grant program funded through the rounding up of member's bills to the nearest dollar. The most an individual member would pay within a year is \$11.88. Our members usually average \$5.50 each yearly.

In return for the rounded up change from our members, we contribute to organizations across our 17 county service area. Each month the VECustomers Share Board meets and distributes the funds collected in the previous month. A board member represents every service area. In March, VECustomers Share Grants totaled \$26,550. Organized in 2001, qualifying organizations have received over 6.9 million.

Organizations receiving grants in March

Cumberland Good Samaritans	\$2,950	New Life Community Kitchen	\$2,950
First Baptist Church of Spring City		Monterey Food Bank	\$2,950
Food Pantry	\$2,950	Bags of Blessings-Meadowview Baptist Church	\$2,950
Calhoun Charleston Food Pantry	\$2,950	Fentress County Food Bank	\$2,950
Peakland Baptist Church Outreach Street		West Polk County Baptist Food Bank	\$1,475
Ministry/Missions Food Pantry	\$2,950	We Are Polk	\$1,475

One of the organizations receiving funds this month is Cumberland Good Samaritans. They are a non-profit with a mission to address the unmet needs of people in crisis in Cumberland County. Cumberland Good Samaritans have been serving Cumberland County for 35 years. During the COVID-19 crisis, they closed their store but are staffing a skeleton crew that is working under the direction of the Emergency Management, providing food relief and crisis intervention. They are working the VOAD (Volunteers Assisting in Disasters) hotline and responding to needs as directed.



(continued from page 1)

offering misleading information are likely a scam. Call Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) or the company that installed the solar array if you think there may be a problem. Other than occasional cleaning, rooftop solar (if installed correctly) is virtually maintenance-free.

Use Trusted Sources

If you're considering solar for your home, make sure you are working with a reputable company. Because this is still an emerging industry with evolving technology, there has been a proliferation of pop-up companies in the market to make a quick buck. Representatives of rooftop solar companies may have more sales experience than knowledge of the energy industry, and their primary goal could be making a sale and moving on to the next prospect.

VEC can offer a candid assessment to determine whether rooftop solar is right for you. After all, VEC has a different "bottom line" that is not directly tied to the sale of a product or service. We take a more holistic, objective view of how to achieve energy and cost savings for our members, and that may or may not include rooftop solar.

In this ever-changing environment, it's important to remember you have a trusted energy advisor – your local electric cooperative. We are a community-focused organization that works to efficiently deliver affordable, reliable and safe energy to our members.

Remember, we're just one call or click away, so please reach out with any questions about your electric service or bills – we're here to help.



Safety Starts With You

Tips for spotting potential electrical hazards in your home

Summer is just a few weeks away and here at Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC), we think it's a great time to look around your home and check for potential safety hazards.

Remember, every electrical device has a purpose and a service life span. While we can extend their operations with maintenance and care, none of them are designed to last or work forever. When electricity is involved, failures can present electrical hazards that might be avoided with periodic inspections.

Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters

Outdoor outlets or those in potentially damp locations in a kitchen, bathroom or laundry room often include GFCI features. The average GFCI outlet is designed to last about 10 years, but in areas prone to electrical storms or power surges, they can wear out in five years or less. Check them frequently by pressing the red test button. Make

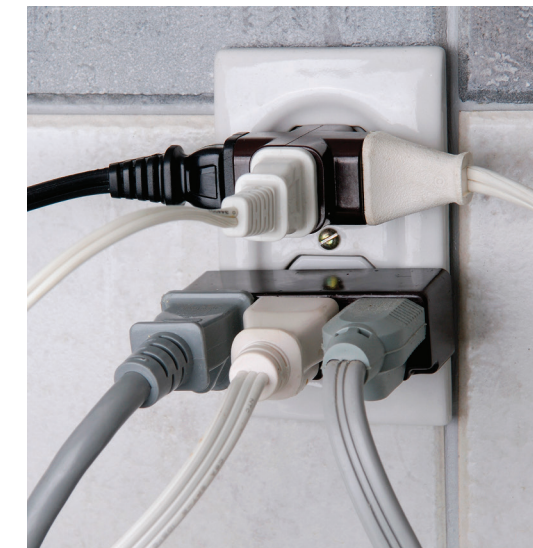
sure you hit the black reset button when you are done. Contact a licensed electrician to replace any failing GFCI outlets.

Loose or Damaged Outlets or Switches

Unstable electrical outlets or wall switches with signs of heat damage or discoloration can offer early warnings of potential shock or electrical fire hazards. Loose connections can allow electrical current arcing. If you see these warning signs, it may be time to contact an electrician.

Surge Protectors

Power strips with surge protectors can help safeguard expensive equipment like televisions, home entertainment systems and computer components from power spikes.



Overloaded electrical circuits are a major cause of residential fires. Lower your risk of electrical fires by not overloading your home's electrical system.

Safety starts with you.

Extension Cords

If you use extension cords regularly to connect devices and equipment to your wall outlets, you may live in an underwired home. Remember, extension cords are designed for temporary, occasional, or periodic use. If an extension cord gets noticeably warm when in use, it could be undersized for the intended purpose. If it shows any signs of frayed, cracked, or heat-damaged insulation, it should be replaced. And always make sure that extension cords used in outdoor or potentially damp locations are rated for exterior use.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, approximately 51,000 electrical fires are reported each year in the United States, causing more than \$1.3 billion in annual property damage.

Electricity is a necessity for modern living, and VEC is committed to providing safe, reliable, and affordable power to all of our members. We hope you'll keep these electrical safety tips in mind so that you can note any potential hazards *before* damage occurs.