

Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Sullivan County REC

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Office Hours
Monday through Friday
7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

From the CEO



Power markets and rates

By Craig A. Harting

LET ME BE honest — I am just so ready to not talk about the pandemic. So this month I thought I'd talk about power markets and your power supply.

Lately, demand for power has been down due to the pandemic decreasing economic activity (so I still can't get away from talking about the pandemic), and this has resulted in wholesale power prices being stable.

But you may be surprised to learn that most of your power does not come from the wholesale power market, and that your power costs are actually lower than the market. Your power comes from Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny). What is Allegheny?

Allegheny

Allegheny was formed in 1946 by the 13 rural electric co-ops in Pennsylvania to purchase power on our behalf. The 13 co-ops (plus one in New Jersey) own and operate Allegheny as a cooperative, and each of us has one director on the Allegheny board.

Allegheny continues to purchase power for us but it also owns a 10% interest in the two-unit nuclear power plant in Berwick, Pa. This supplies 60% of the power needs of the co-ops across the state.

Allegheny built a hydroelectric plant on Lake Raystown near Huntingdon, Pa. This plant takes the runoff from the lake and turns it into energy. We also purchase hydroelectric energy from

Niagara Falls and the St Lawrence River. Hydro makes up 10% of the power needs of the co-ops in the state.

The additional 30% is purchased in the wholesale market (the PJM grid). Most of this power is supplied by natural gas plants. Put all together, Allegheny has some of the lowest wholesale power prices in the state.

Rates

Your bill is made up of two different parts — generation and distribution. Generation rates collect funds to pay for generating the power. Distribution rates pay for getting this power to you.

By having Allegheny as our power supplier, generation rates look to be stable for the next two or three years. After an increase at that time, we believe there will be another period of stability. Generation rates have not changed since January 2013.

Distribution rates are made up of a monthly basic service fee and a kilowatt-hour (kWh) rate based on use. Over time, the basic service charge will continue to increase and the kWh charge will decrease due to distribution costs being nearly all fixed costs. Distribution rates have not changed since May 2017, but costs have continued to increase, so at some point we will need to make an adjustment in rates.

As we put 2020 behind us, here's wishing you a pandemic-free and Happy New Year in 2021! 🌞

Set it and forget it...not!

By John Zelewicz
Penn Lines Writer

THERE used to be a commercial for a kitchen device with the motto “Set it and forget it.” While that might have been true for that particular item, it doesn’t work for most things. You don’t buy a new car and figure that since they already put oil in it, you never have to worry about changing the oil again. At least I hope you don’t think so. The fact of the matter is, things like cars, heating systems, and even electrical systems need to be maintained or there will be problems down the road.

Since Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) was formed, it’s grown from the first electrical pole installed and the first mile of line run. Today, Sullivan County REC serves more than 6,000 members in Sullivan, Lycoming and Bradford counties. The cooperative maintains more than 933 miles of line, 20,500 poles, and more pieces of equipment such as insulators,



REPAIRS: The Mill Creek Substation is shut down in October so needed repairs could be made. Members normally supplied power from the substation had power backfed to them from other substations while the work was completed.



POLE PATCHES: During the time a substation is off-line, co-op lineworkers, including Dave Kepner, make needed repairs such as patching holes on poles caused by woodpeckers.

fuses, and transformers than you can count.

The co-op has grown to include five substations: Estella, Dushore, Laporte, Kellyburg and Mill Creek. Your co-op does all it can to provide the most reliable service possible by clearing rights-of-way, replacing poles, and constantly updating or replacing electrical equipment.

On Oct. 5, the Mill Creek Substation, which is supplied power from Pennsylvania Power and Light (PPL), had to be shut down for repairs. The project started two and a half years ago when the co-op was informed that PPL had experienced “trips” on the line from lightning strikes.

To correct this issue, a contractor was hired to install numerous lightning arrestors in five locations on the transmission line.

Work began, but then had to be stopped and rescheduled when it was determined that the proper equipment was not available.

“Once this project was started, Allegheny Electric Cooperative discov-

ered that the lighting arrestors delivered were not the correct ones needed for this line, so the project was kicked down the road until the correct lightning arrestors arrived,” explains Walt Tubach, manager of electric operations for Sullivan County REC.

To enable this work to be done safely, it was necessary to shut down the Mill Creek Substation. Members normally receiving power from this substation received electricity provided by backfeeding power from three other substations.

While work was being done on the Mill Creek Substation, the cooperative took the time to look things over and see if there were any other repairs that were needed and could be completed at the same time.

“We decided on a fall date to shut the transmission line off to do the lightning arrestor work safely,” Tubach says. “Our CEO, Craig Harting, and I talked about hiring a drone company to inspect the line and see if any other issues need to be addressed while the power to the line was off.”

Upon completion of the inspection by the drone, it was discovered there were six cracked insulators, some cotter pins that were loose due to vibrations and numerous woodpecker holes that needed to be filled.

Turning the power off

Turning off the power to a substation isn't the same as flipping the light switch off in your living room. It took several days for Tubach to write up procedures for the work to be done. Lineworkers had to install fuses and ensure that everything worked in coordination with other breakers. Amperage settings in the programmable breakers had to be changed. In other words, a lot of planning and work had to be done in advance before power was turned off to the substation.

"In addition to all the planning required before we took the Mill Creek Substation off-line, we had to create a procedure to work on the line safely in



UPDATING EQUIPMENT: Transformers, like other electrical equipment such as refrigerators, washers, dryers and water heaters, fail over time and have to be replaced. Sometimes a bad transformer or cracked insulator can cause a power outage.

the event of an outage," Tubach notes. "This was necessary as everything was being backfed from three other substations."

During the time the substation was off-line, co-op lineworkers climbed nine poles to adjust the cotter pins and fill the woodpecker holes in the poles. Lineworkers used a specially made substance that hardens in the hole and protects the pole from decay.

Hinkle and McCoy were the contractors used to change the insulators and install the lighting arrestors while co-op lineworkers did the other work.

While co-op lineworkers normally take on the responsibility of making repairs and needed updates to co-op lines and equipment, this time they just needed a little help from a contractor.

"The reason we used a contractor is because we're not equipped with the proper line gear needed to do all of the transmission work," Tubach explains. "We would have need-

ed different hoists, line grips, longer hand lines and different fall protection because these poles are as high as 90 feet tall."

This was not the first time the Mill Creek Substation had to be shut down. In the early 2000s, power was turned off so woodpecker holes could be filled and a wood pole changed out for a steel pole so woodpeckers would leave it alone.

Looking for problems

One way to help prevent outages is to continually inspect poles, lines, and equipment and look for small problems before they become big ones. The co-op hires Osmose Wood Preserv-



HIGH WORK: While lineworkers use bucket trucks whenever possible, there are times when it's impossible to use such equipment. When this happens, lineworkers use special equipment to safely climb utility poles and make the necessary repairs.

ing Company to inspect around 1,400 poles a year to ensure they are safe. If a pole is deemed to be unsafe, it is replaced. This past year, it was determined that 90 poles needed to be replaced. But changing out poles isn't the only way your co-op works to ensure reliable service.

"We do line inspections each year on different substations for each of the feeders," Tubach says. "We also have three brushing crews in different locations that have been trained to find stranded wires, cracked insulators, low lines, etc. We always look at the possibility of moving lines from the woods to along the road for better reliability. This makes lines more accessible, easier to look over during an outage and makes repairs quicker when an outage occurs."

Tubach is extremely thankful to Allegheny Electric Cooperative employees Bill Carbaugh and Jeff Stover for ordering the lightning arrestors

and setting up the contractor for the needed repairs. Also, the co-op thanks Hinkel and McCoy for the hard work they safely did in such a short time. Tubach is also grateful for the work co-op lineworkers did, and he thanks the co-op members affected by the planned outages.

"I want to thank my linemen for all of the switching they did, for following procedures and for being safe," he says. "I also want to thank our members for their understanding during the numerous interruptions they experienced. It was a pleasure to work with the 2,200 members in this area affected by all of this work. Their understanding is greatly appreciated!" 🌞

Stay safe in winter weather

THERE are places where the seasons don't change much. Autumn and winter mean you might have to wear a light jacket during the day or perhaps even light a fire in the fireplace, not so much to heat the whole house but just because a wood fire looks nice and adds a festive air to the season.

But living in northeast Pennsylvania, we know that winter can bring storms that cause hazardous road conditions, downed power lines and extended power outages.

Before a storm even begins, tune into your local weather service for the latest weather forecast. It's not uncommon for storm predictions concerning the intensity and duration of a winter storm to change. One thing that's important to know is the differences among various watches and warnings.

- ▶ **Winter storm watches** signify that stormy conditions, including heavy snow, freezing rain or sleet are likely within the next few days. You should be alert, because this means adverse conditions could begin within the next 12 to 48 hours.
- ▶ **Winter storm warnings** call for stormy conditions to begin within the next 24 hours. Those in the range of the warning should be mindful of the impending conditions and consider canceling plans to travel outside of the home.
- ▶ **Blizzard warnings** advise those in the affected areas to seek refuge immediately due to high levels of snow, strong winds and resulting near-zero visibility to those traveling on the road.

If the power goes out, notify Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) of the outage by calling our outage numbers at 570-924-3418 or 1-800-596-8397. Follow the verbal



instructions provided by our Outage Management System. If it asks you to provide information, be sure to state the name on the account, a street address and a phone number where you can be reached. Remember that during an outage, Facebook and emails should not be used to report an outage because they're not monitored on a regular basis.

Be sure to have an emergency kit prepared to help you and your family weather the storm and the resulting outage safely and comfortably. Some of the items this kit should include are bottled water, non-perishable food, flashlights, a weather radio and extra batteries.

If you're using an alternative heating source during an outage, know how to use it safely and have all supplies for it gathered and ready. To help you and your family stay warm during an outage, dress warmly, cover windows at night, close off unneeded rooms, and place draft blocks at the bottom of doors.

To protect your circuits and appliances when power is restored, switch off lights and unplug appliances. Leave one light switched on to indicate when power is restored.

Only venture outside if absolutely necessary. Downed power lines could be submerged in snow and ice, making them difficult to see. If you must go outside, use caution and treat all downed and hanging lines as if they are energized. Stay away and warn

others to stay away, and immediately contact Sullivan County REC.

If travel is necessary, be especially cautious when driving and keep an emergency kit in your vehicle. The kit's supplies should include a windshield scraper, a first aid kit, a cellphone charging adapter, booster cables, a blanket and a flashlight with extra batteries.

Never drive over a downed line. Doing so could pull down the pole and other equipment, causing additional hazards. If you see a downed line, do not get out of your car. The safest place is inside the vehicle. Contact the co-op immediately to report the downed line.

For more information on electrical safety and weathering winter storms, visit SafeElectricity.org. ⚡

2021 Youth Tour update

EACH YEAR, students are selected from Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative territory to represent your co-op at the annual Rural Electric Youth Tour held in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, the 2021 Youth Tour has been canceled due to the uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative Board of Directors wants to continue supporting those students who would have attended the 2021 Youth Tour. At their November 2020 board meeting, the board approved giving a \$500 grant to a high school junior from each of these three school districts: Sullivan County, Montoursville and East Lycoming.

Any high school junior whose parents or guardians are members and receive their electric service from Sullivan REC can go to their guidance office to apply. Deadline to apply is March 15. ⚡

