




VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

P.O. Box 1049, Dillon, MT 59725-1049
(406) 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271

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E-mail: contact@vec.coop

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

76th

Annual Meeting of Members

It's that time of year, when members from across the Vigilante Electric Cooperative service territory come together for an afternoon of information, food and entertainment. On March 7, 2014, we will be hosting our 76th Annual Meeting of Members in the Lewis and Clark Room of Mathews Hall on the campus of University of Montana - Western.

The annual meeting gives members the opportunity to learn about their cooperative from the people who lead it, hear about the challenges that we face politically and vote on the individ-

uals who serve on the board of trustees. For electric cooperatives, the annual meeting is the most important event of the year. It is always informative and it gives you, the member, an opportunity to help shape our organization's future.

Registration begins at 11:45 a.m., with lunch by invitation starting at 12:15 p.m., and the meeting to commence at 1:15. An official notice of the meeting and a dinner reservation card will be mailed to each member. The dinner reservation cards need to be in by February 28, 2014. Hope to see you there.

Telephone Scam

Be aware of fraudulent calls

The following situation was brought to our attention by a member. This happened the first weekend in January.

A person called a member's business on a Saturday saying they needed to pay their electric bill. An employee gave the message to the owner. The owner then called the phone number. The person answering the phone told the owner he needed to pay \$800 - \$900 on a past-due bill from November, or their electricity would be disconnected immediately. He said they needed to pay via the phone and provide their bank information. The owner started asking more questions and the person hung up. When the owner tried calling

the number again, he was told that "this Vonage customer is not available."

Please, be extremely careful what information you provide over the phone. There are a couple of things to keep in mind regarding these phone calls: delinquent accounts are notified of potential disconnect via a statement on the monthly bill, and we won't ask for details regarding your account because we already have this information. We do not make unsolicited phone calls, and our office is closed on Saturdays. If you receive a questionable phone call about your account with us, give us a call at (406) 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271.

Trustees

President

Dean Peterson

Vice President

Dean Hanson

Secretary/Treasurer

Sharon Lasich

Tom Helm

Andy Johnson

Don Jones

Allen Martinell

Jim Petersen

Norm Tebay

General Manager

Rollie Miller

Outage Notification Numbers

M-F 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**683-2327 or
(800) 221-8271**

Dillon

After Hours Mon. - Thurs.

Dan Snellman683-6222

Gary Ferris683-6321

Charles Wharton660-1878

Weekends

**683-2327 or
(800) 221-8271**

Whitehall

After Hours and Weekends

Marty Simons287-3950

John Moos266-3605

Justin Bair266-3351

Townsend

After Hours and Weekends

John Moos266-3605

Justin Bair266-3351

Marty Simons287-3950

When to pull the plug

By Luann Dart

Saying goodbye to an old friend can be daunting. But pulling the plug on an outdated refrigerator or dishwasher might save you money; new appliances are often considerably more energy efficient.

A new refrigerator consumes 75 percent less energy than a 1970s model. Replace a vintage clothes washer and save \$60 on utility bills and nearly 5,000 gallons of water a year, according to the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers. However not every new appliance is a good bet; always look for the ENERGY STAR label — it signals energy-efficient models.

Ready to save? Walk through your home to find opportunities to pull the plug!

Cleaning Kitchen, Laundry Costs

In the laundry room, a full-sized ENERGY STAR-certified clothes washer uses 15 gallons of water per load, compared with the 23 gallons used by a standard machine. During the machine's lifetime, this saves 27,000 gallons of water.

Replace your kitchen's classic refrigerator with an ENERGY STAR-certified model to save between \$200 and \$1,100 in lifetime energy costs. Today's average refrigerator uses less energy than a continually lit 60-watt light bulb. Resist the urge to move the old refrigerator to the basement or garage. Instead, say goodbye and recycle the energy-guzzler.

Was your dishwasher built before 1994? If so, you're paying an extra \$40 a year on your utility bills compared with neighbors who have an ENERGY STAR-qualified model.

Screen Savings

Televisions might be a little more baffling. As screen sizes increase, energy consumption also may rise. You can still be a savvy shopper. ENERGY STAR-certified TVs are about 25 percent more efficient than conventional models. LED screens use 20 percent less energy than LCD TVs.

Once you purchase a TV, calibrate it by adjusting the contrast and brightness to a moderate level. By default, new tel-

evisions are set to dynamic, high-contrast settings. This consumes more power than standard, lower-contrast settings.

Smart Settings

Attached to old appliances? You can still save with smart settings. For

example, heating water creates the greatest expense when washing dishes or clothes. Set your water heater at 120 degrees, and be sure your clothes washer or dishwasher is full whenever used.

Here are a few other ways to save without buying new appliances:

- **NOT TOO COOL FOOD:** In the kitchen, don't keep your refrigerator or freezer too cold. Recommended temperatures are 37 to 40 degrees for the fresh food compartment, and 5 degrees for the freezer section.
- **TOAST, DON'T ROAST:** Use toaster ovens or microwave ovens for small meals rather than your large stovetop or oven.
- **AIR DRY DISHES:** Use the dishwasher's "eco" option or use a no-heat air dry feature. Additionally, scrape food pieces off the plates, rather than rinsing them.



- **COLD CLOTHES:** In the laundry room, wash your clothes in cold water using cold-water detergents whenever possible. Adjust load settings for smaller loads.
- **LOSE LINT:** Clean the lint screen in the dryer after every use to improve the dryer's efficiency.

For other tips on how to save energy, call the energy experts at Marias River Electric Cooperative. Find out how little changes add up to big savings at www.TogetherWeSave.com.

Luann Dart writes on energy efficiency issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

Residential Rate Switching

By Rod Siring, Member Services

Utility rates are often a source of confusion. They can be complicated, and most utilities maintain several rate classifications and schedules. At Vigilante Electric Cooperative we maintain five rate classifications, and within the residential class there are two rate schedules.

Our goal with rates is to ensure that each rate class pays for its share of building and maintaining our electrical system. Each year, a cost analysis is done to establish this very thing.

Based on our 2013 cost of service study, the cost for having a residential service in place is roughly \$44.77 per month, or \$537.24 per year.

When we allocate costs for residential services, they are distributed equally. The costs incurred on one facility are no different than those incurred on another. The difference is the revenue, or patronage, collected from each. Those accounts where patronage is more than \$537.24 per

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Co-op Connections

Cash Back Mall

By Rod Siring, Member Services

For several months I have used these pages to inform you on different money savings opportunities available through the Co-op Connections program. Last month I referred to a new offering from Co-op Connections — Cash Back Mall. Recently, I had the opportunity to test drive Cash Back Mall and I came away from the experience with two thoughts: This site will really help you save some money, and it really encourages you to shop.

As with all of the features of the Co-op Connections program, you start with their website. After logging on, click on the Cash Back Mall button at the top of the page. To get started you will have to download an app called shopping assistant. There is also a video available for review, but it is more of a sales pitch than “a how to” video, however it is worth watching.

Once you have downloaded the app and set up your account, you’re ready to shop. There are more than 5,000 online retailers participating in this program. The shopping assistant will appear as an additional toolbar on the program you use to browse the Internet, and it works in conjunction with your browser. You can shop from the shopping assistant or from any search engine.

From the shopping assistant you can find participating stores through the search window, which is signified by a looking glass. Type in the name of an online retailer and if they participate, the store’s name will appear in a box below the search window. Click on the box and you are taken directly to their site. Once there, a message will appear asking you to activate the cash back feature, click on this and you’re ready to shop.

The shopping assistant also helps you search for participating retailers alphabetically, by category or keyword. Just click on the store’s button on the shopping assistant. From here, you can find participating stores and their current promotions. In the stores section, there is a box that says coupons. When you click on the number in the box, you will

see their active promotions. Find one you like and hit redeem.

You also can shop directly from a search engine. Simply type in the name of a store into the search window and then click on the link for its website. If the store participates, you will see the message to activate cash back. There is also an indicator on the shopping assistant that will say “not a member site” or “cash back activated.”

When using one of the search engines, the type of browser you use and the version of the browser can impact the search results. For my money, the best way to shop using the Cash Back Mall is through the shopping assistant.

So, how does the cash back work? Online retailers pay a fee to have their business promoted on sites such as this. When you are in the stores section of the shopping assistant, you will see the cash back opportunity offered by each store. Once you make a purchase, your cash back amount will appear in the shopping assistant display within seven days.

How often will you get paid? Well, that depends on how you set up your profile. There is a drop-down arrow on the right side of the cash back earned button. One of the options is My Profile. Make sure this section is filled out. Here you can set the dollar values that will automatically trigger a payment, and how you want the payment made. As for how quick you will get your money, read the fine print in the help section. There could be up to a 60-day time lag.

Overall, I like this site. I made my first purchase on a Sunday, and saw the pending cash back amount in my shopping assistant on Wednesday. Plus, I was able to use a free shipping offer in conjunction with my purchase. It is hard to conceptualize the fact that there are over 5,000 online retailers participating in this program. However, once you are set up, as you browse, the system will inform you that you are on a participating site. It continually opens your eyes to the money savings opportunities.

Rate Switching

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year are not only paying for their share of the system, but they are contributing to margins.

If we were to maintain only one pricing schedule for residential, the accounts that pay less than \$537.24 in patronage would have their costs subsidized by the higher usage accounts. This would erode the margins that we are required to figure into our rate structure, lower capital credits and would have to be compensated for by an increase in rates to all residential accounts.

To be equitable, we maintain two schedules for residential accounts. Most residential services start in the “A” rate, but if the annual patronage falls below \$400 it will be switched to the “B” rate, which has a higher base charge and a higher kilowatt-hour charge. Conversely, to be put back into the “A” rate an account will have to exceed \$700 annual patronage. Having these limits reduces the chances that an account switches annually between rates. For some of you, this reclassification will occur with the billing for January’s usage, which also will coincide with the first billing under our new rate schedule.

Prescription Discount Tracker

Total Paid Claims YTD	156
Total Savings YTD.....	\$4,403.83
Total Savings Percentage	37.27%
Dec. paid claims	24
Dec. Savings	\$770.56
Dec. Savings Percentage	33.34%

