



VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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E-mail: contact@vec.coop

Vigilante Safety Roundup Revisited

By Rod Siring, Member Services

This past December we launched Vigilante Safety Roundup. Many volunteer organizations in our service territory rely heavily on donations as a means of offsetting budgetary constraints. This is one reason we offer this voluntary program, which provides our members a way to donate to organizations in our communities that keep us safe.

Year in and year out, Vigilante Electric Cooperative gives back to our communities. Under the community section on our website, you will see a list of organizations we have contributed to, which includes 15 volunteer fire departments. However, the scope of funding needed for creating safer communities is vast. While we do what we can, we think with the safety roundup program we can do better.

If we are exposing you to a roundup program for the first time, our program is modeled after successful safety roundup programs administered across the country. In these programs, funding is not allocated based on the type of organization, but rather what the funding is needed for. Any nonprofit organization within our service territory in need of funding for a project that is deemed

safety-related is eligible to receive funding.

Our application gives members three options for donating to our safety roundup: (1) you can have your bill rounded up to the next dollar. From experience, the average roundup amount is about \$6 per year, and the most it could be would be \$11.88 per year; (2) you can add a monthly dollar value of your choice; or (3) you can make a one-time donation.

Regardless of how you donate, 100 percent of the money will be presented to worthy organizations through grants. Grants will be awarded through an application process, and will be reviewed by the Vigilante Electric Board of Trustees.

We know that in today's world everyone's budget is tight and every penny counts — this is why Vigilante Safety Roundup is such a fantastic way to make your pennies work to benefit others. Individually, pennies don't go far, but when we add up all the donations, we can help many organizations.

The application process can be done over the phone by simply contacting us with your donation preference. Together we can make a difference in the safety of our communities.

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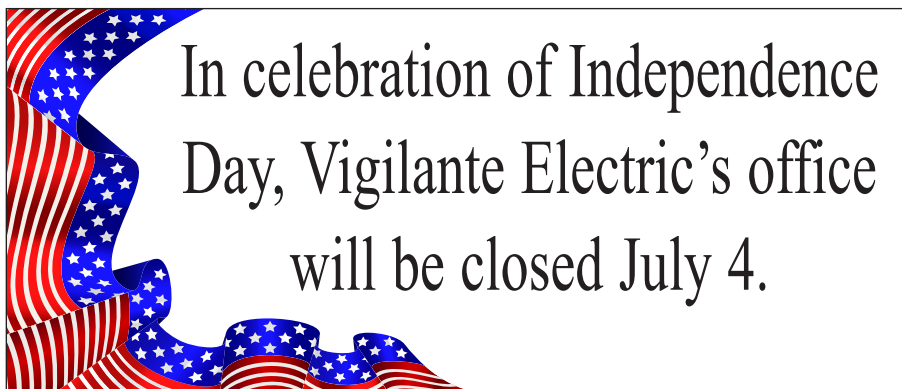
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Please Make Room for Roadside Crews

By Abby Berry

When the power goes out, so do Vigilante Electric Cooperative's line crews. Line workers are the first to respond after an outage occurs, and they work tirelessly to restore power to the communities we serve.

If you're traveling and see one of our crews on the side of the road, we kindly ask that you move over if possible and give them a little extra space to work. We deeply care about the safety of all, and this extra precaution ensures just that.

If you approach a crew while traveling on a two-lane road, moving over to the next lane might not be an option. In this case, we simply ask that you slow down when approaching roadside crews. If you approach a crew while

traveling on a four-lane road, and safety and traffic conditions allow, we ask that you move over into the far lane.

Utility crews aren't the only ones who could use the extra space. Emergency responders, such as police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians often find themselves responding to emergency situations near busy roadways. We ask that you follow the same procedures mentioned above to help keep these crews safe.

Be mindful that these are not mere recommendations. Montana has and enforces a "Move Over" law. Montana Code Annotated - 61-8-346. Operation of vehicles on approach of authorized emergency vehicles or police vehicles — approaching stationary emergency vehicles or police vehicles.

There's plenty of room for all. Let's work together to keep everyone safe on our local roadways.

Cooperative 101 — Capital Credits

By Rod Siring, Member Services

Many things make electric cooperatives different from other electric utilities. First and foremost we are owned by those we serve, and while there are many unique features of an electric cooperative, there is one thing in particular that we receive many questions about — capital credits.

Your cooperative is, by law, a nonprofit organization. After all financial commitments are met, any excess revenue is credited back to the membership. The capital credit system, which was adopted at the 1947 annual meeting, provides a method for allocating each individual member's share of excess revenues, or net margins.

The term "capital credits" is used because the actual money, which is classified as net margins, is invested in cooperative capital such as reserves or equipment. This money belongs to the members, but they have agreed to its use for capital purposes by accepting the capital credit provisions in the bylaws.

A capital credit statement is sent to members annually, notifying them of the allocation of margins for the previous year. When financial conditions permit, a general retirement (or refund) of capital can be made. These retired capital credits are then paid back to the individual member. It is our policy to retire the oldest capital credits first. The last capital credits retired were those allocated in 2000, and 66 percent of 2001.

How well does this system work? Since adopting the capital

credit system at the 1947 annual meeting, Vigilante Electric has retired more than \$15.1 million to its members, and over the past three years the average annual amount of capital credits retired is almost \$690,000.

One challenge of distributing retired capital credits is keeping track of every member we owe. Life is dynamic and people move. If you do have capital credits and leave our system, please keep us informed of your current address. We will be publishing a list of past members who we are looking for on our website and in this magazine. Please review the list, and if you know the whereabouts of anybody on the list, please contact us.

In the next edition of the publication, we will address a few more issues regarding capital credits. It is a challenging concept to explain, but it is a system that works extremely well. In the meantime, if you have any questions about this, feel free to contact us.

For Outages		
First: Check the fuses or breaker in the building in which the electricity is off.		
Second: Check the breaker below the meter.		
Third: If electricity is still out, check with neighbors to see if they have power.		
Fourth: Call Vigilante Electric Cooperative		
Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.		683-2327 or 800-221-8271
Dillon	Whitehall	Townsend
After Hours Mon- Thurs	After Hours	After Hours
Justin Bair 925-1540	Marty Simons 287-3950	John Moos 266-3605
Charles Wharton 660-1878	Chuck Romero 491-5446	Chase White 459-3892
Gary Ferris 683-6321	Zach (701) 290-9265	Marty Simons 287-3950
	Maershbecker	
Weekends 683-2327	Weekends	Weekends
or 800-221-8271	Same as above.	Same as above

Haystacks

Habits are defined as a constant, often unconscious inclination to perform an act. Sometimes habits become routine and we ignore potential dangers. As we proceed into the growing season, we would like to bring to your attention a serious potential hazard that could become a dangerous habit. It is common practice in the Agriculture community to put haystacks on nonproductive ground, but too frequently this is underneath power lines.

By law we cannot place our electrical line over existing buildings and structures. There are too many risks involved in such a practice. Placing a utility line over an existing structure increases the danger of fire to the structure and seriously increases the chances of someone contacting the power line.

Consider living in a house where the power lines crossed over the structure. Anytime there was work to do on the roof, whoever did the work would be in danger of making contact with the line. Additionally, if the line ever breaks and protective devices do not react fast enough, the damage could be devastating.

As haystacks are erected, each layer puts whoever is working on it closer and closer to danger. Haystacks present an inviting place for children to play. Plus, you are putting a dry fuel source directly under an instrument that could ignite it.

Most of us know somebody or have heard of somebody whose life was changed permanently because they came into contact with a power line. Within our service area the combination of haystacks and power lines has caused many close calls and a few serious injuries. The threat is real — and it can kill.

Too often it takes a traumatic event for people to change. The risk of losing a haystack to fire, or worse, a life to electrocution, is unacceptable. Please do not place your haystacks under power lines.



Another Look at SmartHub

Since introducing SmartHub in April of last year, we have seen a steady growth of members using this service. To date, we have more than 1,200 registered members. For those new to our membership, SmartHub is a secure, innovative tool that makes managing your electric account(s) easier.



SmartHub is a Web and mobile app that allows you to interact with us. SmartHub allows you access to a wealth of information from your computer, smartphone or tablet (Android or iOS). You can pay your bill, view your electricity use, stay in contact with us and much more. You'll be notified when your bill is due, and you can pay securely with just a few clicks through stored payment information.

SmartHub helps you manage your account. You can store credit card information and set up automatic payments that are secure and simple. With this, you also assume the responsibility for keeping this information up to date — especially your credit card information.

SmartHub allows you to stay on top of your usage and takes the guesswork out of your bill. Through detailed graphs, you'll be able to monitor your use and potentially find ways to reduce and save. Engaged users may also discover issues that lead to high bills, and changing habits that can reduce use.

If you still would like to pay online but not register or have information stored online, we offer SmartHub Pay Now. Unlike the full SmartHub site, you cannot view your usage or update information; it only allows you to pay your bill. Just use your billing account number and your last name, or the name of your business, to pay your bill quickly and easily.

SmartHub and SmartHub Pay Now can be accessed by using the buttons in the upper right corner of our webpage or by downloading the free mobile app available through the Apple App Store or the Google Play Store. Once it's downloaded, search for and select Vigilante Electric Cooperative as your service provider, then follow the cues to register.

Information on all of your payment options is available on our website at www.vec.coop. You will also find instructions on how to download the mobile app to your tablet or smart phone. Plus, you can always call us for assistance.

Co-op Connections

Prescription Discount Tracker

Total Paid Claims YTD	581
Total Savings YTD	\$22,274.95
Total Savings Percentage	42.67%
February Paid Claims	7
February Savings	\$319.19
February Savings Percentage	54.59%

The path to efficiency independence

By Anne Prince

While fireworks and Independence Day parades are synonymous with the Fourth of July, no such fanfare comes to mind when discussing energy efficiency. Perhaps it should. If you think about it, energy efficiency not only benefits individuals and families, but the country as a whole. Energy efficiency ultimately helps our country on a path toward greater energy independence.

At its essence, greater efficiency means less energy is used for the production of goods and services. For individual consumers, a reduction in energy use usually translates to a tangible financial benefit — more money in your wallet at the end of the month. If your co-op neighbors are also using less energy, collectively, it means the overall cost of providing that electricity could be lower and may result in reduced costs for co-op members. For many, this is reason enough to strive for greater energy efficiency. On a national level, energy efficiency, sometimes called the “fifth fuel,” has a more profound impact. It can potentially boost the economy by allowing consumers and businesses to invest in other areas. As importantly, greater energy efficiency may slow the rate at which domestic energy is depleted, and therefore reduce or diminish the need for foreign energy.

Energy efficiency can generally be achieved in two ways.

The first is with mechanical change, such as replacing an older heating and cooling unit or less-efficient appliance with a new ENERGY STAR model or upgrading to new, insulated windows. Less expensive actions include improving the seal of your home’s “envelope” by caulking exterior windows and doors, and sealing openings where pipes and ductwork meet the outside. Swapping out incandescent bulbs (inside and outside) with LEDs also makes a noticeable difference.

The second way to realize energy efficiency is through smarter management of your energy use. Leveraging smart thermostat technology is a good place to start. Most smart thermostats contain an app allowing remote control by mobile phone or tablet. Program your thermostat to reflect your family’s schedule. Many thermostat programs allow you to view and edit your thermostat schedule and monitor the amount of energy used. Sometimes, however, energy efficiency is simply a matter of changing old habits such as washing clothes in cold water instead of hot.

Regardless of the path you take on the road to energy efficiency and independence, Vigilante Electric Cooperative can help you on the journey. Feel free to contact us with any question you may have about how to use electricity more efficiently.

Affordable. Innovative. Member Focused.

It’s hard to predict the future, but one thing seems certain — **new government regulations will increase the cost of electricity.**

We want to work with you to keep your electric bills **AFFORDABLE**. We’re controlling costs and no matter what the future holds we’ll continue to put you, our members, **FIRST**.



Vigilante Electric Cooperative

Find out how we’re *Looking Out for You* at

www.vec.coop

Looking Out
for You

