

living with energy

IN IOWA



A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

MARCH 2017

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION FOR MEMBER-OWNERS OF ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE

What's hot in garden design?

High school students:
Win a spot on the
2017 Youth Tour!

Visit our website at www.accessenergycoop.com

Maintain
proper clearance
around grain bins

National **Lineman**
Appreciation Day
is April 10

UPCOMING EVENTS



- March 14** **Nominating Committee Meets for Election of Directors**

- March 15** **Scholarship Application Deadline**

- March 22** **REC Day on the Hill**

- March 31** **Photo Contest Deadline**

- April 10** **National Lineman Appreciation Day**

You can reach our office 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for answers to billing and account questions, paying your bill and service interruptions by calling 866-242-4232.

OFFICE CLOSING

The Access Energy Cooperative office will be closed April 14 for Good Friday.



Access Energy Cooperative is dedicated to exceeding members' expectations for safe, reliable and efficient service, while being a good citizen in our communities.

Office: Access Energy Cooperative
1800 W. Washington St., P.O. Box 440
Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641
Phone: 319-385-1577 or 866-242-4232
Fax: 319-385-6873
Call Before You Dig (Iowa One Call): 800-292-8989
Website: www.accessenergycoop.com
Facebook: facebook.com/AccessEnergyCoop
Twitter: twitter.com/AccessEnergyC
E-mail: contactus@accessenergycoop.com
Office Hours: Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Friday, 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Closed Saturday, Sunday and holidays
After Hours and Report Outages: 319-385-1580 or 800-452-7819

Payments can be placed in dropbox under flag pole. Visa and MasterCard accepted.

General Manager/CEO: Kevin Wheeler
Editor: Kimberly Davis
Assistant Editor: Cherity Wibben
Officers and Directors:

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------|----------------|
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This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

HOW YOUR CO-OP WORKS

Keeping up with technology keeps your power on

It's a simple premise: When you flip the switch at home, the lights should come on. At Access Energy Cooperative, we work hard to ensure you have electricity every hour of every day. It's what we do; we're here for you, our member-owners. Even as we upgrade the distribution system to improve reliability, we face continual threats, such as a tornado or ice storm. Maybe a neighbor forgot to call before he dug up his backyard. Maybe someone slid off the road and hit a utility pole.

With more than 2,200 miles of electric distribution lines, we have a lot of ground to cover. So when the lights go out, we cover it as quickly as possible. Not too long ago, our only option was linemen driving throughout large areas to investigate a problem. But we've invested in smart technologies that allow us to monitor our system remotely and pinpoint problems more quickly and accurately, as they occur.

We also have great employees with tremendous expertise in maintaining and repairing our infrastructure. As your locally owned and operated not-for-profit utility, we deeply

care about the areas we serve. We evaluate and deploy cost-effective system upgrades and preventive maintenance strategies across our 10 counties. And we work hard all year to keep trees away from power lines to prevent outages.

In 2016, our outage reports show a significant reduction in the number and length of outages affecting our members. There were no major storms last year, which helped tremendously; in addition, our stringent equipment and vegetation management plans are doing their jobs to keep outages down and your power reliable.

Our 2016 reports also showed a significant increase in number of poles rejected for safety during inspection. The sections tested in 2016 covered areas with many of the original poles installed in the 1940s and 1950s, making a large percentage of the poles tested around 70 years old. That, in combination with the fact that we used a new contractor employing new technology for the testing process, is helping strengthen our pole-testing program to create a safer system for you. ⚡

2016 System Reliability Report

	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	5-year average
Member service interruptions to number of members served	.76	2.34 (incurred major storms)	1.33	1.37	1.04	1.37

2016 and 2017 Maintenance Program Schedules (Set up on a rotating basis across the service area)

Program description	2017 program	2016 program
Equipment inspections	Lee County and Van Buren County areas	Lee County area
Vegetation management	Mt. Pleasant, Coppock, south of Burlington and Lowell areas	Selma, Stockport, Lockridge, Perlee, Batavia and Primrose areas

Managing physical threats is key to grid reliability

BY KEVIN WHEELER

While the threat of cybersecurity attacks on the electric grid gets a lot of attention these days, physical damage from storms or critters is much more likely to disrupt power. There are many physical threats to our power delivery system that your cooperative works hard to manage on a daily basis. From weather events (such as ice storms, tornadoes and flooding) to criminal activity (including copper theft and shooting at a substation), it takes proactive commitment to consistently deliver reliable service.

If the lights do go out, we're ready to restore power as quickly and as safely as we can. Here are three key ways that we work to keep your power as reliable as possible:

1. Being part of the community

One of the most valuable things about being served by an electric cooperative is that you also have an ownership stake in the way the cooperative operates. Electric cooperatives know our communities. We live and work in the towns and neighborhoods we serve. You know many of Access Energy Cooperative's board members and employees, who are also personally acquainted with or are a part of fire departments, county supervisors, EMTs and other organizations.



We know that emergencies can happen at any time. These relationships are important in urgently responding to unplanned events or in preparing for more predictable events, including winter storms or summer flooding. For example, when a significant winter storm impacted almost every area of South Dakota over the Christmas holiday – leaving thousands without power – Iowa's electric cooperatives responded. That's because we're part of one large cooperative community and cooperation among cooperatives is an essential principle of providing reliable electric service.

2. Planning, preparing and practicing

There's a well-known saying: "It's not *if* a crisis will occur, but *when* it will occur." What constitutes a crisis can mean different things to member-owners, depending on the role electricity plays in their daily lives or businesses. We test our disaster and business continuity plans regularly and pride ourselves on being prepared at all times.

Our plans not only focus on how to prevent threats, but also how to respond and recover from them. For example, trees too close to power lines can cause major damage during a storm and may result in a lengthy outage. Business activities,

such as vegetation management or pole inspections, may seem routine; however, they're strategically performed to proactively reduce threats.

3. Coordinating with stakeholders

Access Energy Cooperative places a high importance on working partnerships with fellow cooperatives, our state and national electric cooperative associations, industry partners and government agencies to mitigate the potential impacts of all types of threats to our system. Electric cooperatives work closely with the rest of the electric industry, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Energy and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on matters of critical infrastructure protection. This includes sharing needed information about potential threats and working together to avoid disruptions to the extent possible.

Although the grid is incredibly resilient and can withstand many physical impacts, it's also a dynamic infrastructure that requires constant attention. We're vigilant in ensuring we protect the grid from physical and cyber threats in order to power your lives! ⚡

Kevin Wheeler is the general manager/CEO of Access Energy Cooperative.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win 10 shade trees!

Shade trees should be a major component in your plan for lowering your family's summer energy bills. To help you get started, we're going to give 10 lucky electric co-op members 10 free shade trees up to a foot tall. (You also may choose from other tree categories for delivery in May.) The winners also will receive a one-year membership to the Arbor Day Foundation, which includes the organization's newsletter, *The Tree Book* and generous discounts on future tree purchases. For more details on the Arbor Day Foundation, go to www.arborday.org.

To enter this month's contest, please visit the new *Living with Energy in Iowa* website at www.livingwithenergyiowa.com and complete the entry form by March 31, 2017. ⚡



ANNUAL MEETING

Save the Date!



Aug. 1, 2017 @ 5 p.m.

**Access Energy Cooperative
Annual Meeting of
Members**

Everything is FREE!

NOTE OF THANKS

We just love it when our members take time to tell us how they feel!

Consumer's Name:
McDonald-Ekstrand
Family Farm LLC

"Just wanted to let everyone know how much I appreciate your service, patience and help. Thank you."

CO-OP VIPS

National Lineman Appreciation Day is April 10

America's electric cooperatives have designated the second Monday of each April as National Lineman Appreciation Day, to honor the hardworking men and women who often operate in challenging conditions to keep your power on. Electric cooperative linemen don't often receive the recognition they deserve. They work all hours of the day, often in hazardous conditions far from their families, going above and beyond to restore power to their communities.

If you see a line worker in the Access Energy Cooperative office or around your area, please take a moment to say thanks. You also can leave a Twitter message at #ThankaLineman. ⚡



Tony Adams



Mitchell Banes



Tony Brown



Eli Harscher



Cole Hetzler



Steve Hyde



Korbin Johnson



Kurt Lowenberg



Jim Mills



Levon Mullen



Wyatt Phillips



Charles Rila



Donald Roach



Bob Ruby



Bill Simon



Jon Trumpold

You can help us deliver reliable service

Report suspicious activity

We ask our member-owners to be mindful of unusual situations and to immediately report them to the co-op or local authorities. For example, if you see non-cooperative personnel near a substation, that's noteworthy and should be reported. If you see something that doesn't seem right, we ask you to say something so that it can be investigated.

Check for damage

If you have tree branches or other vegetation growing too closely to power lines or utility poles, please contact our operations department at 319-385-1577 so we can keep our lines clear in order to provide the most reliable service. If you come across damaged poles or equipment, please call the same number.

Here are some easy steps for greater efficiency



Photo: Werner Ladder

Do you want to save money and electricity, but have limited time, money and patience? According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), a “typical American family” spends nearly \$2,000 per year on their home energy bills. Much of that money, however, is wasted through leaky windows or ducts, old appliances or inefficient heating and cooling systems.

Luckily, there are several relatively easy ways to save energy without a substantial commitment of time and money, whether you own or rent an older or newly constructed home. And, you won’t have to hire a specialist or call in a favor from someone who’s handy with tools to help you.

Start here

According to *Money* magazine, **improving the envelope** of your home is a good place to start. Sunlight, seasonal temperature changes and wind vibrations can loosen up even a tight home, increasing air leakage. Doors and windows may not close tightly, and ductwork can spring leaks, wasting cooled and heated air. By placing weather stripping and caulk around windows and doors, you can keep cool air inside during warm months and prevent chilly air from penetrating indoors during colder months. Sealing gaps around piping,

dryer vents, fans and outlets also helps to tighten the envelope and create greater efficiency. Apply weather stripping around overlooked spaces like your attic hatch or pull-down stairs too.

Replacing incandescent bulbs with LED bulbs can make a big difference in home efficiency, and it’s one of the fastest ways to cut your energy bill. Known for their longevity and efficiency, LED bulbs have an estimated operational life span of typically 10,000 to 20,000 hours, compared to 1,000 hours of a typical incandescent bulb. According to the DOE, replacing your home’s five most frequently used light fixtures or bulbs with models that have earned the ENERGY STAR® rating can save \$75 each year.

Wrap up savings

Installing a blanket around your water heater could reduce standby heat losses by 25 to 45 percent and save you about 7 to 16 percent in water heating costs, according to the DOE. For a small investment of about \$30, you can purchase precut jackets or blankets and install them in about an hour. On a safety note, the DOE recommends that you not set the thermostat above 120 degrees Fahrenheit on an electric water heater with an insulating jacket or blanket; the higher temperature setting could cause the wiring to overheat. Also, some water heater manufacturers suggest not adding extra insulation; check your owner’s manual or the company’s website to be sure.

Given that a large portion of your monthly energy bill goes toward heating and cooling your home, it makes sense to ensure your home’s heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) system is performing at an optimal level. **Checking, changing or cleaning the filter** extends the life of your HVAC

system and saves you money.

Air filters prevent dust and allergens from clogging your HVAC system. Otherwise, dust and dirt trapped in the system’s air filter leads to several problems, including reduced airflow in the home, up to 15 percent higher operating costs, lowered system efficiency, and costly duct cleaning or replacement. Many HVAC professionals recommend cleaning the system filters monthly.

Take control of energy savings

Look at your programmable thermostat. When was the last time you checked to make sure it was programmed for the correct time, current season and family schedule? This is one of the best energy-saving tools at your fingertips. It enables you to fine tune the temperature during particular hours of the day. To achieve the highest efficiencies and savings, it must be programmed properly and adjusted periodically to keep pace with changes in household routines.

Remember, there are easy steps you can take now to improve the energy efficiency of your home year-round. To learn about additional ways to save, visit our website at www.accessenergycoop.com. ⚡

Summer help wanted!
Operations Department
Access Energy Cooperative

Seasonal help is needed this summer in the Access Energy Cooperative operations department. Applicant must have graduated high school by summer 2017 and must enroll in post-secondary education in the fall. Contact Diane Magnani at dmagnani@accessenergycoop.com.