



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

West Central *Electric News*

February 2012



West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc. ~ Serving our members' needs since 1939

West Central board says rate increase is minimal but necessary

After dodging the proverbial bullet the past two years, West Central Electric's board of directors has determined that a minimal rate increase is necessary to insure stability of the cooperative's finances into the near future.

The last rate increase was in April 2009, and since that time, the industry has seen a jump in wholesale power costs increased operational expenses (fuel, materials, labor) and flat kWh sales, all of which have contributed to the necessity of an increase.

"Keep in mind, we are not a profit-driven company -- we are a cooperative, and any margins we do make are returned to you, our members," General Manager Mike Gray said. "We do everything we can to control expenses and still maintain quality service to you."

The overall increase amounts to 7 percent, and will take effect April 1, 2012, with the new rates reflected on the bill due by May 15, 2012. The new residential rate will see charges for the first 800 kWh set at \$0.0951 and over 800 kWh at a reduced rate of \$0.0712. The service availability charge will remain at \$25.

"The board and management take a rate increase very seriously, and we are constantly looking for ways to be more efficient and keep expenses down," Gray said.

"We are a not-for-profit cooperative -- that means we don't raise rates to generate profits. We raise rates simply to cover the cost of doing business, and only when absolutely necessary. Rate increases are tough for everyone, but this move will help continue to keep electric service safe and reliable."

Mike Gray
General Manager

WCE Rate Schedule (Effective with bill due by May 15, 2012)

Residential
Service Availability @ \$25.00
First 800 kWh @ \$0.0951
Excess kWh @ \$0.0712

Commercial and large-industrial rates available upon request

Members who use 1,500 kWh per month can expect a monthly increase of \$9.77. Members whose usage is 3,000 kWh per month can expect a monthly increase of \$16.82.

Stagnant new service growth partly to blame

Historically, WCE has seen growth in new services of 1 percent to 3 percent each year. That growth was enough to increase revenues enough to help keep up with the rising costs of fuel, materials and labor.

"That changed with the recession and housing bust of

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You can do a lot to reduce your electric bill...



ENERGY-SAVING TIPS...
WCE employee Tiger Fiene replaces a furnace filter at cooperative headquarters in Higginsville. Replacing furnace and air conditioning filters regularly can have a big impact on energy use.

Saving Energy A year's worth of

Got cabin fever this winter? Spend time making your home more energy efficient and start saving for your summer vacation!

You can trim your electric bill all year long by taking a few simple steps. Here's a list of West Central Electric's recommendations for year-round energy and money savings!

January: Lowering your thermostat just a few degrees during winter months can save as much as \$85 per year. Programmable thermostats make it easy to save by offering pre-programmed settings to regulate a home's temperature throughout the year.

February: Adjust your water heater. Turning down the temperature gauge to below 120 degrees Fahrenheit can heat up your savings.

March: Stop air from escaping your home and money from escaping your wallet! Head down to your home's basement and seal those leaky ducts.

April: A little caulk can go a long way. Air leaks in your home add up. Caulking cracks and openings to the outside could save more than \$200 a year.

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New payment options are aimed at helping members pay their electric bills

With the pressures of the rising cost of living, your electric cooperative is committed to helping you in every way possible to decrease your energy usage, as well as get your bill paid on time to avoid late fees.

"Traditionally, bills have been mailed out on the last working day of the month, and are late after the 15th of the month," Office Manager Sandy Starke said. "When payments are made after the due date, late fees are charged, and we know that can add up for members who are already struggling to pay their bill."

Therefore WCE will be adopting a cycle billing schedule, set to be implemented later this year.

"Members will have a choice of when their electric bill is due, which will save late fees for those members who get paid later in the month and are forced to have to make payment arrangements,

which incur late fees," Starke said.

Members will be able to choose whether to stay with the 15th of the month due date, or move their due date to the 1st, 8th or 22nd of the month. Bills will still be calculated and mailed approximately two weeks prior to the selected due date, with late fees being assessed after the due date has passed.

"We hope this move will help ease the burden on those members who are not able to pay by the 15th of the month by giving them the opportunity to choose the time of the month that works best with their finances," Starke said.

Members who are interested in changing their due date may contact the cooperative at 800-491-3803 or 660-584-2131.

West Central's Cycle Billing Program is slated to begin June 1, 2012

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1-800-491-3803

General Manager:
Mike Gray

Board of Directors:
Clark Bredehoeft, President
Ron Steelman, Vice-Pres.
Paul Nolte, Treasurer
Robert Simmons, Secretary
Stan Rhodes, Asst. Sect.
Dale Jarman, Director
Max Swisegood, Director
Densil Allen, Director
Richard Strobel, Director

Net Metering & Interconnection Act

West Central Electric Cooperative has a net metering agreement for interconnection of a distributed generation source.

Our policy, agreement and application now reflect the new standards set by the Net Metering and Easy Connection Act as of January 1, 2008.

For more information, contact our Higginsville office at 800-491-3803 or 660-584-2131.

WCE board says rate increase is minimal but necessary

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2008," Gray said. "Since 2008, WCE has actually seen a decrease in connect-

ed meters, which has led to a decrease in yearly revenues."

Gray said kWh sales projections for 2012 are similar to those posted in 2009.

In addition, wholesale power costs have risen nearly \$800,000 since 2009 from \$15,288,277 per year to an estimated \$16,087,836 for 2012.



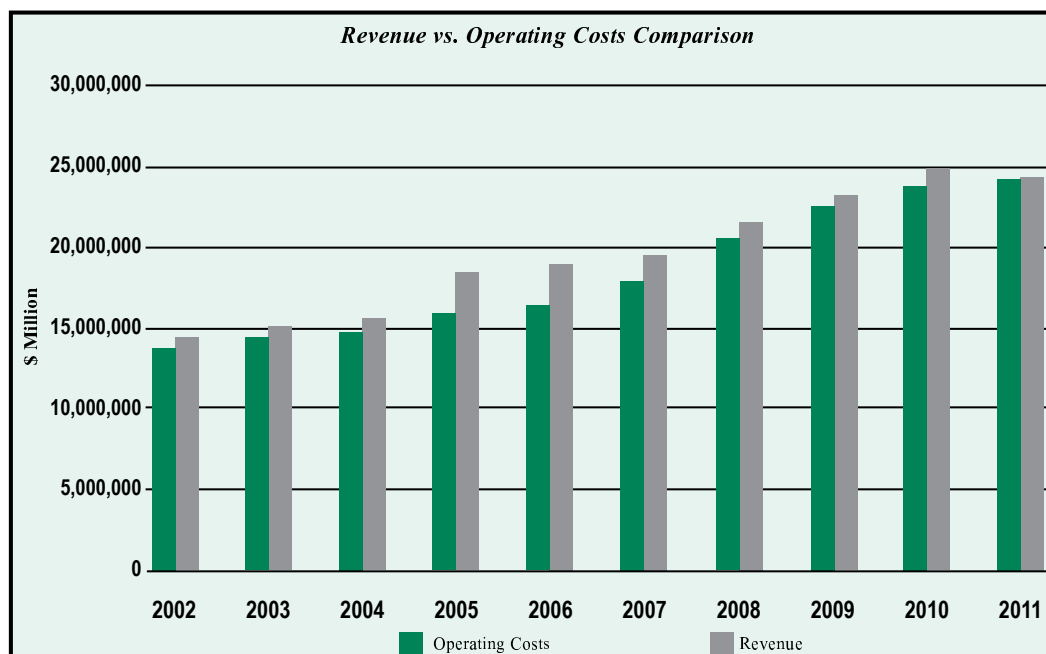
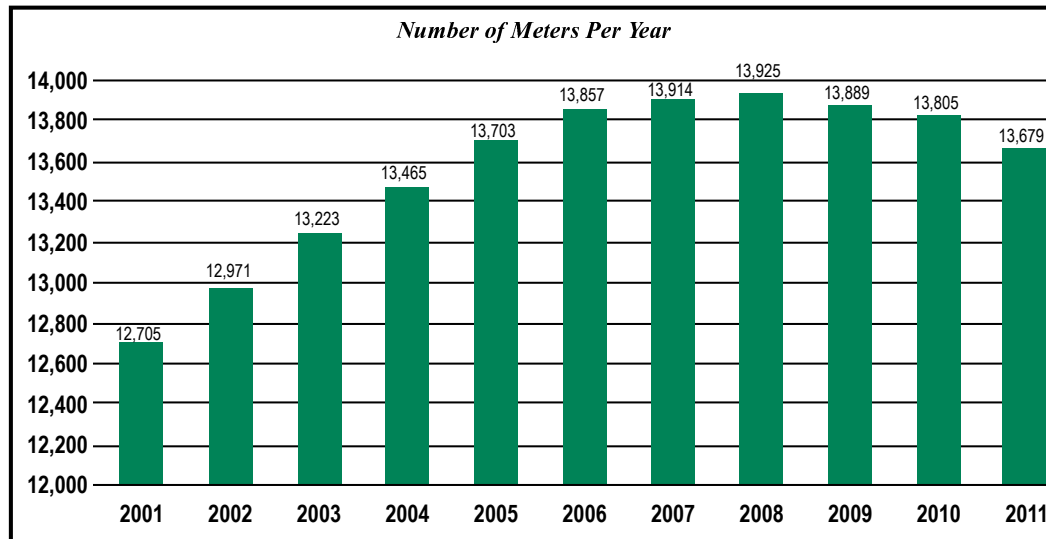
Electrical safety vacation checklist

Summer vacations are hard to pull off these days, so it's important that trip-takers have peace of mind while away. Fires can start when lightning storms strike electronics or small appliances; burglaries tend to increase because folks aren't at home.

The electrical safety checklist below will help you decrease the risk of problems occurring while on vacation:

1. Turn off all electrical appliances, including toaster ovens, stoves, and curling irons.
2. Unplug television sets and computers—these items are especially susceptible to lightning and power surges.
3. Use a timer on indoor lights. Look for one that can be set to a random pattern rather than regular times throughout the day.
4. Install motion-detecting lights outdoors.
5. Set the thermostat to 80 degrees in the summer and 55 degrees in the winter if you plan to leave for an extended period of time.
6. Give your house key to a neighbor and make sure he or she has a phone number where you can be reached.

Source: *National Sheriffs' Association*
Christine Smith writes on electrical safety 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.



TCS rebate program set to change this year

West Central Electric is committed to educating members about energy efficiency, and dedicated to helping members save money where they can.

The Take Control and Save program helps cooperative members save money and energy by making their homes more energy efficient. One of these programs is issuing rebates for the installation of energy-efficient equipment and appliances.

TCS recently announced several changes taking place in the program for 2012.

•ENERGY STAR® APPLIANCES (Program ends May 31, 2012)

Energy Star® clothes washers will qualify for a \$100 rebate, Energy Star® dishwashers will qualify for a \$50, and Energy Star® window air conditioners will qualify for a \$50 rebate if pur-

chased and installed by May 31, 2012. Rebates will be given for new construction or replacement. Electric water heating must be present in the home to qualify.

•WATER HEATERS

Electric water heaters will qualify for a \$50 rebate. Rebates will be given for new construction or replacement of an electric water heater. Water heaters must be a minimum of 40 gallons, and

.90 efficient or better. Replacement of a gas water heater does not qualify.

•DUAL FUEL HEAT PUMPS

Dual fuel heat pumps will qualify for a \$150 per ton rebate. **New require-**

ments for 2012 include a minimum SEER of 16.5.

•GROUND SOURCE HEAT PUMP

Ground source heat pump systems will qualify for a \$750 per ton rebate for a first-time installation in a new or existing home, and a \$150 per ton rebate for a replacement of the pump unit.

New requirements for 2012 include a minimum EER of 19.1.

Rebates will not be paid on more than 10 tons for residential systems or more than 50 tons for commercial systems.

For complete program details and qualifications, visit www.westcentralelectric.coop.

Take Control & Save

A Cooperative Effort for Energy Efficiency

You can do a lot to reduce your electric bill...

A year's worth of saving energy

From page 1

May: Make sure your refrigerator is on your spring cleaning to-do list. Throw out expired items, clean the refrigerator inside and out, and check the temperature gauge. For maximum operating efficiency, a refrigerator's temperature should be between 37 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

June: When was the last time you changed a filter? Replacing furnace and air conditioner filters regularly can have a big impact on a home's energy use. Dirty filters can restrict air flow and reduce the overall efficiency of your cooling system, forcing it to work harder on hot summer days.

July: Your home's cooling costs can skyrocket—right along with the temperature outside—during summer months. Keeping your thermostat set between 78 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit can save up to 8 percent on monthly cooling bills.

August: Heading out of town on vacation? Be sure to unplug all of your electronic devices like computers, monitor, printers, TV and cable boxes, DVD players, and microwaves. Electronics with digital displays and instant-on features consume energy even if they're not in use.

September: Be a "fan-atic." While they don't replace an air conditioner or a heat pump, fans move the air so everyone feels more comfortable. On a milder day, a fan is a much more energy-efficient choice than cranking up the air conditioning. Fans cool people, not rooms, so turn them off when you leave.

October: Get ready for winter by insulating your attic. Adding nine or more inches of insulation could save you more than \$150 a year.

November: As the weather cools down, pull up your window shades. Keeping blinds open during cold weather lets heat from sunlight in, reducing the need to turn up your home's thermostat.

December: Put a new ENERGY STAR® appliance at the top of your Christmas wish list. Upgrading appliances like washing machines to ENERGY STAR®-rated models can save up to \$140 per year.

West Central Electric is dedicated to being an energy efficiency resource for its members. To learn more about how you can save money through energy efficiency practices, call us at 1-800-491-3803 or 660-584-2131.

For even more information, check out TogetherWeSave.com, an online portal to energy savings tips that uses real dollar savings projections—based on your individual electric rate and climate zone—to motivate small changes in behavior that add up to big savings.

Once you arrive at the site, enter your ZIP code to be redirected to West Central's customized section. You can watch videos that provide detailed instructions about energy savings practices, add up your potential savings with a Virtual Home Tour, and much more.

Source: Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives



Consider easy upgrades to boost safety

Nothing has the charm of an older home on a family farm or a cute cottage in a historical downtown district. But cosmetic and structural upgrades are often packaged with the cozy charm.

When upgrading your home, a fresh coat of paint and updated fixtures may come to mind. But what about hiring a professional to update the wiring behind a switch plate or outlet? Do you know the hidden dangers of aged wiring in your home? Don't take on wiring problems yourself—electrical upgrades often require a professional who knows what inspections and permits are needed. Here are a few clues to find out if your home's electric network needs a professional switch.

1. Type of wiring. Modern wiring is insulated, meaning it is covered in plastic. Older homes may have copper or aluminum wiring. Copper wiring can work just as well as modern wiring if it is still in good condition and has not been altered or improperly installed. However, fire risk increases in homes with both copper and aluminum wiring. Corrosion to aluminum from copper can lead to loose connections causing fires. Use only aluminum-approved switches, outlets, and other accessories if your home has aluminum wiring.

2. Plugs fall out of outlets easily.

Loose plugs are a high fire danger. Older outlets that have lost their grip need to be replaced. Luckily this upgrade is affordable.

3. Not enough outlets. The increasing use of chargers for phones and many other electronic devices means outlets are in high demand, especially in older homes where outlets are not as plentiful. A lack of outlets can result in overuse of extension cords and power strips. Be sure to use quality, 14-gauge or thicker cords that are approved by Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Never overload an outlet. Overloading can cause heat, leading to fire risk. Consider hiring a licensed electrician to add outlets to your home.

4. Danger in wet areas. GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) outlets are now required in areas around water like near a kitchen or bathroom sink or outdoors. But in older homes, GFCIs may not have been installed. It is fairly simple to replace old receptacles with GFCIs; hire a professional to upgrade outlets near water.

5. Wind causes lights to blink. If you notice your lights blinking on windy days, it may be due to worn wiring in the weatherhead (where overhead lines enter your home). Contact your electric co-op to check weatherhead wiring.

Source: This Old House, Underwriters Laboratories

Kelly Trapnell writes on safety 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.



The case for compact fluorescents...

The money savings alone makes CFLs an affordable option

Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) have come a long way in the past decade. The stigma of cold, blue light in an ugly design with an annoying buzz is largely gone as their light has warmed and their efficiency been proven.

Initially, CFLs still cost more than incandescent bulbs, but ENERGY STAR-qualified CFLs are 75 percent

more efficient and last at least six times longer. According to ENERGY STAR and the U.S. Department of Energy, a CFL in your first grader's room will last until the child is a teenager. A CFL will pay for itself in about six months, with even earlier payback when used in a fixture you leave on the longest.

You can save about \$6 per bulb or about \$14 a fixture annually with these CFLs. If you replace your home's five most frequently used light fixtures or their bulbs with ENERGY STAR-qualified models, you can save about \$70 a year. If you swapped out all your fixtures and lights (about 30 light fix-

tures), you could save more than \$400 a year on your electric bill, says ENERGY STAR.

CFLs come in a wide variety of styles and models, including bulbs for recessed, three-way, dimmer and outdoor fixtures.

ENERGY STAR offers calculators at www.energystar.gov comparing incandescent bulbs to CFLs. Touchstone Energy's Together We Save site at www.togetherwesave.com/add-up-your-savings also has a calculator for estimating the savings of energy-efficiency improvements, including switching to CFLs.

Doug Rye Says...

Happy summer comfort...

I decided to splurge and take my wife to a lodge at one of our great state parks to help ring in the New Year. It is difficult for me to stay up much past the late news, but I can do it if I am in good company and if someone will give me a green New Year's hat and a silly little horn.

There was only one place to eat, and it was the nice restaurant at the lodge. By the time you have been there for two full days and eaten six straight meals with the same people, you begin to feel like family. In this case, it was super nice.

On New Year's morning, I left our room and went to the room with the big fireplace and the big view to get some coffee. As I stepped into the hallway, a lady housekeeper with a vacuum cleaner looked at me and said, "Hey, I just read your article in the electric cooperative magazine last night." I said, "Then you must know about the little bitty bedroom that I had as a child." And sure enough, she did.

She told me about her childhood, sisters and brothers, and a house with only a small wood heater for the winter. Then she said, "But we were all happy." Several others have commented on the article with their stories, and all of them have mentioned that they were happy even though their house did not have all the comforts that we have today. At that time, I had not yet made a New Year's

resolution, but I heard the word happy so many times and I was wishing everyone a Happy New Year, so I made my 2012 resolution. I will be happy regardless of the circumstances.

Although I am not convinced that it is necessary to have total temperature comfort for one to be happy, I am convinced that everyone would like to have comfort. In this and next month's column, I am going to teach you everything I know about temperature comfort in your house.

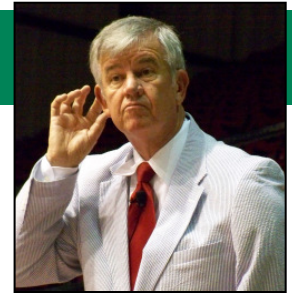
The first thing to know is that not everyone has the same comfort temperature. Some like it hotter and some like it colder. Based on the calls that I get at the office, I would say that a husband and wife rarely agree on which temperature is best.

One lady told me, in a kidding tone, that her husband was more worried about his cattle being comfortable than her. That was on a day when it was snowing over most of the state. Comfort is usually related to both the air temperature and the relative humidity. Generally speaking, folks are the most comfortable if the temperature is about 74 degrees with a relative humidity of about 50 percent. Remember that relative humidity is the percentage of moisture in the air compared to the most moisture that the air could hold at a certain temperature. Let's start with some summer comfort tips.

I have never had a person tell me that their house was too dry in the summer. Let's take a day in Arkansas when the temperature is 90 degrees. If the relative humidity is 70 percent, you will feel sticky hot because the moisture on the skin cannot evaporate and cool the body. So you turn on your AC unit. An AC unit cools by removing heat and humidity. As the humidity is lowered, the skin moisture evaporates and you feel cooler.

That same 90-degree day in Arizona with 50 percent relative humidity would be like going to heaven because the skin moisture evaporates easily. So that 90-degree air at 50 percent is much dryer than the 90-degree air at 70 percent. If it were raining on a 90-degree day, the relative humidity would be right at 100 percent in either state. How can we relate this to your house for better comfort? Well if it is a hot 90-degree/70-percent humidity day and your house has lots of air infiltration, leakage in the return air system, unvented bath areas or anything making moisture, the air-conditioning unit will have to work harder and longer to keep you in the comfort range.

If your air-conditioning unit is oversized, it will not run long enough to remove the humidity, so you will probably lower the thermostat setting to make the unit run longer. All of this means higher utility bills. The solution is to



caulk, repair ductwork, vent bathrooms, etc., and then purchase a properly sized air-conditioning unit when needed. This really isn't complicated if you take it one step at a time. So I suggest that you let this much absorb and not evaporate, and next month we will discuss winter comfort tips.

Until then, BE HAPPY.

Note: Doug Rye, a licensed architect and the popular host of the "Home Remedies" radio show, works as a consultant for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas to promote energy efficiency to cooperative members statewide. To order Doug's video or ask energy efficiency-related questions, call Doug at 1-501-653-7931. More energy-efficiency tips, as well as Doug's columns, can also be found at www.ecark.org.

Listen to Doug Rye's "Home Remedies" show Saturday mornings from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on KXKX Radio, 105.7 FM. or online at 9 a.m. Saturday mornings at www.1037thebuzz.com

Planting trees or putting up a fence this spring?

Make sure to call before you dig.

