

Consider the VEC Surge Guard Program Now... Before the Spring Storm Season Arrives

Lightning can cause devastating damage to your appliances and electronics

By Peter Jackson



As winter winds down and we look forward to spring, don't forget to add surge protection to your spring "to-do" list. We often think about the need for surge protection for our homes and sensitive electronics during the rumble and flash of thunderstorms but with so many activities demanding our time these days... many of us forget to follow through and take action.

Thunder storms can create intense cloud-to-ground lightning strikes which often hit trees but can also strike utility power lines as they look for an easy path to discharge electrical energy from the storm clouds to the earth.

Volunteer Energy takes extra precautions by installing surge protectors on electrical distribution lines throughout the system but - depending on where lightning chooses to strike - there can be a risk to your home if lightning strikes nearby.

For a monthly payment of \$5.95, VEC can provide Surge Guard protection for your large appliances. This protection can be enhanced with purchased plug-in devices. Call your local VEC office and ask to sign up for the Surge Guard program. Our trained technician will install a special meter base surge protector behind your electric meter to help capture electrical surges and send them to earth ground *before* they

can enter your home and cause damage.

Once installed, the meter base surge protector will work as a team with the Surge Guard plug-in surge protectors that you purchase to virtually eliminate opportunities for storm-related surges to damage your appliances and sensitive electronics.

For a limited time, new Surge Guard customers will receive a free 8-outlet plug-in strip when they enroll in the program.

For more information, call Kristy at 423-334-7055.



Barbara Tays Honored by VEC

Volunteer Energy Cooperative recently honored Monterey's Barbara Tays for her years of service to the Cooperative. Tays was hired in December 1968 and retired November 30th, accumulating nearly 47 years of service and working her entire career in the VEC Monterey customer service center.

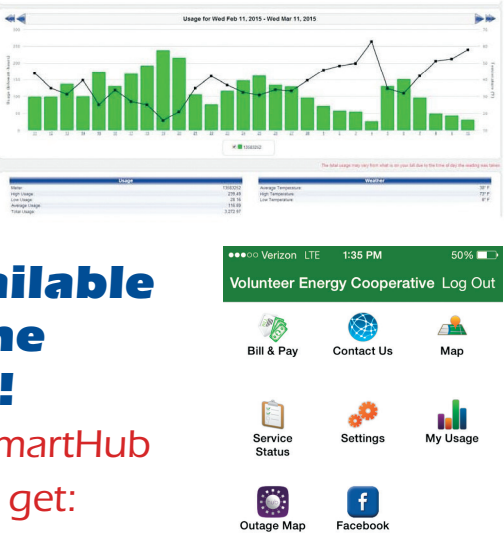


Pictured at the celebration are Bobby Randolph, VEC area manager; Keelan Milligan; Jack Looper; Jerry Randolph; Tays; Kellie McCormick; Brad Whittaker; Tommy Walker; Rody Blevins, VEC President/CEO; and Amber Miller.

Announcing: Links for downloading SmartHub to your mobile device now available directly from the VEC homepage!

Download the FREE SmartHub mobile app NOW and get:

- Instant access to outage information
- Hour-by-hour usage history
- Bill pay options . . . and **MORE!**



www.vec.org



EPA's Clean Power Plan Equals High Costs for VEC Members

By Rody Blevins, VEC President/CEO



*Rody Blevins
President/CEO
Volunteer Energy
Cooperative*

In 2014, EPA proposed a strategy to limit carbon dioxide emissions in a nationwide effort toward environmental clean-up. Dubbed the Clean Power Plan, the proposal is to cut carbon emissions by 32 percent from 2005 levels in just 15 years. It is an aggressive plan that has already resulted in the closing of coal-fired electric generation plants all across the nation and, especially, here in the Tennessee Valley. The deadline is September 2016 for states to submit their strategies to meet the goals of the Clean Power Plan.

Let me say at the outset that neither Volunteer Energy Cooperative nor the electric power industry is opposed to a cleaner environment. The power industry has been a leader in developing technologies to reduce emissions and operate cleaner. We support environmental stewardship and put that support in practice every day. No one wants to breathe dirty air. We want to leave the world a cleaner place for our children.

Our view is that the Clean Power Plan is too aggressive and will lead to markedly higher rural electric rates. Some rural residents are already barely able to afford the basics. The Plan will put an added financial strain on these customers that is unnecessary and unavoidable. We are advocating a systematic move toward a cleaner environment by way of common-sense, logical steps that do not adversely affect our rural customers.

The Plan's baseline for improvement is the year 2005. This negates the strides and environmental investments that we have made in the last ten years (emissions scrubbers, completion of the Watts Bar nuclear facility, addition of cleaner fuel sources, etc.). The Plan also provides little credit for power generated from hydroelectric sources (dams) such as we enjoy in the Tennessee Valley. We feel this plan is aimed squarely at TVA distributors and is unnecessarily punitive to our customers.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, of which Volunteer Energy Cooperative is a member, is challenging the Clean Power Plan in federal court, citing the Environmental Protection Agency rule's potential to shutter coal-based generation at a high financial cost to co-ops and their members.

According to Kirk Johnson, NRECA's senior vice president for government relations, "The final Clean Power Plan exceeds EPA's legal authorities and will have a significant negative impact on consumer-owners of not-for-profit co-ops across the nation. We are asking the court to put the brakes on this rule and prevent this incredible overreach from being implemented."

"The Clean Power Plan is costly and risky," said Johnson "It will force electricity price hikes on our nation's most vulnerable citizens—those who can least afford to pay more each month—and jeopardize the reliable power supply on which the American economy depends."

Please join us as we fight for affordable, reliable power and common sense solutions. Contact your congressman and let him or her know that you support electric cooperatives in this effort. Or you can visit www.takeaction.theelectric.org to submit a comment.



The VECustomers Share program funded \$29,700 in community service grants in December. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, more than \$5.5 million in grants has been awarded. The deadline for grant applications is the last working day of each month. For additional information, contact the office of Marketing and Economic Development, at 423-334-7051. Applications are also available online, at www.vec.org.



Rachel Evans and Savannah Dunn of the Alvin C. York Institute Junior ROTC accepts a grant check from Jim Taylor, VECustomers Share board member. Also pictured is York Superintendent Phil Brannon.

Organizations receiving grants in December

HonorAir Knoxville Inc.	\$5,000	McDonald Community Center	\$750
The Art Circle Public Library Foundation	\$2,500	Bradley High School Wrestling Booster	
Fentress County Literacy Council	\$1,500	Club Kids Programs	\$750
Clearwater Volunteer Fire Department	\$1,500	Stone Elementary Jr. Beta Club	\$750
Spring City Toys for Children	\$1,500	Cherokee Removal Memorial Park -	
Polk County Alumni Association	\$1,500	Blythe Ferry	\$700
Meigs High School Tennis Team Boosters	\$1,100	Midway High School Band Boosters	\$700
Wilson Elementary School 8th Group Fund	\$1,000	Fairfield Glade Rotary Club	\$700
Helping Hands Mission	\$1,000	Meigs County Historical Society	\$600
Monterey Civitan Club	\$1,000	Habitat for Humanity of Cleveland	\$500
Hamilton County Special Tactics		Midway Hall of Fame	\$500
and Rescue Service	\$1,000	Polk County High School Wildcat Gridiron Club	\$500
Muscular Dystrophy Association	\$900	Roane Choral Society	\$400
Midway Welding Club	\$900	Bay View Arabian Equestrian Team	\$300
Creative Compassion, Inc.	\$850	National Center for Youth Issues	\$250
Children's Advocacy Center		Bradley/Polk Foster & Adoptive	
of Hamilton County	\$800	Care Association	\$250

Don't Let the Winter Electric Bills Catch You By Surprise

By Paige Finnell

Electric bills that arrive in February and March can catch you off guard, since the weather is milder and spring is on the way. Keep in mind that these bills reflect usage for the colder months of January and February and are typically among the highest of the year.

The weather in January and February 2015 saw some very cold temperatures and brought one of the most devastating ice storms the VEC service area has ever experienced. TVA, our supplier of electricity, met a new all-time winter peak demand. During this time heating equipment used record amounts of energy to keep homes warm during one of the coldest periods in recent history. As a result, electric consumers all across the Tennessee Valley saw large increases on their bills in February and March 2015 as a result of this weather.

Because electricity is used before it is billed, the delay between the electricity use and receipt of the bill can be confusing, especially when record-breaking single-digit temperatures experienced 30 days before cause costs to soar. So keep this in mind when viewing the next few month's bills.

VEC offers several tools for customers to help them manage the highs and lows in their electric costs caused by seasonal temperatures.

- **Levelized Billing** is a service that averages the usage for the most recent 12 months and spreads the costs throughout the year. The bill that you pay is based on this rolling average; therefore, your bill will not be exactly the same each month. Typically the bill will only fluctuate about 5% from month to month, usually within \$10. To qualify for Levelized Billing, you need to have lived at your current location for at least one year and have a good payment history with a zero balance due.
- **Pay-My-Way** allows you to pre-pay for the energy you use and eliminates billing surprises. You can schedule your own payments at times to meet the needs of your household budget. Once an initial credit balance of \$100 has been established, you can make a minimum payment of \$40 or more at any time. The credit balance decreases as daily energy use occurs.
- **SmartHub Mobile App** is a free tool that allows you to manage your electric account on your mobile device. It can display your daily electric usage, as well as track the temperature, on an hourly basis. Daily activities directly affect the amount of power that is consumed in a household and being aware of when and how you use electricity is a powerful weapon in the war against high energy costs.
- **eScore** is a program that offers a free energy evaluation to identify ways to make your home more energy efficient as well as rebates for certain improvements that you make to your home. To participate in this valuable program or to learn more about it, click on the eScore logo at the bottom of the VEC home page.

If your bill goes up this winter and the temperature seems mild when the bill arrives, remember that the billed costs reflect electrical usage at least a month ago. And be glad that the cold winter days are a fading memory.

To learn more about these options and/or to sign up, call your local office or go to our website at www.vec.org.

Protect Yourself Against Scammers

It is an unfortunate fact of life that there are unscrupulous individuals in the world that will do their best to separate us from our money. Electric customers have increasingly been targets of scams that involve demands for immediate payment of electric bills, bogus checks, unneeded home repairs, and even identity theft.

The following general rules can help you protect yourself and others from fraud:

- If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. "Something for nothing" schemes entrap thousands of people each year. A little common sense goes a long way in avoiding this type of scam.
- If in doubt, stop. Give credit to what is sometimes referred to as your "gut feeling". If a story seems not quite right to you... stop. You can do some research and confirm that the information you are being provided is correct and complete.
- Fiercely guard your personal information. We cannot repeat this enough. Unless you can confirm that the person is an employee of VEC, do not provide any type of personal information to them.
- Report any suspicious activity to your local police. If law enforcement is made aware of a potential problem, they are better able to take action or inform others regarding a potential scam.
- Call VEC if you have questions or concerns. We are happy to talk to you and provide information.

VEC **does not** use social media (i.e. Craigslist, etc.) to advertise employment opportunities, items for sale or home improvement services.

VEC **does not** contact customers by phone and demand an immediate payment for electric service.

VEC **does not** enter the homes of our customers unless a specific request has been made by the customer in advance (such as a request for an energy evaluation).

VEC employees and contractors **always** carry proper identification.

Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)

Residential & Outdoor Lighting Fuel Cost Adjustment

Effective January 1, 2016

2.049¢

For the most current FCA information, visit www.vec.org



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