

## Cooperative's Are Still Relevant for Today's Challenges

Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) members have embraced the cooperative business model: "... an autonomous voluntary association of people who unite to meet common needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise" for more than 81 years.

Being a member of a cooperative – instead of just a customer – has a number of important benefits. One of the most important benefits is that there are no outside owners or investors who demand a profit. For more than 81 years VEC has operated as a not-for-profit business. Because of that fact, VEC members pay an average of 2.89 cents less per kilowatt-hour than the national average.

Another key advantage is that VEC – like most cooperatives – is democratically controlled. The policies, procedures, and rates that VEC adopts are controlled by a board of directors who are elected by our members. VEC is an all-inclusive cooperative. It doesn't matter whether our members are rich or poor; it doesn't matter what race or religion our members belong to; age, disability and political affiliation doesn't matter either. Everyone has an equal say and an equal share in their cooperative.

And since VEC is a cooperative that is owned and operated by the members of the communities we serve, we have a special attachment to these communities. Around the world people are struggling through uncertain economic times and it is understandable that they are looking to the cooperative business model as a source of some relief. Eighty-one years ago when VEC was formed, our nation and this region were suffering through the Great Depression. One of the main goals in forming VEC was to help provide economic opportunities for communities. Affordable power not only helps residents meet their own energy needs, it helps attract industry and makes operating smaller businesses more affordable.

VEC also strives to serve communities by offering educational opportunities to young people through scholarships and leadership development programs. It all goes hand-in-hand with being a concerned member of our communities.

Because VEC and most cooperatives are owned by members, a significant portion of their income stays local, supporting other businesses and generating tax revenues for the community.



Rody Blevins  
President/CEO  
Volunteer Energy  
Cooperative

## 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 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.

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 or you can go to VEC.org and download the application and mail it in. Our trained technician will install a special meter base surge protector behind your electric meter to help capture electrical surges and send them to 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 or go to [www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org).

## Don't Let 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.

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 every 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.
- **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.
- **SmarterHub 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.



So 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](http://www.vec.org).





The VECustomers Share program funded \$35,000 in community service grants in December. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, more than \$5.8 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](http://www.vec.org).

### Organizations receiving grants in November



L-R: David Milen - VEC Polk County Board Member, Richard Taylor - Polk County EMS, Hoyt Firestone - County Executive, Bill Womac - VECustomers Share Board Member, and David Murphy - Vice President of Marketing and Economic Development VEC.



L-R: Stephanie Linkous - Executive Director United Way McMinn-Meigs, John Gentry - County Mayor, Rody Blevins - President/CEO Volunteer Energy Cooperative, Erbin Baumgardner - VECustomers Shares Board Member, and Mike Frazier - VEC Board Member McMinn County.

Because of the extreme devastation in McMinn County and Polk County, Tennessee, as a result of the tornadoes on 11/30/2016, the VECustomer Shares Board voted to dedicate all funding in December to Storm Recovery. VECustomer Shares awarded \$17,500 to McMinn County and \$17,500 to Polk County Recovery efforts.



Tornado Devastation in Polk and McMinn Counties

## Safety Checklist: Check the Items on This List Created by the National Electrical Safety Foundation



- Outlets:** Check for outlets that have loose-fitting plugs, which can overheat and lead to fire. Replace any broken or missing wall plates. Make sure there are safety covers on all unused outlets that are accessible to children.
- Cords:** Make sure cords are in good conditions- not frayed or cracked. Make sure they are placed out of traffic areas. Cords should never be nailed or stapled to the wall, baseboard, or to another object. Do not place cords under carpets or rugs or rest any furniture on them.
- Extension Cords:** Check to see that cords are not overloaded. Additionally, extension cords should only be used on a temporary basis; they are not intended as permanent household wiring. Make sure extension cords have safety closures to help prevent young children from shock hazards and mouth burn injuries.
- Plugs:** Make sure your plugs fit your outlets. Never remove the ground pin (the third prong) to make a three-prong fit a two-conductor outlet; this could lead to an electrical shock. NEVER FORCE A PLUG INTO AN OUTLET IF IT DOESN'T FIT. Plugs should fit securely into outlets. Avoid overloading outlets with too many appliances.
- Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs):** GFCIs can help prevent electrocution. They should be used in any area where water and electricity may come into contact. When a GFCI senses current leakage in an electrical circuit, it assumes a ground fault has occurred. It then interrupts power fast enough to help prevent serious injury from electrical shock. Test GFCIs regularly according to the manufacturer's instructions to make sure they are working properly.
- Light Bulbs:** Check the wattage of all bulbs in light fixtures to make sure they are the correct wattage for the size of the fixture. Replace bulbs that have higher wattage than recommended; if you don't know the correct wattage, check with the manufacturer of the fixture. Make sure bulbs are screwed in securely; loose bulbs may overheat.
- Circuit Breakers/Fuses:** Circuit Breakers and fuses should be the correct size current rating for their circuit. If you do not know the correct size, have an electrician identify and label the size to be used. Always replace a fuse with the same size fuse.
- Appliances:** If an appliance repeatedly blows a fuse, trips a circuit breaker, or if it has given you a shock, unplug it and have it repaired or replaced.
- Entertainment/Computer Equipment:** Check to see that the equipment is in good condition and working properly; look for cracks or damage in wiring, plugs, and connectors. Use a surge protector bearing the seal of a nationally recognized certification agency.
- Lightning:** During an electrical storm, do not use appliances (i.e., hairdryers, toasters and radios) or landline telephones (except in an emergency); do not take a bath or shower; keep batteries on hand for flashlights and radios in case of a power outage; and use surge protectors on electronic devices and appliances.
- Space Heaters:** Space heaters are meant to supply supplemental heat. Keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from any combustible materials such as bedding, clothing, draperies, furniture and rugs. Don't use in rooms where children are unsupervised and remember to turn off and unplug when not in use.

## 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 February 1, 2017

**2.322¢**

For the most current FCA information,  
visit [www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org)

Volunteer Energy Cooperative is an Equal Opportunity provider and employer.

