

# Don't Let THUNDERSTORMS Come As A Shock To You

As temperatures start rising, so do the chances of thunderstorms. And when thunderstorms hit, lightning can be a serious threat to personal safety. It can also cause power outages and create serious problems for your electronic equipment and electric appliances.

The best atmospheric scientists in the world cannot determine exactly when or where lightning will strike, but there is one thing we can be certain of – it will strike. And when it comes to thunderstorms and lightning, the best defense is to be prepared.

Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) offers Midland weather radios at all its customer service centers. The Midland weather radios offered by VEC can be set to monitor several different counties and provide an alert when threatening weather is approaching. They have a battery backup and also operate on your regular household current.

Lightning, high winds and heavy rains can also cause electrical spikes. You can also protect your home's appliances and your sensitive electronic equipment by signing up for VEC's Surge Sentry program. With Surge Sentry's warranty-backed protection, you will have one less thing to worry about during threatening weather.

For more information on the Surge Sentry program or weather radios you can contact your local VEC Customer Service Center or visit [www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org).

Lightning has been known to strike more than 10 miles from the storm in an area of clear sky above. So just looking up at the sky may not provide a true indication of whether or not a threat exists. It's also important to prepare a thunderstorm/power outage kit that includes:

- Canned/packaged food
- A manual can opener
- Fresh water (bottled)
- Blankets
- Battery-operated radio
- Flashlight with fresh batteries
- Extra batteries

It's also important to prepare now by making sure VEC has your correct phone number on file. This insures an outage at your home can be restored in the most efficient way.

During a thunderstorm:

- Do not take a shower or bath. Water and copper tubing are excellent conductors of electricity.
- Stay away from windows. A central location in the house in an area away from doors and windows is the safest.
- If your power goes out, immediately report it to VEC and then avoid using the phone. (Phone lines may also conduct electricity.)
- Never touch downed power lines. Dial 911 or VEC immediately to ensure that the line is turned off so repairs can be made.

During a power outage:

- Report the outage immediately to VEC.
- Unplug major appliances to prevent a system overload when power is restored. Gradually plug in and turn on appliances after power is restored.
- Avoid opening your refrigerator and/or freezer. The appliance when keep food fresher longer if the door is kept shut.
- Use battery powered flashlights rather than candles whenever possible to avoid the threat of fire.

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

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Powerlines is produced by the Volunteer Energy Cooperative's Marketing & Economic Development Department as a service to customers. Comments and suggestions can be e-mailed to [vec@vec.org](mailto:vec@vec.org) or mailed to VEC Marketing & Economic Development Department, P.O. Box 277, Decatur, TN 37322.

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# POWERLINES

Newsletter of Volunteer Energy Cooperative

## STRONG LEADERSHIP AND COOPERATION FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEBATE

As we enter the last few months before major national elections, we are seeing increased attention toward issues on the agendas of both parties. Climate change is one of these issues. The focus now seems to be not so much on whether climate change is a problem, but what to do about it. The debate continues how to legislate the reduction in greenhouse gases.



The simple fact is that there is no "silver bullet" that will resolve the issues of rising energy costs, rising demand, reduction in supply, and environmental stewardship. The solution will depend on a mix of technology solutions, a diverse fuel mix, renewable energy, nuclear generation, and efficiency efforts. It will require innovative thinking and incentives for new thinking. There will be no room for grandstanding; the decisions must be well thought out and the goals achievable.

Experts tell us that in the next 10 to 15 years, the nationwide power generating capacity will need to grow by 50 percent just to meet projected growth in areas served by electric cooperatives. Balancing the need for power with the responsibility to the world we live in is a daunting task.

The Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), an organization of scientists and electrical engineers, says that to achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gas emission reductions by 2030, we will need to make use of a mixture of strategies: energy efficiencies, renewable energy, nuclear power, new coal technology, carbon capture technology, plug-in hybrid vehicles, and distributed generation.

There is no quick-fix; this will be a long-term effort. The scope of the issue is huge and will involve an effort larger than the one required in the 1960's to send a man to the moon. Its resolution will require strong governmental leadership, vision, and bipartisan cooperation. The VEC Board and I will work to ensure that customers of electric cooperatives like you have a voice in the process and a seat at the table to develop a sound, workable, affordable, and environmentally sound strategy. We are committed to serve you and to ensure that safe, reliable electric power is available and affordable now and in the future.

## Spring City 5th Graders Get a Taste of the Future

Tyler Keel was hoping to get a little shopping done during his lunch break, but the line at the bank was too long. He wound up depositing his check and cutting his break short. He just headed

back to work at Clayton Investments. That's a common event, right? Except Tyler is a fifth grader at Spring City Elementary School.

Tyler and two busloads of his fellow Spring City Elementary School fifth graders spent a cold winter's day in February, working their jobs, balancing their checkbooks, and shopping till they dropped at Junior Achievements real world simulator – BizTown on the campus of Anderson County High School. Students were assigned jobs ranging from retail sales professionals, accountants, business managers, and medical professionals to TV and newspaper reporters, and radio personalities. They even elected a mayor. They spent the day rushing to the bank to deposit their paychecks, shopping, and running their own businesses. JA BizTown is a mini-town complete with a city hall, a town square, and 18 public and private businesses.

Organizers say JA BizTown vividly illustrates the connection of hard work and tangible success while allowing students to gain a firsthand understanding of their responsibilities as employees, citizens, and consumers in a free-market economy.

Students and volunteers from Spring City who attended said the event was fast paced, fun, and a real eye-opener. "I really liked getting an office and learning about working and money," Tyler Keel said. He worked as an investment advisor at Clayton Investments and was nominated for Employee of the Day by his boss.

Tyler's grandmother, Jackie Keel was an event volunteer. She liked the healthy dose of reality. "I think this is great," Keel said. "I think they do get some career ideas, but they also get a real good look at what it takes to hold a job." Vance Winstead was an adult volunteer assistant at BizTown's radio station. He kept the DJ's busy playing music, running ads, doing interviews, making announcements and generally fighting against radio's cardinal sin – dead air. He said the fifth graders came through with flying colors. "I've found that when I put them under pressure, and refused to bail them out – they really rise to the occasion," Winstead said. "I think this is great. I'd like to see it as a mandatory activity."

One of Winstead's DJ's, David Loden (a.k.a. "Boom Boom Cannon") said the pace was tough to keep up with, but he was enjoying himself. "I am a lot more interested in a career in radio now," he said. "It's not easy to keep up with everything, but it's a lot of fun."

Karen Hilleary, who was also an adult volunteer, said the event was well worth all the time and effort that went into providing the opportunity for the fifth graders.

"The students are getting first-hand knowledge of business and personal finance," she said. "I think they are also building confidence and character. You see the look of being overwhelmed on their faces when they are confronted with a dilemma. Then you see that look turn into confidence and a sense of achievement when they get the job done."

A Volunteer Energy Cooperative customers helped the students with a VECustomers Share grant that went toward transportation expenses. VEC's Coordinator of Public Relations and Communications Robert McCarty was also one of the adult volunteers.

"This is a terrific activity," McCarty said. "I am very impressed with this program. The preparation all the teachers obviously gave to all their students was great and I'm especially impressed with the students themselves. They took their jobs seriously and they worked very hard. I'm sure they had a lot of fun too, but they certainly earned their paychecks today."





# VEC Customers Share

## VEC Customers Share NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

By allowing their electric bills to be rounded up to the next dollar Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) customers funded \$33,700 in community service grants in January. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, more than \$2.5 million in grants has been awarded. The deadline for grant applications is the last 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 January include: Monterey Lions Club - \$2,500; The Food Bank Support Group, Allardt, - \$2,184; New Beginnings Garden Club, Decatur - \$2,000; The Art Guild of Fairfield Glade - \$2,000; Rhea County Imagination Library - \$2,000; The Manna From Heaven Food Pantry, Crossville - \$2,000; The Caring Place, Cleveland - \$1,700; Pickett County High School Softball Booster Club - \$1,621; Stone Memorial High School Cheerleading Boosters, Crossville - \$1,500; Teens Against Drugs Activity Center, Crossville - \$1,500; Benton Elementary School PTO - \$1,200; Decatur Traveling Tigers - \$1,000; Advent Home Youth Services, Inc., Calhoun - \$1,000; Midway Youth League - \$1,000; Midway Quarterback Club - \$1,000; York Agricultural Institute Cheerleading Boosters - \$1,000; New Hope Pregnancy Care Center, Cleveland - \$1,000; Clearwater Volunteer Fire Department - \$1,000; Helping Hands, Crossville - \$1,000; Meigs South Elementary School PTO - \$1,000; The Lighthouse Counseling & Life Skills Center, Hamilton County - \$1,000; Hopewell Elementary School PTO, Cleveland - \$1,000; Meigs County Relay for Life - \$750; Pickett County High School English I & II Club - \$745; Cleveland/Bradley County Keep America Beautiful - \$500; and FOP Rock City Lodge #22 - \$500.



VEC Customers Share Board Member Doug Ford, center, presents a grant check in the amount of \$1,000 to Dr. Blondel Senior, left, and Elsie Owens of Advent Home Youth Services of Calhoun.

## VEC Moving Ahead With Automated Meter Reading

In May of 2006, Volunteer Energy Cooperative kicked off an aggressive five-year, \$9.2 million project to automate VEC's meter reading functions. In February of 2008 nearly one-third of VEC's 108,000 customers are having their meters read through the Automated Meter Reading (AMR) system.

The early reviews of the new AMR system are good.

"Volunteer Energy Cooperative is committed to providing the most reliable service possible and providing our customers with this service at the most affordable costs possible," said VEC President/CEO Rody Blevins. "The AMR program is helping us to meet both of those goals."

One of the main functions of the AMR system is to efficiently and accurately gather billing information. Eliminating opportunities for errors in the meter reading and data entry aspects of billing is an important benefit of the AMR system. But the AMR system will help VEC manage load demands better and also help speed up the power restoration process in the event of an outage.

The customers meter feeds information to the AMR system daily. If that information from a customer's meter stops, there is either some equipment malfunction or the customer is out of power.

For example, suppose a tree limb brushes up against a distribution line which causes a fuse to blow on the line. With conventional methods, the outage is first identified only when a customer calls to notify VEC that their power has gone out. If this customer is at the end of the feeder, VEC crews would be forced to check all the fuses on the feeder and then check the section down line from the fuse to find the cause of the outage.

With VEC's AMR system tied into the cooperative's Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system, managers can quickly identify affected customers and view all the equipment on the feeder. That allows crews to quickly pinpoint the source of the trouble and restore power much more quickly.

The new AMR meters that are being installed transmit information through powerlines back to the substation. From there, the information is transmitted by fiber optics or wireless transmission to VEC offices. Currently VEC has 10 substations equipped with AMR capabilities and the Fredonia Substation in Cumberland County is scheduled to go online soon.

In the near future customers in the Spring City area are scheduled to be switched to AMR. When crews switch out older meters with the new AMR meters, customers experience a very short power outage. VEC's Automated Voice Response telephone system calls customers in advance, when VEC has their correct phone number on file, to let them know when to expect the brief outage.



Morris Swafford, left, and Courtney Gregory install Automated Meter Reading (AMR) equipment at the home of a VEC customer.

The typical American home contains many thousands of dollars worth of electronics and devices. And thunderstorm season is just around the corner.

That's why now is the time to consider affordable surge protection products backed by a solid warranty. Volunteer Energy Cooperative's Surge Sentry products are also backed by a local company with 70 years experience and a real commitment to customer satisfaction.

Surges in electricity can happen at any time, but they are more prevalent during stormy weather. Lightning strikes and tree limbs falling on electric lines are two of the most common causes. They can cause sudden, powerful increases in voltage. They may last only a millisecond, but they can damage or destroy household appliances and



The Surge Sentry starter kit is your first step toward protecting your electronic appliances against electrical spikes.

electronic equipment. Plug-in suppressors supply the second line of defense. These come in a variety of sizes and configurations. The Surge Sentry starter kit contains plugs and ports for plugging in a variety of appliances and electronic equipment. Plug-in suppressors are available with ports for power outlets, coaxial connections, and telephone connections.

The final line of defense is having your home properly grounded. When VEC technicians install Surge Sentry equipment, they check to make sure the home is properly grounded. The purpose of grounding the home is to prevent shocks, fires, damage to appliances and electronic equipment, and to minimize damage from lightning.

When all three of these lines of defense are in place, one more line of defense is automatically installed. That defense is the warranties that will repair or replace your appliances and/or electronic equipment. The warranties vary depending on which Surge Sentry products are in place, so check with a customer service representative at your local VEC customer service center for all the details or visit [www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org).

## Surge Sentry Helps Provide Peace of Mind

## TVA Board Approves Rate Increase

The TVA Board of Directors has approved a 7-percent increase in firm wholesale electric rates that will take effect April 1. The board said the increase is necessary to fund new power generation facilities and energy efficiency initiatives to meet the growing power demand in the Tennessee Valley. The rate increase will provide an estimated \$300 million in additional revenue during the 2008 fiscal year. "We certainly recognize the financial challenges that consumers face as we make a recommendation to the board on the need to increase rates," TVA President and CEO Tom Kilgore said. "TVA is taking steps to reduce its non-fuel operating and maintenance costs by more

than \$400 million over the next three years. However, additional revenue is needed for long-term investments to keep the power system reliable and lessen our dependence on volatile energy markets. That will help us keep electricity reliable and affordable in years to come." As this issue of *Powerlines* goes to press, Volunteer Energy Cooperative President/CEO Rody Blevins said it is too soon to calculate exactly what the TVA rate increase will mean for Volunteer Energy Cooperative customers. More information on VEC's new rates will be provided in next month's *Powerlines*.