The energy industry is undergoing rapid change, and technology is paving the way for innovation in the way energy is used, produced, stored and shared. Consumers are interested in more green energy alternatives while smart homes and apps make managing energy use and paying your electric bill more convenient than ever.

While the changing energy market has created more options for consumers, it has also resulted in more utility scams and misleading information surrounding solar installations in particular. That’s because of two factors.

Utility scams are common because of the vast number of utilities that exist, and consumers are understandably anxious with the threat of disruption to their electric, heating or water service. Second, new products and services in the energy industry provide an opening for scammers and pop-up companies to provide misleading information or shoddy products and services.

Avoid Phone Scams

A common phone scam typically begins with a phone number that appears to be from a valid utility company. The scammer will claim you have a past due account and threaten to disconnect service or take legal action. The scammer will typically demand that you use a prepaid debit card or money order, often within a very short, urgent time frame to pay the “past due” amount.

You can combat this scam by being aware of the status of your account. Never give your banking or personal information over the phone to someone you did not call. If you have a question or concern about your energy bill, call us directly. Do not use the phone number given by the scammer.

Avoid Solar Scams

Another scam we see from time to time is connected to rooftop solar. Homeowners with rooftop solar may receive a sales call offering an accessory, upgrade or extended warranty to their solar array. The calls could be from crooks claiming to represent a solar company, promising to replace faulty or broken parts or improve efficiency. Again, if you are not expecting the call, don’t be fooled. These calls

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**UPDATE YOUR PHONE NUMBER TODAY**

When you update your phone number(s) you will become eligible for a prize drawing.

You can update your information by calling your service center, using SmartHub, or by logging into your account at vec.org. You can also use the form on the back of your bill.

**Tennessee Valley Authority**

Residential & Outdoor Lighting
Fuel Cost Adjustment
Effective May 1, 2020

1.533¢

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

Volunteer Energy Cooperative is an Equal Opportunity provider and employer.

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**Planting the Right Trees in the Right Place**

In this part of Tennessee, we are blessed with an abundance and variety of trees. It is one of the many things that make South East Tennessee a beautiful place to live. But it can also be quite a challenge for Volunteer Energy Cooperative in meeting our responsibility to deliver a reliable flow of power to 119,000 customers in all or part of 17 counties.

Summer storms create saturated soil, which can cause trees to fall. Arcing and flashovers between power lines and nearby branches – branches that may not even be coming into contact with power lines – can cause serious safety risks. For those reasons, VEC has an aggressive right-of-way clearing program to reduce power outages and to minimize safety risks.

A solution preventing a tree from extensive trimming or removal is to plant the right tree in the right place. The University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension office prepared the following guidelines for power line-friendly tree planting:

- Small trees – 30 feet or less in height – should be planted at least 10 feet from buildings and 20 to 25 feet away from power lines.
- Medium trees – 30 to 70 feet in height – should be planted at least 15 feet from buildings and 30 to 35 feet from power lines.
- Large trees – those reaching 70 feet or more in height – should be planted at least 25 feet from buildings and 40 to 45 feet from power lines.
- No tree trunk, no matter how small the tree, should be within 10 feet of a utility pole.

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**Smart Management, Smart Life. SMARTHUB.**

SIGN UP TODAY AT WWW.VEC.ORG

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**Your Trusted Energy Advisor**

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(continued on page 3)

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**Rody Blevins**

President/CEO
Volunteer Energy Cooperative
As I put together this month’s powerlines, America and the world are in the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been given a Stay at Home order from Governor Bill Lee, and the daily news is full of heartbreaking statistics. Many families in our communities have lost jobs or a severe reduction in income. Taking into consideration current events, VECustomers Share Board Members decided to give the money collected to food banks.

VECustomers Shares is a grant program funded through the rounding up of member’s bills to the nearest dollar. The most an individual member would pay within a year is $11.88. Our members usually average $5.50 each yearly.

In return for the rounded up change from our members, we contribute to organizations across our 17 county service area. Each month the VECustomers Share Board meets and distributes the funds collected in the previous month. A board member represents every service area. In March, VECustomers Share Grants totaled $26,550. Organized in 2001, qualifying organizations have received over 6.9 million.

Organizations receiving grants in March

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland Good Samaritans</td>
<td>$2,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Baptist Church of Spring City</td>
<td>$2,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Pantry</td>
<td>$2,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calhoun Charleston Food Pantry</td>
<td>$2,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peakland Baptist Church Outreach Street</td>
<td>$2,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry/Missions Food Pantry</td>
<td>$2,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are Polk</td>
<td>$2,950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the organizations receiving funds this month is Cumberland Good Samaritans. They are a non-profit with a mission to address the unmet needs of people in crisis in Cumberland County. Cumberland Good Samaritans have been serving Cumberland County for 35 years. During the COVID-19 crisis, they closed their store but are staffing a skeleton crew that is working under the direction of the Emergency Management, providing food relief and crisis intervention. They are working the VOAD (Volunteers Assisting in Disasters) hotline and responding to needs as directed.

VECustomers Share Board Members decided to give the money collected to food banks.

**Safety Starts With You**

**Tips for spotting potential electrical hazards in your home**

Summer is just a few weeks away and here at Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC), we think it’s a great time to look around your home and check for potential safety hazards.

Remember, every electrical device has a purpose and a service life span. While we can extend their operations with maintenance and care, none of them are designed to last or work forever. When electricity is involved, failures can present electrical hazards that might be avoided with periodic inspections.

**Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters**

Outdoor outlets or those in potentially damp locations in a kitchen, bathroom or laundry room often include GFCI features. The average GFCI outlet is designed to last about 10 years, but in areas prone to electrical storms or power surges, they can wear out in five years or less. Check them frequently by pressing the red test button. Make sure you hit the black reset button when you are done. Contact a licensed electrician to replace any failing GFCI outlets.

**Loose or Damaged Outlets or Switches**

Unstable electrical outlets or wall switches with signs of heat damage or discoloration can offer early warnings of potential shock or electrical fire hazards. Loose connections can allow electrical current arcing. If you see these warning signs, it may be time to contact an electrician.

**Surge Protectors**

Power strips with surge protectors can help safeguard expensive equipment like televisions, home entertainment systems and computer components from power spikes.

**Extension Cords**

If you use extension cords regularly to connect devices and equipment to your wall outlets, you may live in an underwired home. Remember, extension cords are designed for temporary, occasional, or periodic use. If an extension cord gets noticeably warm when in use, it could be undersized for the intended purpose. If it shows any signs of frayed, cracked, or heat-damaged insulation, it should be replaced. And always make sure that extension cords used in outdoor or potentially damp locations are rated for exterior use.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, approximately 51,000 electrical fires are reported each year in the United States, causing more than $1.3 billion in annual property damage.

Electricity is a necessity for modern living, and VEC is committed to providing safe, reliable, and affordable power to all of our members. We hope you’ll keep these electrical safety tips in mind so that you can note any potential hazards before damage occurs.