

Membership MATTERS



Energy Budget Tools

Blue Ridge Electric offers the following to help you manage your electricity usage and costs:

Be Energy Efficient — An energy efficient home will help you reduce energy usage and contain energy costs. Take simple steps to target the major household energy users: set thermostats to the lowest comfortable level in winter (68 degrees is suggested) or highest in summer (76 to 78 degrees), reduce hot water use by installing low-flow shower heads, and replace traditional light bulbs with compact fluorescent lights (CFLs). Find more ways to save by taking the online energy audit at TogetherWeSave.com. or call our local office for an Energy Savers booklet.

Use Budget Billing — Combined with bank draft, this payment plan makes budgeting and paying your electric bill easier. Based on your previous usage, we schedule equal payments for 11 months and then even up your account on the twelfth month.

Additional Options — If you live in Caldwell or Alleghany counties, FlexPay is now an option. This “pay as you go” plan allows you to purchase your electricity in the amounts you choose, when you want: daily, weekly or monthly. FlexPay is coming later this year to Ashe and Watauga counties.

Helping Members — The cooperative offers the following tips to members needing assistance paying their bill:

- Call us to discuss an individual installment plan as soon as you get your bill.
- Payment arrangements can extend the payment due date. At \$10 each, it's far less than a \$40 delinquent fee.
- Call us before your account becomes subject to disconnection. By that time, no payment has been made for two months.
- Blue Ridge members support Operation Round Up® to provide crisis heating assistance to those who qualify and apply at their local social services agency. To help as many people as possible, funds will be made available up to \$150 per member on an annual basis.

THE *Perspective*

Providing Good Value

One of the greatest challenges for Blue Ridge is keeping electricity affordable for our members and ensuring that you feel electricity is a good value. We serve a challenging terrain with tough weather as was evidenced with the Christmas Day ice storm.

Other cost pressure factors include the battle in Washington concerning climate change and carbon emissions, and the ongoing market cost pressures on electric generation fuels such as coal, gas, and uranium. Added to this is the fact that renewable resources, that we are required to purchase under the North Carolina Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Portfolio Standard, are more expensive than traditional resources.

When you put all of this together, there is a significant upward price pressure on electric rates today and into the foreseeable future. These cost challenges are the reason we found it necessary to implement a rate increase of 3.46 percent on bills rendered after March 4; however, I want to share some ways we are working to maintain good value for you.

- At their January meeting, the Board of Directors agreed to provide a one time, one month rate reduction for February bills. Through this action, members' bills for last month were reduced, on average, by about nine percent. This helped to reduce your costs from the extreme cold weather and higher electric usage experienced during January and February. This equated to bill reductions for all members combined totaling almost \$1 million.
- The Board of Directors also voted for the cooperative to absorb \$1 million in wholesale power costs from last year. Through this action, the Board reduced 2009 operating margins and eliminated the need to bill members for this cost in 2010.
- The Board agreed to retire \$2 million through capital credits refunds in May 2010.
- Cooperative staff worked diligently with State officials, including Governor Beverly Perdue, to ensure a disaster declaration was made following the Christmas Day ice storm. This declaration and the resulting FEMA reimbursement will save members over \$2.5 million in storm related expenses.



We will continue to seek ways to provide even better value to our members through reductions in our operating costs, power costs, and producing strong net income from our subsidiary companies, Blue Ridge Energies and RidgeLink. The challenges outside of our control are significant. That's why we are working hard to do everything we can to provide value through the decisions over which we have some control and influence.

An Editorial by
Chief Executive Officer Doug Johnson



Energy Efficiency Tools at Your Fingertips

Most homeowners would be surprised to know how much energy their home uses. At Blue Ridge Electric, we have ideas for hundreds of things you can do to increase energy efficiency.

Go to BlueRidgeEMC.com and click on "Energy Tips" for more information. While you're there, check out the  "GreenSmart" tab where you'll find an online store with everything you need to be more energy efficient. You'll also receive a 20 percent discount at checkout just because you're a member of Blue Ridge Electric.

Finally, view "how to" videos at TogetherWeSave.com or take an online audit to show you what investments will save you the most on your energy costs.

There's something all of us can do to help. We're all in this together. Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corporation - ***Always looking out for you.***

More News

Nominating Committee to Be Announced

Members of Blue Ridge Electric have the opportunity each year to elect directors from the membership during the Annual Membership Meeting, which is held annually on the second Saturday of June. As part of that process, a Nominating Committee made up of 12 cooperative members is appointed by the Board of Directors and charged with recommending a slate of qualified candidates to present to the membership to fill available Board seats.

The names of members of the Nominating Committee will be posted in district offices and on the Blue Ridge Electric web site the day following the Board's regularly scheduled meeting on February 25.

Members of Blue Ridge Electric who are interested in running for one of four available Board seats this year should contact a member of the Nominating Committee before March 25 when they will conduct the nomination process and present their list of nominees to the Board of Directors. Please note that nominees must meet the minimum director qualifications listed in the cooperative's bylaws which can be obtained at any Blue Ridge Electric office or at BlueRidgeEMC.com.

Board nominees are determined through a Nominating Committee process that includes a review of incumbent candidates and consideration of qualified new candidates, or the nomination by petition process. The nomination by petition process requires a petition to be signed by 15 or more members who are in good standing with the cooperative. The petition must be submitted on or before the first business day in April which falls on Thursday, April 1, 2010.

A slate of qualified Board candidates is submitted by the Nominating Committee or the nomination by petition processes. This election process by the membership helps ensure strong leadership of the cooperative with a diverse group of Board members reflecting skills including business experience, financial expertise, prior board experience, strategic planning, leadership abilities, and alignment with cooperative culture and values.



Never Attach Anything to Power Poles

Putting signs, deer stands, or other items on utility poles creates serious safety hazards. Staples, nails, and tacks used to hang signs — as well as the signs themselves — pose dangers to line technicians who must climb poles when either restoring power following storms or while performing routine maintenance to ensure system reliability.

Posters or other objects (birdhouses, balloons, flags, and even basketball nets) can create dangerous obstacles. Also, the nails and tacks left behind from signs can snag utility workers' boots or puncture safety clothing, making line technicians vulnerable to slipping or even electrocution.

Blue Ridge Electric recommends contacting local zoning officers to inquire about where signage can be posted legally and safely.

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Members Only NEWS For Members of Blue Ridge Electric



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Caldwell (828) 754-9071

Watauga (828) 264-8894

Ashe (336) 246-7138

Alleghany (336) 372-4646

Wilkes (800) 451-5474

PowerLine® (800) 448-2383

(PowerLine® is an automated account information and outage reporting system.)

Toll Free 1 (800) 451-5474
(for members outside the service area)

To report an outage at any time,
call one of the numbers listed above.

OFFICE HOURS

8:30 am - 5:00 pm, Monday - Friday

Night deposit available.

Visit us on the Web:
www.BlueRidgeEMC.com

Portable Electric Generator Safety

Portable electric generators can offer the added security and comfort of knowing you have a back up source of power if ever needed. However, if generators are not used properly, problems such as carbon monoxide poisoning or electrocution could occur.

Follow these tips to prevent misuse of portable electrical generators:

- Follow manufacturers' directions for installation and operation.
- To prevent electric shock, make sure your generator is properly grounded. The operation manual should provide correct grounding procedures.
- Operate electric generators or other fuel-powered machines outside where deadly carbon monoxide fumes cannot enter the home.
- Use the generator only in a well-ventilated, dry area located away from air intakes to the house. Do not use a generator in an attached garage.
- Do not overload the generator by operating more appliances and equipment than the generator can handle. The operating instructions should have an output rating for the generator.
- Individual appliances should be plugged directly into the receptacle outlet of the generator using appropriately sized extension cords to carry the electric load. Make sure the cords are rated for outdoor use, have a grounded, three-pronged plug, and are in good condition.
- Do not run extension cords under rugs.
- Never connect portable generators directly to your home's wiring. The reverse flow of electricity can electrocute an unsuspecting utility worker.
- Never plug a generator into a household outlet.
- Do not refuel a generator while it is running.
- Only store fuel outside of living areas and away from heat sources like water heater pilot lights.
- Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
- Keep children and pets away from generators.

Sources: Consumer Product Safety Commission,
Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service