



WE'RE READY FOR STORM SEASON. ARE YOU?

Now that summer is in full swing, I, like many of you, welcome more opportunities to be outdoors and enjoy the warmer weather. Summertime brings many of my favorite activities like cooking out with family and friends, afternoons on the water, a quiet campfire, and simply slowing down a bit to enjoy life.

But summer months also make conditions right for dangerous storms. We have already had a few storms with strong winds that caused power outages in our service territory. Our crews are ready and standing by to respond should power outages occur in our area.

When major storms knock out power, our line crews take all necessary precautions before they get to work on any downed lines. I would encourage you to also practice safety and preparedness to protect your family during major storms and outages.

When the power first goes off, don't panic! Calmly check to see if your neighbors still have electricity. If they do, the problem could be inside your home.

Check your main fuses or circuit breakers to see if they have blown or been tripped. Replacing a fuse or resetting a circuit breaker may restore your electricity. If your meter is located away from the house, be sure to check the fuses or breakers below the meter. ***If OEC responds to an outage and the trouble is with your electric service, you will be charged for a service call.***

If you determine that the power failure has not been caused by a problem in the home, you can report the outage on the SmartHub app or call OEC at 800-472-8410. Phones are answered 24/7. Have your address, account number, or location number ready when calling and

let us know if you have seen or heard anything that may have caused the outage, such as sparks, loud noises, or trees on the power lines. This will help our field crews find the problem quickly to get your power restored.

Keep away from downed power lines and power poles. Do not cut or clear trees and branches near power lines. Report these hazards to OEC immediately.

If you use a standby generator, be sure it has been installed and wired properly. If improperly installed, a generator could cause dangerous conditions for OEC's employees working to restore the power. Your generator could be damaged when the power is restored if a double throw disconnect is not used and properly

installed.

Thankfully, lengthy outages do not happen on a regular basis. However, that does not mean you should not prepare for them.

Safe Electricity and OEC suggest you:

- Have a storm kit ready that includes flashlights, bottled water, non-perishable food, battery-operated radio, batteries, portable cell phone chargers that are fully charged, hand sanitizer and first-aid supplies.

During a power outage:

- Keep freezers and refrigerators closed to preserve food.
- Disconnect appliances and electronics to avoid damage from electrical surges.
- If safe, go to an alternate location for heat or cooling.
- If weather conditions allow, check on neighbors. This is especially important since cell phone and internet communications may be disrupted and they may be unable to call for help.



Does your health rely on electricity?

Many medical devices use electricity or are battery dependent, including: breathing machines, power wheelchairs, oxygen, and home dialysis equipment. Some equipment is vital to keeping you alive! Read the equipment instructions and talk to the equipment suppliers about your backup power options.

Cellphone

Keep your cellphone charged so that you are able to call for help or be reached by someone else.

Batteries

- If your devices are battery-operated, make sure you have extras on hand.
- Do you periodically check your backup batteries? Unused rechargeable batteries may need charging.
- Portable battery packs will supply hours of back-up energy.

Use the Car

Can your devices be plugged into or recharged through the power outlet in your vehicle? If you plan on using this for your backup power make sure that you keep your vehicle's fuel tank at least half full.

Generator

Maybe you need to invest in a generator and know how to use it safely. There are two types of generators for homeowners to choose from: portable and standby.

Medications

Do you have medications that need to stay in a cool, dry place?

- If the power goes out, a refrigerator should generally hold its temperature for two to four hours, if you are not opening and closing it.
- After four hours, empty the ice from the freezer into a cooler and keep your medication in that cooler. It should be safe in there for a day or two.

OEC deeply cares about the health and safety of our members. We encourage you to do the same and have an emergency plan in place.



RIGHT-OF-WAY CLEARING IMPROVES SERVICE FOR ALL

One of the things I love best about our community is the natural beauty that surrounds us. We are fortunate to have so many trees that offer breathtaking color, shade, and a habitat for all sorts of birds and other wildlife. We know that you appreciate our community for many of the same reasons.

At Oconto Electric Cooperative (OEC), we strive to balance maintaining beautiful surroundings and ensuring reliable power supply by keeping power lines clear in rights-of-way (ROW).

While we recognize and appreciate the beauty of trees, there are three main benefits to ROW clearing in ROW areas. However, before touching on the main reasons, let me explain what a “right-of-way” is and how it may impact you. A right-of-way is the land we use to construct, maintain, replace, or repair underground and overhead power lines. Rights-of-way enable the co-op to provide clearance from trees and other obstructions that could hinder the power line installation, maintenance, or operation. OEC must be able to maintain the power lines above and below the ROW. The overall goal of our vegetation management program is to provide reliable power to our members while maintaining the beauty of our community. Proactive vegetation management benefits co-op members in three tangible ways.

Safety

First and foremost, we care about our members and put their safety and that of our lineworkers above all else. Overgrown vegetation and trees pose a risk to power lines. For example, if trees are touching power lines in our members’ yards, they can pose grave danger to families. If children can access those trees, they can potentially climb into a danger zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a power line to a near-

by conductor like a tree. A proactive approach also diminishes the chances of fallen branches or trees during severe weather events that make it more complicated and dangerous for lineworkers to restore power.

Reliability

One of the biggest benefits of a smart vegetation management program is reliability. Strategic ROW clearing reduces the frequency of downed lines causing power outages. Generally speaking, healthy trees don’t fall on power lines, and clear lines don’t cause problems. Proactive ROW clearing keeps lines clear to promote reliability.

We also use data and the technology to maximize the efficiency of our operation, including our vegetation management plan. The co-op’s entire system is divided into sections and each year the right-of-way of one section is cleared. This allows OEC to clear the right-of-way areas of the entire system every 8-10 years.

Affordability

As you know, OEC is a not-for-profit cooperative, and that means we strive to keep our costs in check in order to keep our rates affordable. This extends to our approach in vegetation management. If trees grow too close to power lines, the potential for line loss and expensive repairs also increases. Effective ROW clearing and other vegetation management efforts keep costs down for everyone.

Our community is a special place. We appreciate the beauty trees afford, but we also know our members depend on us to provide reliable energy. Through vegetation management, we are better able to keep the power lines clear, prepare for future weather events, and secure the reliability of the grid.





Employee Charity

Oconto Electric Cooperative

Oconto Electric Cooperative is committed to the communities we serve. We support local schools, community organizations, and agencies through donations and programs that OEC offers. Many OEC employees are active with local groups and organizations, which enrich the cooperative's relationship with the people and communities we serve.

Our employees are dedicated to co-op principle number seven: commitment to community. Our employees have distributed \$133,000 to local charities and organizations since 2004. Employees organize several fundraising efforts throughout the year with funds being awarded in late fall.

Funds raised in 2021 will be split among four charities this year.

Shawano Area Matthew 25, Inc. (SAM25)

SAM 25 is a 501(c)(3) non-profit group that started in 2013 out of concern for the growing poverty and homelessness in our country and in our community. Their mission is to help those affected by poverty improve their circumstances and become self-sufficient. In fulfillment of this mission SAM25 opened its first program, SAM's House, a seasonal Emergency Homeless Shelter in Shawano that is open from November 1 through April 30 each year.

SAM25 recently expanded to include a larger shelter, resource center, thrift store, and a community clinic. Funds raised for SAM25 will go toward some new appliances and a water softener system to ensure the longevity of those appliances.

Oconto Falls Area Cycling Coalition

Oconto Falls Area Cycling Coalition was established in the fall of 2020. After three years of donating not only their time but money, the group decided it was time to establish the club. They see great potential in the Oconto Falls area. The grant money will be used towards expanding the trail system and adding a storage building to house the equipment that is used for maintaining and grooming the trails.

The original part of the trail, located by the tubing hill in Oconto Falls, was a little over one mile long and was created as part of an Eagle Scout project. Now the trail is a little over three miles long and is used year-round. In the summer/fall months, trails are used for biking and hiking. Winter months bring opportunities for fat biking and snowshoeing. Weather permitting, there are an additional three miles of trail around River Island Golf Club in the winter.

Abrams Fire Department

The Abrams Fire Department is a small local department, made up of 20 volunteer firefighters from all walks of life, focused on helping our community. The department is working on replacing various pieces of personal protective equipment that have become outdated, such as helmets and breathing apparatus.

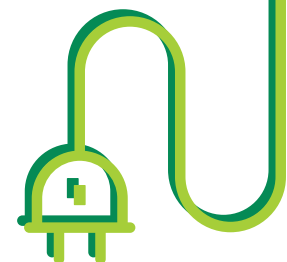
Underhill Volunteer Fire Department

The fire department will be using funding to acquire a foam system that will be installed on their fire engine. (427304) The foam system will greatly improve the outcome on fires as it helps extinguish and prevent re-ignition. Foam not only saves water, time, and resources, but also reduces property loss.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

During summer months, run large appliances that emit heat (like clothes dryers and dishwashers) during the evening when it's cooler.

This will minimize indoor heat during the day when outdoor temperatures are highest.



MY CO-OP



CONCERNS OF ONGOING PANDEMIC CANCELS MEMBER APPRECIATION PICNIC

What does that mean for my capital credits?

As COVID-19 continues to exist, and as individuals are continuing to get vaccinated, the OEC board of directors has made the tough decision to not hold the annual member appreciation picnic this year. The health and safety of our members, your families, and our employees are very important to us.

We're planning something extra special for you during co-op month in October. Please watch for details in the magazine.

This year OEC will be paying out capital credits from 2001. If you have capital credits of less than \$25 you will receive a credit on your electric bill. If your capital credits for that year total \$25 or more, you will receive a check in late July/early August.

What are capital credits?

You, the members, are the owners of your electric cooperative, and capital credits reflect your ownership in the cooperative. As you pay for your energy, OEC utilizes the revenue to grow, operate, and maintain a safe and reliable energy system. Any money that is earned over and above the costs of doing business is called margins. Your portion of allocated margins is then returned to you in the form of capital credits.

Capital credits are the most significant source of equity for most cooperatives. They are similar to the dividends that investor-owned utilities pay to their shareholders except that OEC "dividends" go back to the members/owners.

How does a member get capital credits?

When a member of Oconto Electric begins purchasing electricity, they get two accounts—a billing account and a capital credit account. The capital credit account is specific to you and your spouse, if married. Regardless of how many times you move or how many billing accounts you may have, you have one capital credit account that stays with you. Each year OEC margins are allocated back to the members. Your share is deposited in your capital credit account for that year.

How are year-end margins allocated?

At the end of each year OEC divides the dollar value of that year's margins by the amount of total revenue collected during the year. This is the "allocation factor." The alloca-

tion factor is then multiplied by the amount of revenue each member contributed during that year. This is your share of the margins—or your capital credit allocation—for that year.

When do I get my capital credits?

Even though the cooperative allocates capital credits to members each year, the money is not paid out right away. The money is used for a number of years for the following purposes:

- to increase equity, giving the co-op more borrowing power
- to avoid borrowing money as much as possible
- to have reserves in case of an emergency

The board of directors reviews OEC's financial condition annually and then decides whether to retire capital credits. The board's goal is to keep capital credit retirements on a 20-year rotation, always retiring the oldest year.

How do I get my capital credits?

If the amount of your retirement in a given year is more than \$25, a check will be sent to the last valid address we have on file. If the amount is less than \$25 and you still purchase electricity from OEC, it will appear as a credit on your electric bill. If the amount is less than \$25 and you no longer purchase power from OEC, the amount goes into "no check status" which means the money will be held by OEC until there is enough retired to total more than \$25. At that time a check will be sent to the last valid address.

What happens to the money when the member can't be located?

Capital credits become "unclaimed" when OEC is unable to locate the member after three years. Unclaimed funds, as allowed by state law, are placed in an account with the Federated Youth Foundation. The money in that account can only be used for education or charitable purposes. Annually OEC funds scholarships for member students pursuing higher education.

If you would like to know more about capital credits, contact OEC at 1-800-472-8410.

HIDDEN ACCOUNT NUMBERS

Oconto Electric Cooperative hides two account numbers in the local pages of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* each month. If you spot your account number, call our office before you receive the next issue, and OEC will give you a \$15 credit on your electric bill or a \$25 credit if you have a load management receiver. The June account numbers belonged to Rick Bohman, Sheboygan, and Susan Behringer, Muskego.

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