

# MINNESOTA VALLEY Co-op News

Volume 75 No. 11 • November 2013



## MANAGER'S MESSAGE • PAT CARRUTH

*General Manager*



### Our Commitment to Safety

Working with electricity is dangerous ... period. That's why Minnesota Valley spends a lot of time, energy and money on safety training for our employees. We devote an average of 40 hours per employee per year to safety training. Linemen receive much more than the average.

We treat our investment in safety as a top priority for not only our employees, but the public. We make it a priority to educate children about electrical safety, in particular. Each year, we ask elementary schools in our area if we may come in and provide safety demonstrations to their third and fourth graders. We gear towards that age group because our industry feels that is the age in which we have the best chance of getting our message across. In addition to schools, we give demonstrations to 4-H clubs, fire departments, scout

as well. We not only feel public education about electrical safety is important - we feel it is our duty.

The foundation of our employee safety initiative is a continuing education program for our line department personnel. These "safety meetings" are coordinated and taught by loss control instructors from our statewide association and our cooperative owned insurance company, Federated. Typically, the line department has ten half-day safety meetings per year with the instructor. We also send our line crews to at least one trade meeting each year that includes safety courses. Special employee certification training is also provided each year in First Aid and CPR. We have a formal Safety Committee that reviews and updates our Job Procedure Manual. This seventy-page document covers general and detailed safety rules aimed at keeping our people safe. The committee is responsible for communicating the document to all employees at least once a year.

Every three years, Minnesota Valley goes through a process called the Rural Electric Safety Accreditation Program (RESAP). This is a program through our National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). This program culminates in a panel of safety professionals going through our building, trucks, equipment and documentation. The documentation alone is very extensive. It must prove that we have been complying with the regulations and reporting requirements of OSHA, MNDOT, USDOT, EPA and MPCA rules. They also watch our people work out in the field on the jobsite. At the end

of the day, they determine if our overall commitment to safety passes their standards. Minnesota Valley has always passed this program and did again in 2013. Along with the candid assessment, they let us know about areas that we could improve on to help strengthen our safety program.

We not only invest in the human side of the safety equation, but also in the equipment necessary for our employees to conduct their work in a safe manner. Maintaining equipment in prime working condition is critical. Each day our linemen go through a visual check of their equipment. They depend on non-conductive (dielectric) tools such as protective rubber gloves and sleeves, and fiberglass

hot-sticks, to insulate them from the lethal force of electricity. Our vehicle fleet is also subject to on-going scrutiny. The fleet is highly maintained and inspected annually by a MNDOT certified inspector. The bucket trucks and diggers are also subject to annual dielectric testing.

Working with electricity is one of the most dangerous occupations one can take up. Not just for the fact that electricity is dangerous by nature, but most of the time, linemen are working with electricity when the weather is "just plain old nasty". This compounds the danger.

(continued on next page)



Safety demonstration to a group of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders.

groups and any other organization interested in learning more about electrical safety. We spend quite a bit of time and money on general electrical safety messages with the entire public in our service area,

Minnesota Valley will be closed on Monday, November 11<sup>th</sup> in observance of Veterans Day and Thursday, November 28<sup>th</sup> for Thanksgiving. Enjoy the holidays!



### **Commitment to Safety** *(continued from page 1)*

Throughout your cooperative, you have a dedicated group of people here. They know their job is to provide you, the member-owners, with the best possible electric service they can. To help them to that end, you, the members of Minnesota Valley, provide them with very good trucks, equipment and educational opportunities. More importantly, you provide them with your commitment to their safety.

### **Work Plan and Budget**

The 2014 Work Plan and Budget is in draft form and in the hands of the board. They will be discussing it at their regular meeting later this month. There is a lot of work that goes into a Work Plan and Budget and most of the heavy lifting is done by the department heads. Fortunately, they have all had plenty of experience in making budgets so we always have pretty high expectations on ending the year pretty close to where we plan.

Of course, the volatile variable in budget making for us is the weather. Weather can either make things happen

or make things miserable operationally and financially. Anyway, we think the numbers for 2014 look pretty good. We also expect to end 2013 in good shape operationally and financially, as well.

### **Rates Steady for 2014**

Barring anything unforeseen, we will be holding rates steady for 2014. This is especially exciting for us because we have had rate increases for the past six years straight. For the most part, those increases were driven by investments in: 1) new power plants, emission control systems and renewable mandates; 2) our new delivery point and expansion of our transmission system and; 3) general increases in everyday operating costs. The biggest driver, of course, has been renewable energy mandates. Anyway, strictly as a point of reference, we want you to know that there are only two electric co-operatives in Minnesota with lower rates than ours out of 45. The entire electric utility industry has had much upward pressure on costs and, subsequently, retail rates over the past several years.

## Safe and Efficient Use of Portable Heaters

As fall fades into winter, it's time to turn up the heat and keep your home warm and cozy. Portable electric heaters are a popular option for people who have a space that requires supplemental heating or is infrequently occupied. Many people choose to use small heaters in order to keep one area of their home warm without overheating the entire structure. This can be particularly helpful for individuals who are sensitive to the cold.

Portable electric space heaters come in many sizes and shapes, with most of them able to fulfill your space heating needs. Space heaters generally range in size from 750 to 5,000 watts. When used properly, space heaters can help trim heating costs for a specific room. As a general rule, however, central heating is the most efficient way to heat a home.

Portable electric space heaters do not qualify for Minnesota Valley's Electric Heat or Dual Fuel Rate, therefore portable space heaters can only be operated on Minnesota Valley's general rate. Installing permanent electric heat on a heat rate remains a more affordable option for electrically heating a home, because these heaters are on one of our cheaper heat rates.

Installing permanent electric space heat can give you all of the benefits of a portable type heater, and deliver that heat much more safely and inexpensively. You can separately heat individual rooms with permanently installed heaters, just as you could with a portable space heater.

"Permanently installed electric heaters on a heat rate are the way to go. Portable electric space heaters can be an excellent heat source, but permanently installed

electric heat will give you a much better bang for your buck while being safer to operate," confirms Minnesota Valley Co-op Member Services Manager, Bob Walsh.

Many types of portable heaters on the market are claiming to have a newly discovered heating technique that is not available anywhere else. This simply isn't true. Typically, space heaters work by convection, which involves the circulation of heated air in a room. There are also radiant heaters that emit infrared radiation to directly heat the area in front of the unit C three twenty three zero three A. It is the radiant form of heat that many portable heating manufacturers are saying their product can deliver at an incredibly higher efficiency. This again is simply not true!

Electric space heaters are the only space heaters that do not run the risk of air quality concerns inside your home. Fossil fuel burning space heaters always have the threat of creating carbon monoxide gas from the incomplete combustion of fuel. With all types of portable space heaters, safety should be a top priority. Improper use of any heater can increase the likelihood of a fire or burn accident. Always make sure to carefully follow the manufacturer's installation and operation instructions.

Remember, portable space heaters can be a safe and economical way to supply temporary heat to an area, but they are not intended to be a permanent heat source. Being temporary heaters, portable heaters have certain safety concerns that you need to be aware of. There are many types of portable heaters and many ways to heat small areas. Please contact the Minnesota Valley Member Service Department if you would like assistance or have questions about choosing the heat source that is right for you.







## Best Wishes to Kathy Christenson, Communications Manager, who Retires in November

On November 8, 2013, Kathy will close one chapter in her life and open another one, perhaps more relaxing, as she retires after more than 38 years of service to Minnesota Valley.

Since her first day of work on September 5, 1975, Kathy has held various positions at Minnesota Valley. This included working in the Administrative, Billing and Member Services departments. Since 1996, she has been the Communications Manager where her main objective was to keep the members informed of issues relating to the cooperative. These responsibilities ranged from creating the monthly newsletter to planning the annual meeting. Her dedication to excellence will be missed here at Minnesota Valley.

Kathy has many fond memories here at Minnesota Valley, but none more rewarding than meeting with members when she would do "human interest" news-

letter stories. She states, "I've learned so much about the people and their hobbies, businesses, endeavors and lifestyles. I really enjoyed listening to and telling their stories." Kathy has also thoroughly enjoyed working with the Operation Round Up Trust Board and all of the recipients of those grants. Kathy's been working with this program since 1996 and has seen first-hand the good it has done for the communities of Minnesota Valley.

Of all the things Kathy will miss about coming to work every day, most of all she says she will miss the people she has worked with over the years. "There isn't any place I would have rather spent the last 38 years."

While retirement will be a new experience for Kathy, she looks forward to spending more time with her two children and their families. Kathy has been a great asset to Minnesota Valley and we wish her all the best. Thank you, Kathy, for 38 years of dedicated service to Minnesota Valley.

### ENGINEERING & OPERATIONS • JOHN WILLIAMSON



#### Manager of Engineering & Operations Line Department

Now is the time of year when the weather can change your plans on a moment's notice. We were fortunate we didn't receive the snow, ice, and wind North and South Dakota cooperatives experienced the first weekend in October. They had ice accumulate on their power lines, resulting in broken poles, downed lines, and many consumers without power.

We sent a crew out near Bismarck, ND with a bucket truck and track digger the week of October 11<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> to assist the cooperatives in restoring power to their consumers D three zero two zero three. Normal equipment couldn't get off the roads to fix cross-country power line areas.

Pole change outs on our system will continue throughout the coming months, along with underground services. Underground services will come to a halt once the ground freezes up for the winter. We will continue to retire overhead lines on the CapX project, going from south of Granite Falls toward Marshall (where we previously installed underground this spring and summer).

By the time you read this, harvest fieldwork should be wrapping up. We did have a few poles hit again this harvest season, but thankfully no one was injured from any of these instances.

November 11<sup>th</sup> is Veterans Day and we would once again like to take the opportunity to thank all veterans for what they have done and continue to do. Enjoy the white stuff sure to come our way soon!

## Comparative Report

	Jan-Sept 2013	Jan-Sept 2012	Jan-Sept 1993
Kwh Purchased	153,096,834	151,809,177	98,861,751
Kwh Sold	145,392,334	143,512,277	89,854,011
Cost Of Purchased Power	\$7,241,131	\$6,970,318	\$3,418,063
Patronage Capital Margins	\$791,841	\$434,642	\$77,196
Reserve For Taxes	\$249,002	\$248,300	\$171,070
Cost Per Kwh Purchased (mills)	47.30	45.91	34.57
	September '13	September '12	September '93
Total Plant	\$62,084,583	\$60,708,313	\$22,831,072
# Of Members Receiving Service	5,258	5,244	5,165
Average Residential Bill	\$158.08	\$197.65	\$85.18
Average Residential Kwh Consumption	1,286	1,753	1,321
Average Kwh Usage All Consumers	2,416	3,085	1,764
Peak Kw Demand (Peak Load)	28,781	32,408	22,594

There were no winners in last month's issue. Keep looking!



There are two hidden account numbers in this newsletter. If you find your number, you will receive a \$10 energy credit or \$20 if you are an Operation Round Up participant. Call the office to claim your credit.



**MEMBER SERVICES • BOB WALSH**



*Member Services Manager*

## Electric Heating is Still the Way to Go

As in the past, Minnesota Valley has set their heating rates to insure the best electric heating prices for those members who have electric heat systems. Minnesota Valley Cooperative is going to tell you right up front what your electric heat rate for the whole winter is going to be. So with any type of electric heat, your heating bill will be cheaper than those of any fossil fuel heating systems.

You won't have to play any guessing games with heating fuel prices if you are heating with Minnesota Valley's Electric Heat or Dual Fuel Heat Rates. Our rates are comparable to #2 fuel oil (60% efficient) and L.P. (90% efficient) heating systems if the price of those two heating fuels were roughly \$1.15 – 1.20 per gallon. A recent check with local fuel suppliers found those numbers were fuel oil at \$3.50 and L.P. at \$1.65 per gallon.

Yes, electric heat is the way to go for a CLEAN, SAFE, and CHEAP heating energy source. Contact your local HVAC contractor, electrical contractor, or the Minnesota Valley Member Services Department to get in on the savings. There are many types of electric heat to meet all of your heating demands.

## Survey Will Be Sent Out this Month

It is important to us to continue providing safe, reliable, and convenient electric power for you and your family. When you take time to fill out our 2014 End Use Survey, you help us better understand the needs of our members.

As in the past, Basin Electric will conduct the survey on behalf of Minnesota Valley Cooperative Light and Power Association. The survey gathers residential consumer information that provides valuable information about the cooperative's service territory.

The survey will be mailed out to residential consumers this month. If you receive a survey, we would greatly appreciate you taking a few minutes to complete it. The survey asks you to provide us with information about your residence, type of heating and cooling systems, and major appliances. Your answers are very important, so please respond as accurately as possible and return it promptly.

A postage-paid return envelope will be included with the survey for your convenience. The survey will also be available to complete online.



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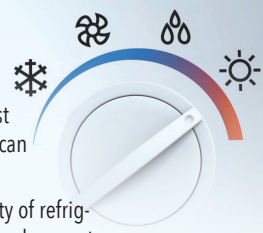
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[www.mnvalleyrec.com](http://www.mnvalleyrec.com)

## November's Energy Saving Tip

Replace your incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs. Replacing just one 75 watt incandescent bulb that operates 3 hours per day with a 20 watt CFL could save you over \$6.00 per year in energy savings alone. The savings are even greater when you factor in the cost of incandescent bulb replacements over the life of a CFL bulb.



- ❖ **Geothermal Heat Pumps** – The most efficient heating system around. This type of system uses the earth to heat your home at a fraction of the cost of other systems. These amazing heating systems can reach efficiencies of 400% and more!
- ❖ **Air Source Heat Pump** – Use the heat transfer ability of refrigeration equipment to transfer heat into or from your house at very economical rates. Efficiencies of well over 200% can be attained.
- ❖ **Electric Plenum Heaters** – A plenum heater is a forced-air heating device that is installed in the plenum—the spot in the ductwork system where ducting and furnace join. It uses the existing ductwork and furnace blower to distribute heat to the building.
- ❖ **Radiant Slab Heating** – A very popular way to heat a structure and get the added feature of warm floors. Radiant heat waves travel through the air and heat objects that they hit. Just the same way that the sun heats objects when it hits them.
- ❖ **Radiant Wall and Ceiling Heat** – Heat the objects (like you) in your home, not the air. Radiant ceiling, cove, and baseboard heaters give you that kind of instant heat.
- ❖ **Fan-forced Supplemental Heat Units** – There's nothing new about fan-forced electric heat. It's been around for more than a century, making bathrooms, dens, basements, breezeways, or little-used rooms more comfortable at an instant's notice.



At the end of the survey there is a space for your comments and suggestions. As a nonprofit, member-owned cooperative, we are committed to customer service and we welcome your comments, questions, criticism, or suggestions. If you would like us to respond, please include your name. Otherwise the survey is anonymous and we have no way of knowing who to call or write.

Some members may have completed a similar survey four years ago. As part of our power supply contracts and government requirements, our cooperative must conduct this kind of survey every few years.

Information compiled from the 2014 End Use Survey will be used in the load forecast and power supply planning process. The survey also helps Minnesota Valley plan for the future and determine what programs will be most beneficial for our members. We look forward to meeting your future energy needs.

