CELEBRATING HARD WORK & WORKING HARD
Community Solar Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony and Rate Design Analysis Continues

As I pen this month’s Rural Montana, the sun is glistening off the bright snow, and staff is preparing for the ribbon-cutting ceremony to dedicate our Shares du Soleil Community Solar project. Now that we have 132 solar panels on the roof, I take great delight when the sun shines! This has been a fantastic project to be involved with and experience member commitment to renewable energy resources. It’s been a great partnership.

The Board’s Risk Management Committee is reviewing future rate design options for BEC with our continued support. There is still much to do in analyzing member usage patterns. As you might suspect, people use electricity very differently based upon lifestyle, income, age of housing, degree of weatherization, the energy source for space, and water heating, etc. Consequently, we have dug deep into member meter data to understand how differently members use energy throughout the year, e.g., high usage, low usage, seasonal, low income, net metering, etc.

After completing the Cost of Service Study, the committee is focused on achieving greater equity and fairness within the member classes and how that is best achieved. The question we ask is; Is everyone paying their fair share of operating and maintaining the electric system? In light of the aforementioned diversity in usage patterns, it is not an easy task, but we must move closer to this goal. BEC’s system must be built to handle the highest 15-minute demand, whether it occurs once a year or monthly. Members need to pay for their proportionate share of the system to assure the light switch works every time it’s flipped.

Another area of consideration for the Committee in looking at different rate structures is the need to ensure long-term financial stability for BEC. Utilities typically collect a high degree of their annual revenue to run the company within the energy charge (kwhs). Prospective financial forecasts are largely based on predictable energy sales. Climate change has created a high degree of financial risk for BEC with the changing weather patterns. Going forward, we need to minimize that financial risk.

In closing, I thank you for your membership in BEC. On behalf of our staff, Board of Trustees and myself, we wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and the happiest of New Years!

Kevin P. Owens, PE, General Manager

Please Note
Our Holiday Hours

Beartooth Electric will close at Noon on Tuesday, December 24 and reopen on Thursday, December 26. We will also be closed for the New Year holiday on Tuesday, January 1. To report a service problem always call us at 406-446-2310.

Source: energy.gov
Safety Features to Look For—

Certification. Make sure the heater you buy carries a safety certification label from an independent testing organization, such as the UL mark, the ETL label from Intertek, or certification from CSA International.

Shutoff features. A smart sensor that automatically shuts off a heater when it overheats is a must. You’ll also want a tip-over switch that does the same if the heater is knocked over.

Ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) plug. Most space heaters don’t come equipped with a GFCI plug, which prevents electric shock. Heaters without one should not be used around water, manufacturers advise.

Sturdy cord. Most space heaters come with a cord that’s 6 feet long. To prevent overheating, never use an extension cord or a power strip with an electric heater.

How to Use a Space Heater Safely

Half of all home heating fires happen during the months of December, January, and February. Our experts, as well as the pros at the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers and the National Fire Protection Association, offer the following safety tips:

• Place the heater on a hard, level, and nonflammable surface. They are intended to sit on the floor, not on a table.
• Establish a 3-foot kid- and pet-free zone around the heater, and never put a space heater in a child’s room.
• Keep the space heater at least 3 feet away from combustible materials, such as furniture, bedding, and curtains.
• Don’t use a heater in a workshop or garage near paint, gas cans, or matches.
• Turn it off when you leave the room or go to bed.
• Unplug the heater when it’s not in use by pulling the plug straight from the outlet. Check the cord for damage periodically, and don’t use the heater if the cord is frayed or worn.
• Don’t plug another electrical device or an extension cord into the same outlet as a heater—that can cause overheating.
• Install working smoke alarms on every level of your home and in every bedroom, and test them monthly.

How to Find the Safest Space Heater for Your Home
Safety • Use • Cost

About 25,000 house fires and 300 deaths are attributed to space heaters each year. They’re mostly caused when a heater is placed too close to curtains, bedding, or upholstered furniture, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. In addition, 6,000 people end up in emergency rooms with burns from touching a heater’s hot surface.

“How much does it cost to heat my room?” is a super-complicated question to answer.

Heating a room depends on a plethora of variables – how many windows you have, how well the room is insulated, the temperature outside, etc. The list goes on! It’s near impossible to accurately determine.

However, you can calculate probable energy consumption pretty easily and in the calculation you should consider when choosing your heater. Ideally, you want something that is going to cater to your needs with the minimum of power.

Here’s a handy calculation to easily determine how much your space heater will cost to run per hour, week or even per month. Probably the most important number to know is the heater’s power rating in Watts. This is how much electricity your space heater uses in an hour.

So, the typical space heater is a 1500W unit, that’s 1.5 kilowatts. BEC’s cost for electricity per kWh is 8.9 cents, then you use the following calculation

\[1.5 \text{ kW} \times 8.9 \text{ cents} = 13 \text{ cents per hour}.\]

So if you run a 1500 Watt your space heater for 8 hours a day it will cost $1.07. 8 hours a day for one week = $7.49 8 hours a day for one month = $32.10

However, if you keep your space heater running continuously, it would cost $3.20 per day, $22.43 per week, and $96.00 per month. Please run your space heaters safely and wisely this winter season.
Tyler Gronbeck, Journeyman Lineman joined our Beartooth Electric family on November 1.

Born and raised in North Dakota, Tyler graduated from Bismarck State College’s Lineman Program in 2011. He worked for Cole Creek Construction for one year prior to joining Nodak Electric Cooperative, Grand Forks, North Dakota for his Apprenticeship. Tyler has held his Journeyman Lineman certification since 2015 and will be working on the Red Lodge crew.

Tyler married his high school sweetheart, Meghan in 2015. They have enjoyed Red Lodge as their favorite vacation destination for years. Now as they call Red Lodge home, they look forward to snowboarding, fishing, hiking, hunting and joining in our entire service area events.

Please join us in welcoming Tyler and Meghan Gronbeck to our cooperative family.

NEW EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT—MEET TYLER GRONBECK

Generator backfeed is dangerous and potentially deadly!

When a storm strikes and knocks out power to your home, you may be forced to use a generator. But, do you know about their potential danger? It’s called “backfeed” and it can endanger you, your family, or someone else — especially linemen working on the outage.

What is backfeed?

Backfeed occurs when power travels back through the utility lines and re-energizes them.

Backfeed creates a very dangerous, and potentially deadly, situation for line workers at your electric cooperative. If your generator isn't installed properly, the resulting backfeed of electric current could kill or severely injure a lineman working to restore your power.

“At Beartooth Electric Cooperative, we encourage our members who use generators to make sure they are installed correctly. This is not only for the protection of our employees, but for member safety as well,” stated Kevin Owens, General Manager of Beartooth Electric Cooperative.

To prevent backfeed, generators (whether permanent or portable) should never be plugged into a home’s wiring or directly to the circuit breaker panel.

The best way to avoid backfeed is by installing a transfer switch. A transfer switch ensures your household wiring, or selected circuits to be supplied by the generator, can’t be connected to the power grid and the generator at the same time, eliminating backfeed. It also protects your generator from damage if the power is restored while it’s connected. Make sure to have a qualified, licensed electrician install the transfer switch for you.

Beartooth Electric Cooperatives’ responsibility for electric service ends at the meter, so we cannot know when, or if, you have installed a generator and we cannot know if the installation was done to the specifications of the National Electric Code.

Here’s another reason to have a qualified electrician complete the work. If you plug your generator directly into a wall outlet, then the wiring in your home is no longer protected by a circuit breaker or fuse in your power panel. The wiring in your home could then become overloaded, overheat, and start a fire.

When the power goes out, having a generator means that you can continue to have heat, light and many of the other conveniences we’ve come to enjoy. Make sure you aren't creating unnecessary danger by properly and safely using your generator to prevent backfeed. It could save a life.

Installing a new generator or if you’ve had one for a while—please call the BEC office 406-446-2310 and let us know. We will note a generator on the premises in your member account and our line crew will conduct a complementary generator safety check. Please keep everyone safe, and give us a call.

Beartooth Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Capital Credits—A Powerful Return on Your Investment

Each month when you pay your electric bill, it isn't just payment for service, but an investment in a company you own. One of the many benefits of being a member-owner of Beartooth Electric Cooperative is receiving a Capital Credit check as a return on your investment, much like a dividend on stocks. As a member you build equity in the cooperative each year you receive service.

Member equity is the essential tool Beartooth Electric uses to build, maintain, and upgrade the facilities necessary to provide you the reliable, low-cost electric service you have become accustomed to receiving. Retirement of Capital Credits is a return of member-furnished capital. Beartooth Electric is a not-for profit electric cooperative, so any money left over after paying for all fiscal-year operating costs is returned to our members. This year, your Board of Trustees has authorized the return of $412,273.00 in retired capital credits (also known as patronage capital) for the unallocated 39% of the year 1994, 100% of the year 1995, and 52% of the year 1996. This check represents your monetary credit based on how much you paid BEC for electric service during those years. “On behalf of the Beartooth Electric Cooperative Board of Trustees, it’s a privilege for Beartooth Electric to issue Capital Credit checks,” said Kevin Owens, General Manager. “It clearly demonstrates our commitment to our members.”

What are the steps to receiving a capital credit refund?

Step 1: When you sign up for electric service with Beartooth Electric and pay your membership fee, you become a member-owner of the cooperative. As you purchase electricity from the cooperative, you build equity in it.

Step 2: Each year, Beartooth Electric designates a portion of what you pay in purchases to your Capital Credits account. This is called an allocation. The amount of the allocation is determined by using a multiplying factor that is common to all members. This ensures each member’s allocation is a fair and equitable percentage.

Step 3: Capital Credits are retired at the discretion of the Board of Trustees, and as the financial conditions of the cooperative allow. Capital Credits are your investment in Beartooth Electric and our goal is to return them to you on a reasonable and systematic basis. When the Board of Trustees determines the cooperative has met its financial requirements, they may decide to “retire” (pay) the Capital Credits to our members.

Note: If you move, make sure to give your new address to Beartooth Electric so we can continue to refund any monies you are eligible to receive.

Non-taxable Income: Capital credits are a return of money paid for electricity in a previous year and are generally not taxable income for residential consumers. Commercial and industrial consumers should discuss any capital credits retirements with their tax advisers.

HOLIDAY CHEER FROM OUR SERVICE AREA HARDWARE STORES

The holidays are a great time to invest in LED lighting and save energy too! Your Columbus ACE Hardware will get you started with 10% off any regular LED lighting product (limit two-and don't forget your coupon). Your Red Lodge True Value invites you to use their new FREE Buy Online with Same Day Pick-up in their store-try it now at www.truevalue.com.