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Community News

Taking control of your energy costs

By Eric Winslow
President and CEO



As we head into the summer months, a time of year when electricity pricing tends to trend upward, it's a good time to think about steps you can take to minimize the impact of rising energy costs.

Probably the first and easiest thing you should consider is replacing your incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lights (CFL). The price of CFLs has come down significantly over the

last few years, so purchasing these energy-saving, long-lasting bulbs is an easy way to cut back on your electricity use.

If you have air-conditioning in your home, set the thermostat at the highest temperature you can tolerate. Also, be sure all windows are closed while cooling your home.

It also pays to lower your water heater's thermostat to 120 degrees, take shorter showers and wash clothes in cold water.

If you live in an area where it's permitted, consider air-drying your laundry. If you must use a clothes dryer, avoid over-drying. And when replacing appliances, be sure to purchase ones that are Energy Star approved.

There are dozens of other energy conservation and efficiency measures available on our website, www.citizenselectric.com, and I encourage you to take some time to explore. The HomeEnergySuite, found on the right side of our home page, is a great place to start. The suite offers a wealth of energy-saving information, as well as an interactive home-energy calculator, which evaluates your home's energy use and recommends steps you can take to reduce energy costs. This information is also available at the company office.

A more in-depth approach would be to hire a certified, professional energy consultant to perform an energy audit at your home. I recently had an energy audit of my home conducted by a local HVAC contractor and learned there are areas of my home that need additional insulation and caulking. Armed with this information, I am now addressing these issues. I would recommend an energy audit to anyone with a home more than 10 years old. A list of companies that perform these audits can be found in SEDA-Cog's Energy Resource Center, which you can link to via our home page.

While you focus on taking control of costs at home, we

are doing the same here at Citizens' Electric. Since we last increased our distribution rate in April 2008, we have been faced with rising costs for materials, fuel, equipment and operations. We have taken significant cost-control measures related to wages and benefits, instituted a hiring freeze and looked for additional ways to lower expenses without compromising our long-standing tradition of providing the highest level of reliability of any electric utility in Pennsylvania. We will soon see if our belt-tightening measures were sufficient as we begin studying our operating expenses and income to determine if a distribution rate increase will be needed in the future.

As you know, our generation rate, which is adjusted quarterly, ticked up for the second quarter of 2010. Since we started procuring power through a portfolio approach several years ago, our generation rate, which is a straight pass-through charge, has fluctuated more than we would like from quarter to quarter. Because energy prices can be volatile, there is no way to avoid that entirely. However, we are analyzing ways to minimize those rate fluctuations that are not strictly driven by the energy market. It is our hope to add as much stability as possible to our generation rates.

We are also exploring the possibility of offering customers the ability to participate in a voluntary load management program that could help lower power costs in the future. Load management would give us the ability to remotely stop the flow of electricity to participating customers' water heaters, swimming pools, hot tubs, and possibly air conditioners for short periods of time when electrical demand is at its highest. These "peak-demand" times typically occur on the very hottest weekdays of the summer between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Savings achieved through this program would be passed on to those customers who allow us to control their equipment. We're still in the infant stages of this project, but expect to hear more about it in the future.

Many of you have reported receiving direct mail pieces from alternative generation suppliers recently stating their interest in providing you with electricity. Unfortunately, those mass mailings are intended for PPL customers. There are currently no alternative generation suppliers willing to sell generation to our residential customers. That's due to the fact that, even with the 9 percent increase to our generation rate for the second quarter, we are still selling electricity at a price below what the energy marketers are offering to PPL customers.

While we don't have any suppliers that have expressed an interest in marketing generation to our residential customers at this time, we continue to prepare for the possibility of their entrance into our service territory.

More eBill options on the way

With eBill, Citizens' Electric's internet bill payment program, you can access your account information and pay your electric bill from the comfort of your home.

In coming months, eBill participants will have online access to their hourly consumption data. Understanding how and when you use electricity can help you make better decisions regarding conservation efforts.

In addition to these enhanced features, eBill gives customers the ability to:

- Pay your electric bill on line
- View your current bill
- View your billing history
- Update your account information.

To explore the features of eBill, visit the Citizens' Electric website at www.citizenselectric.com, and click on "Payment Options," followed by "eBill."

For more information about eBill, contact the Lewisburg office at 570-524-2231.

Looking for a little information for our files

Please be sure to verify that the telephone number and address that appear on your electric bill are correct.

If either is incorrect or missing from the bill, please call the office or send us an e-mail so that we can update our records.

Citizens' Electric uses customers' phone numbers when dispatching outages, and to notify customers about planned outages.

If you are interested in receiving text messages and e-mail messages in the future regarding outage restoration times and planned outages, please send us your cell phone number and e-mail address. You can e-mail that information to us at: billing@citizenselectric.com

Look up! Look down! Look out!

Power lines, whether located overhead or under ground, carry high voltage electricity that can kill instantly upon contact.

If you come across a downed power line, keep clear of the line and anything that may be in contact with it. Immediately call Citizens' Electric to report a downed power line.

As you tackle outdoor projects this summer, be sure to note if there are any power lines in the vicinity of your work. If you plan to use a ladder or scaffolding, carry lumber or siding, prune trees, install antennas or perform other work overhead, be sure to look up for overhead lines.

Remember, you don't need to come in direct contact with a power line to be in danger. Electricity can jump, or arc, from an electric line to a person, ladder or other equipment. The best way to protect yourself is by keeping yourself and your equipment well away from any overhead electric lines.

If you are planning excavation work, be sure to get your project off to a safe start by calling 8-1-1 before you dig.

8-1-1 is the abbreviated national telephone number homeowners and professional excavators can call to contact their state's One Call center.

State law requires anyone doing excavation work of any kind to notify the Pennsylvania One Call System three days before digging.



Tree pruning, pole inspections to begin

Citizens' Electric resumes its annual pole-inspection and tree-pruning programs this month.

Osmose Utility Services has been contracted to inspect and treat Citizens' Electric utility poles, and will primarily be working in an area bounded on the north by Route 45, on the east by Route 15, on the west by Fairfield Road and on the south by Pheasant Ridge Road.

Poles deemed to be structurally sound will be treated with an environmentally friendly wood preservative by the contractor. The treatment is a cost-effective way to extend the useful service life of utility poles.

Citizens' has also contracted with Dincher & Dincher Tree Surgeons to carry out our system-wide vegetation management program.

This work focuses on pruning trees within our rights-of-way that have the potential to come into contact with electric lines. Tree pruning is an effective way to increase public safety and reliability.

Employees working for the right-of-way and pole-inspection contractors will carry identification cards and operate out of vehicles clearly marked with company logos. Company representatives will attempt to contact property owners before beginning work on private property.