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Community News



Electric rates to rise

By Eric Winslow
President and CEO

We are all well aware that energy prices have risen dramatically over the past several years.

Fuels used to generate electricity, such as natural gas, coal and oil, are considerably more expensive today than they were in 2003, when we

locked in a four-year power supply contract with Reliant Energy. The cost of doing business in general is much higher today, too. We are paying more at the pump for gasoline. Health insurance has skyrocketed; materials and equipment costs continue to escalate.

Despite these ever-increasing costs, your electric rates have remained stable. We have not had more than a minor fluctuation in the generation rate since 2002 and have not adjusted our distribution rate in 17 years.

Unfortunately, we now know that both of those rates will be going up. Enclosed with your electric bill this month you will find a notice of a proposed distribution rate increase that we filed with the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission on April 30. Citizens' is requesting a 7.4 percent overall increase, to be implemented July 29.

We are also working to secure a new wholesale power supply contract, which will go into effect at the beginning of next year. The overall generation and distribution rate increase is expected to be significant, perhaps greater than 50 percent. However, until the bids are opened and contracts are signed, we won't know for sure how much the total increase will be.

Even with the rate increases, the price you will be paying for electricity remains a bargain at about \$4 per day for the average residential customer. So for about the price of a cup of Starbucks cappuccino, you can light your home, heat your bath water, cook your dinner, run your television, stereo, computer, and appliances, wash and dry your clothes and brew a whole pot of coffee.

When the increases take effect, Citizens' rates will still be competitive with the other electric utilities in

Pennsylvania. We will no longer have the lowest rates in the state, but we do expect to be slightly below the state average.

In terms of service and reliability, we expect to be anything but average. Our reliability benchmarks are the most stringent in the state because we have an exceptional track record in this area, and we have taken some progressive steps to continue that trend.

Early last year, we completed our conversion to an automatic meter reading system. This has freed our linemen from time-consuming monthly meter-reading duties so that they can now focus their efforts on maintenance and reliability projects instead.

The new meter reading system provides us with accurate readings on a daily basis, eliminating the need for estimated bills. It also gives us the ability to check voltages, confirm outages, and detect tampering and potential theft of service, all without leaving the office.

We recently completed work to map our entire electric system and all of its components digitally. The electronic maps will be used to create an engineering model for our electric system that will enable us to perform engineering calculations and assess system capacity. This will aid us in prioritizing future capital improvement projects and help us to make wise budgeting decisions.

We are also in the process of creating an electronic database that incorporates information pertaining to our equipment in the field, property records, maintenance records, etc. This database, when tied in with the computer mapping system, will provide us with an immediate means of tracking relevant information about our facilities in any given area. It will also assist us in managing outages and planning routine maintenance activities.

Of course, technology alone doesn't ensure outstanding reliability or enhanced customer service. It takes people to make it work. And we have a great team of talented, dedicated employees at Citizens' Electric who take pride in providing our customers with excellent personalized service.

Going forward, I feel this progressive and personalized approach will be the key to our ability to contain costs and meet customers' expectations for service and reliability.

Call Center gets high marks

The C&T Call Center, which handles after-hours calls for Citizens' Electric and its affiliated companies, received high marks in a performance survey conducted by Purdue University's Center for Customer-Driven Quality.

Survey results indicate the C&T Call Center outperforms other utility call centers in a number of key areas, including:

Average speed of answer:

- ✓ C & T, 22 seconds
- Industry average, 35.2 seconds

Average calls abandoned:

- ✓ C & T, 3.9 percent
- Industry average, 5.57 percent

Average talk time (including hold time) in minutes:

- ✓ C & T - 1:40
- Industry average - 4:38

The performance survey compared data collected from the C&T call center to data collected from investor-owned utility contact centers across the nation.

Phone issues resolved

During an outage that affected parts of Lewisburg on March 19, a number of Citizens' customers were unable to reach us by telephone to report the loss of power.

The problem apparently stemmed from technical difficulties experienced by our long-distance provider that prevented calls from reaching our after-hours call center.

We worked with our long-distance carrier to determine the nature of the problem, and they have since taken steps to prevent a reoccurrence.

It is very important that customers notify us any time there is a power outage. There may be times when all lines are busy that the caller will receive a "fast busy" signal. If that occurs, please wait a few minutes and try calling again.

Please note that outages are to be reported using our regular office telephone number, 524-2231.

Dial 8-1-1 before digging into spring projects

Planning excavation work? Get your project off to a safe start by calling 8-1-1 before you dig.

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



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

Property owners and contractors can still call the long-time Pennsylvania One Call number, 1-800-242-1776, prior to performing excavation work.

Tree pruning, pole inspections to begin

Citizens' Electric will be resuming its annual pole-inspection and tree-trimming programs in coming weeks.

Utility Pole Technologies has been contracted to inspect and treat, if necessary, approximately 500 Citizens' Electric utility poles beginning this month.

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 life of utility poles.

Citizens' will soon be naming the contractor selected to carry out

our system-wide vegetation management program, which is also expected to get under way this month.

This work focuses on pruning trees within our rights-of-way that have the potential to come into contact with electric lines, causing power interruptions.

Employees for the right-of-way and pole inspection contractors will carry identification cards and operate out of vehicles clearly marked with their company's logo.

Representatives of the companies will attempt to contact property owners before beginning work on their properties.

Customers can pay bill with credit card

Residential customers now have the convenient option of paying their electric bill by credit card. Customers can pay using either Mastercard or Visa. Credit card payments are processed by Moneris Corp., a third-party vendor that charges a service fee of \$5.85 per transaction. Citizens' Electric does not receive any portion of the fee.

Credit card payments will be accepted by calling or visiting the Citizens' Electric Co. office during normal business hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Please verify your contact info

Please be sure to verify that your telephone number and the 911 address that appears on your electric bill is correct. If either is incorrect, please write your correct number or address on the back of

your payment stub and return with payment. Please note that we use your phone number and 911 address when dispatching outages and to notify you about planned outages.