

Power of the People

By W. Marc Farmer,
General Manager,
West Oregon Electric Cooperative



When Times Get Rough

One of my favorite songs

has always been "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" by Simon and Garfunkel. I love the message in the song of friendship, support, and helping one another. It is in that spirit that I write this article.

Like a bridge with its supports on two shores that provides a way for the two sides to connect, I find myself in many instances being the bridge that connects the needs of the Co-op membership with the needs of the Co-op as a business. Most times the balancing of the two needs is fairly easy to see and achieve. One of the most trying decisions for me as a General Manager is the disconnection of members. We do our very best to be as fair and equitable as possible when working with our members on this issue. I would like to share with you what we are faced with in the area of disconnections, what we are currently doing, what change we will be implementing, and the reasons for the change.

The issue for the business aspect and financial impact on WOEC is the amount of write offs for non-payment we incur. In 2005, WOEC wrote off \$15,220.35 for payments not received for electricity used by members. That increased to

\$23,262.19 in 2006. Payments that are written off cost all of the other members more money, as the power used must still be paid for. It is a costly issue for us and we are addressing the problem in a couple of ways, both in a business practices sense and in the form of assistance.

In the business practices sense, we are implementing a change in the timing of when we send out disconnect notices. In past practice, the co-op has allowed a member to go past two due dates before sending out a disconnect notice. You, the member, would then have a 60 day and a 30 day past due balance, as well as the current bill. If the member was disconnected for non-payment, they would then be required to pay both past due balances plus a reconnect fee. Two past due balances plus the reconnect fee results in a significant amount of money required to have power reconnected. This makes it harder for our members to come up with the necessary funds to get power restored in a timely manner. To ease the amount of money required of the member, we will be sending out a disconnect notice for non-payment if payment is not received after the due date on the current bill. If payment is not received in 10 days after the notice, the account will be disconnected. Members will then only owe a 30 day balance plus reconnect fee, instead of two months of billing and the fee. It will lessen the financial burden required to get power restored, thus help our members get reconnected faster.

In an assistance sense, we

have three ways to offer help to our members. First, we have a program called Budget Billing. This program allows members to average out their monthly bills, making it easier to budget a set amount each month. It eliminates the ups and downs of electric bills by taking the last 12 months usage and averaging it out over the next twelve months. This program is available to all of our members and can be done by stopping in at our office to sign up. A member must have a good payment history prior to being placed on Budget Billing. This needs to be done before an account is disconnected. This leads into the second assistance we offer, and that is to work with our members in making a signed payment arrangement. In the event one of our members finds themselves in a position of not being able to meet their current balance, but would like to have the amount averaged over a six-month time period, this program allows it to be added on to the current monthly bill. This works best if done in conjunction with the Budget Billing Program so the monthly bill is an even amount that can be planned and budgeted for.

The third way we offer assistance is in working with outside agencies that offer financial help to members in need. These programs include Oregon Heat, Community Action, Care to Share, and St. Vincent de Paul. Oregon Heat and Care to Share each have a maximum assistance amount of \$150, St. Vincent de Paul \$50, and Community Action is a vari-

able amount based on criteria they have established. We refer our member to these agencies based on need and the ability to qualify for funding. Our staff implemented the program we call "Care to Share" last year and we raised over \$1,500. Our goal is to raise over \$2,000 this year. Anyone wishing to donate to our Care to Share program

can do so by stopping in our office to make their donation. While we work hard to efficiently run and operate a business, we are very cognizant of the needs of our members, who make us a Cooperative. As General Manager, I will continue striving to keep both needs in balance and be the "Bridge Over Troubled Waters."

Safety tips for back country travel

Oregon's back country is nothing to be trifled with, it can be a dangerous place any time of the year and is especially so during our long wet winters. You can protect yourself and your family by using a healthy dose of common sense and carrying the ten essentials in your car, backpack, daypack, snowmobile or truck – don't leave home without them.

1. Extra warm clothing that will keep you warm when wet. This includes wool, polypropylene and other synthetic fleece items. Take a hat; over 80 percent of body heat is lost through the head, plus extra jacket and dry socks.
2. Extra food and water. If traveling by car or truck, canned foods, cheese and crackers are a necessity. If traveling by foot or snowmobile take extra freeze-dried foods, dried meats, cheese and dried fruits. Water is essential for survival.
3. Topographic map of the area. No, your new GPS or web-based driving instructions and maps will not save you. You need a reputable road map or atlas when you travel by

auto, or a topo map for all back country travel, that includes skiing in resorts and developed areas.

4. Compass. You must know how to use it!
5. Flashlight, extra batteries and bulb. It will get dark and you will need to see in the dark. A flashlight can save your life by lighting your way.
6. Sunglasses and sunscreen. You can be blinded by snow blindness that will render you helpless. Severe sunburn will also stop you in your tracks.
7. Pocket knife. You can use a pocket knife dozens of way to help yourself and family survive from shaving dry kindling – to start a fire – to gutting a fish – to repairing equipment.
8. Matches in a waterproof container. Fire can save your life and alert searchers to your location. Waterproof matches are a good choice.
9. Candle or fire starter. You can use a candle to melt water that will keep you from dehydrating; in cold weather dehydration is an invitation to frostbite and hypothermia.
10. First aid kit. Buy one at

Please see page 17

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