

Connections

October 2017

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 21, Issue 10

October is Cyber Security Month!

Your electric cooperative earns national grant to improve its cyber security plans



Federated Rural Electric departments recently evaluated processes, equipment and vendors involved in cyber security.



Brown County REA staff and vendors discussed cyber security topics with scores being given for different answers.

Your electric cooperative, along with four other Minnesota neighboring electric cooperatives, are part of a national program called the Rural Cooperative Cyber Security Capabilities Program (RC3).

The news headlines remind us of scary cyber security issues with Target, Russian hackers and most recently, Equifax. Rest assured, your electric cooperative and the electric industry in general, are involved in cyber security efforts to protect the national grid and your personal data. The cooperative's wholesale power suppliers participate in national annual cyber security tests and have procedures in place for monitoring, detecting and responding to cyber incidents. However, smaller

electric cooperatives do not necessarily have a fulltime information technology (IT) person. This is why the Department of Energy (DOE) awarded the grant to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) to work with smaller electric cooperatives.

Your cooperative's department managers participated in a two-day training session last month. Questions were answered about protecting members and employees' personal data and operational equipment. Areas of focus included: identify, protect, detect, respond and recover. The co-op's response to each question provides a benchmark score so the co-op can record changes and document progress as its cyber security plan evolves.

"Cybersecurity requires a team effort" stated Dr. Cynthia Hsu, NRECA RC3 Team Lead. "More than 10,000 software vulnerabilities nationwide were discovered so far this year. We face challenges of embedded vulnerabilities in computer chips, to malware and ransomware, to websites selling passwords. This involves understanding your vulnerabilities, risks and building layers of defense."

Your electric cooperative also worked with its billing software vendor and IT consultant to record what is being done, what should be the next focus and the focus for next year too.

Federated and Brown County REA's customer information system provider, Professional Computer

— Continued on Page 7

At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

**Add Heartland
Security to your
fall do list for
safety & security**

Got the cabin closed up? Have plans for going south this winter? Your elderly parents need a medical alert system before the cold arrives? Heartland Security, a subsidiary of your electric co-op, can help with a security system, medical alert or furnace failure detect. Call Heartland at 1-888-264-6380.



Energy Wise

Save with programmable thermostats

A programmable thermostat helps make it easy for you to save by offering pre-programmed settings to regulate your home's temperature in both summer and winter — when you are home, asleep, or away.

The key is to establish a program that automatically reduces heating and cooling in your home when you don't need as much. An example of pre-programmed settings for a programmable thermostat are shown on the table below.

Proper thermostat use

- Keep the temperature set at its energy savings set-points for long periods of time (at least eight hours): during the day, when no one is at home, through the night and after bedtime.

- All thermostats let you temporarily make an area warmer or cooler without erasing the pre-set programming. This override is cancelled automatically at the next program period. You use more energy (and end up paying more on energy bills) if you consistently "hold" or over-ride the pre-programmed settings.

- Units typically have two types of hold features: (a) hold/permanent/vacation; (b) temporary. Avoid using the hold/permanent/vacation feature to manage day-to-day temperature settings. "Hold" or "vacation" features are best when you're planning to be away for an extended period. Set this feature at a constant, efficient temperature (i.e. several degrees warmer temperature in summer, several degrees cooler during winter), when going away for the weekend or on vacation. You'll waste energy and money if you leave the "hold" feature at the comfort setting while you're away.

- Cranking your unit up to 90 degrees or down to 40 degrees, for example,



WiFi/Smart thermostats save you money on your energy bill and when you buy one! Your electric cooperative offers a rebate on WiFi/Smart thermostats. Find the rebate form on the co-op's website for eligible models and brands; otherwise, call or e-mail us to request the rebate. Include a copy of your receipt.

will not heat or cool your house any faster. Most thermostats begin to heat or cool at a set time to reach set point temperatures sometime thereafter. Units with adaptive (smart/intelligent) recovery features are an exception to this rule. Adaptive recovery units constantly calculate the time required to heat or cool the house so it reaches that temperature when the homeowner programmed it. By "examining" the performance of the past few days the thermostat keeps track of the seasons for the greatest savings and comfort.

- Many homes use just one thermostat to control the whole house. If your home has multiple heating or cooling zones, you'll need a programmed setback thermostat for each zone to maximize comfort and savings.

- A handy feature with some thermostats is a smart phone app so you can change the temp as you head for home or check on the temp if you are away.

- If your programmable thermostat runs on batteries, change the batteries yearly. Some units indicate when batteries must be changed. (b)

Setting	Time	Heating	Cooling
Wake	6 a.m.	< 70° F	> 78° F
Day	8 a.m.	Setback at least 8° F	Setup at least 7° F
Evening	6 p.m.	< 70° F	> 78° F
Sleep	10 p.m.	Setback at least 8° F	Setup at least 4° F

Energy Tips

Set back and save!

The average household spends more than \$2,000 a year on energy bills — nearly half goes to heating and cooling. Homeowners can save about \$180 a year by properly setting their programmable thermostats and maintaining those settings. Thermostats range in cost from approximately \$150-\$250, meaning they pay for themselves in about two years. (b)

Wake up to a sunrise in your room!

Tired of waking up to a screeching alarm clock in a dark room? Try a gentler method with the Wake Up Light Sunrise Digital Alarm Clock.

The Wake Up clock will wake you up by gradually lighting the room with natural light. It will do the opposite at night to help you fall asleep.

Other features include:

- Natural sounds and radio — you can wake up along with sunlight and various natural sounds, such as birds, forests, sea waves, etc. Plus, set your favorite FM radio channel as the alarm sound.

- Colors and adjustable brightness — choose to light your room with six color lights and an adjustable warm light. You can set the color light to auto-converse one by one or choose your favorite. The warm light has ten brightness levels.



Make your morning more colorful with the Wake Up Light Sunrise Digital Alarm Clock. Wake up to gradual lighting, the radio or even bird songs.

- The clock is powered by a USB cable, which makes it great for traveling. The clock also comes with a power adapter to plug into the wall.

The Wake Up Light Sunrise Digital Alarm Clock is available on Amazon.com for approximately \$40. Wake up bright and cheerful! ☺

Safety

Harvest crops — not power line poles

As farmers return to the fields for fall harvest, your electric co-op would like to remind everyone to watch out for electric poles when working to bring in the crops.

Each year it seems more and more poles are damaged as farming equipment becomes larger. This is especially problematic during harvest. Not only can knocking over a pole be costly for you (the responsibility party must pay for its replacement, plus the linemen's time), but it is also costly for your neighbors. Area farmers are probably corn drying and an outage caused by knocking down poles is frustrating for all.

Look out for the green underground transformer boxes and cabinets too.

Don't add stress to your neighbors, yourself or your pocketbook. Take extra time to make sure you give electric poles a wide berth during this harvest season. Not only that, it could also save your life! Make it a safe harvest season! ☺



Brown County Briefs

Operation Round Up



The Round Up Trust Board meets for its final 2017 meeting Tuesday November 14. Organizations wishing to apply for funding should submit application prior to that date.

Fall energy tip:

When you are asleep or out of the house, turn your thermostat back 10° to 15° for eight hours and save around 10 percent a year on your heating and cooling bills. A programmable thermostat can make it easy to set back your temperature — set it and forget it! See story on Page 2. BCREA offers a \$25 smart thermostat rebate. (E)



Pick up the phone before the shovel; call before digging!

1-800-252-1166

Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees, tiling & more. You can also register at www.gopherstateonecall.org. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. (E)

BCREA teaches electrical safety



BCREA Metering Foreman Adam Fischer dressed his daughter, Natalie, in gear he and fellow linemen wear while working on power lines as part of the Sleepy Eye Safety Day electrical safety presentation. Students also watched a tabletop demonstration with live electrical lines to show the dangers of being careless when working around electricity.

Which is more dangerous to you 7,000 volts or 120 volts? Why can a bird sit safely on an energized power line?

These and other questions were answered for about 230 elementary students, their teachers and chaperones as they learned about ways to stay safe around electricity as part of the Sleepy Eye Safety Day Camp, September 20, at the Sleepy Eye Hockey Arena.

Brown County REA lineman Adam Fischer and Member Services Manager Marcia Solie shared ways to stay safe around electricity in the home, outdoors and around power lines during the event organized by the Sleepy Eye Chamber of Commerce.

Fourth grade students from Gibbon-Fairfax-Winthrop, St. John's of Sleepy Eye, St. Paul's of New Ulm, St. Michael's of Morgan, St. Raphael's of Springfield, Sleepy Eye Public and Sleepy Eye St. Mary's moved through the various sessions to learn about Stranger Danger, Firearm Safety, Germ City, First Aid, Emergency Preparedness, ATV and Machinery Safety, in addition to Electrical Safety.

Sponsorship was provided by AMPI, BIC Graphic, Braun & Borth Sanitation, Brown County REA/Rural Electric Trust, Brown County Public Health Nursing, City of Sleepy Eye, Chuck Spaeth Ford, First Security Agency, Kibble Equipment, Mark Thomas Company, Mathiowetz Construction, McCabe's Ace Hardware, Miller Sellner, NU Telecom, Schutz Family Foods, Schwartz Farms, Sleepy Eye Ambulance, Sleepy Eye Arena, Sleepy Eye Medical Center, Sleepy Eye Police Department, Stark Farmers Insurance, Subway and Volunteers of America/Sleepy Eye Care Center. Volunteer support provided by Safety Day Camp Committee, Americana Community Bank and Sleepy Eye FFA. (E)

Ready or not, winter will come

Summer has given way to fall, which can only mean one thing, winter is not far off. Now is a good time to make sure your heating system is ready for colder days ahead.

If you participate in Brown County REA's dual fuel program (a.k.a. off-peak heating), your electric heat source can be shut off or controlled on days of expected high electrical demand, high wholesale power prices and transmission system emergencies. During these periods, it is critical that you have a non-electric or storage back-up system that can heat your entire home until the electric heat is restored.

Dual fuel systems can be controlled as many as 12 hours at a time, up to 400 hours during the heating season. However, Great River Energy, our wholesale power supplier, estimates dual fuel control this winter on 18 days for a total of 108 hours. The control typically occurs in the early evening and occasionally in the morning.



The dual fuel program requires an automatic and adequately-sized backup heating system that can heat your home during the hours your electric heating system is controlled.

Control hours have increased over the years due to consumer electric usage, high-cost generation during "on-peak" hours and fluctuating wholesale power markets. Members who joined the program many years ago without adequate backup may need to add an alternative non-electric, a storage heat source or consider going off the program.

Keep your home warm and comfortable throughout the winter by taking time now to check the electric and non-electric parts of your heating equipment. ☺

Winter prep tips

- If your back-up system is an oil or propane furnace, be sure to check fuel levels in your tank. Control periods can run up to 12 hours per period and you don't want to run out during that time.
- Test the dual fuel system to make sure the back-up furnace turns on when the thermostat calls for heat. If it doesn't, call your HVAC contractor.
- Clean or replace the furnace filters and have an HVAC contractor tune up the system if needed to make sure it runs efficiently. The cost of maintenance may well be repaid in lower heating bills. ☺

Electric heat sales tax exemption



Do you use electric heat as your home's primary heat source? Are you receiving the sales tax exemption during the heating season?

Electricity sold for residential use is not taxable for the billing months of November through April when sold to metered customers who use it as their primary source of residential heat. If more than one type of heat is used, electricity is not taxable if it is the primary source of heat. Primary source of residential heat is the source that supplies more heat than any other source for the largest period of time during the heating season. See the Minnesota Department of Revenue Sales Tax Fact Sheet 157 at www.taxes.state.mn.us for more detailed information.

If you have made changes and now use electric heat as your primary residential heat, or if it has been 10 years or more since you completed the sales tax exemption form, please fill out the form below and return it to our office. ☺

BROWN COUNTY RURAL
ELECTRICAL ASSOCIATION
SLEEPY EYE, MINNESOTA 56085
RESIDENTIAL HEATING FUEL EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE

I, hereby certify that electricity is the primary source (over 50% of the heating requirements) in my residence at:

_____,
Minnesota. I acknowledge that I am responsible for proving that I qualify for this tax exemption should I be audited. I also am responsible to notify Brown County REA if and when electric energy is no longer used as the primary source for residential heating.

DATED: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

LOCATION OR ACCOUNT #: _____

Cold weather rule outlines process to avoid winter disconnection and loss of electricity

The state's Cold Weather Rule guides utilities on winter disconnections as long as customers follow these main guidelines.

Residential customer notice

An electric cooperative must not disconnect and must reconnect the utility service of a home between October 15 and April 15 if the disconnection affects the primary heat source for the residential unit **and all of the following conditions are met:**

1. The household income of the customer is at or below 50 percent of the state median household income. The electric cooperative may verify income on forms it provides or obtain verification of income from the local energy-assistance provider. A customer meets the income requirements of this clause if the customer receives any public assistance, including energy assistance that uses an income eligibility threshold set at or below 50 percent of the state median household income;
2. A customer enters into and makes reasonably timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household; and
3. A customer receives referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation or other programs likely to reduce the customer's energy bills. In addition, an electric cooperative must, between August 15 and October 15 of each year, notify all residential customers of these provisions.

Before disconnecting service to a residential customer between October 15 and April 15, an electric cooperative must provide:

1. A notice of the proposed disconnection;
2. A statement with the customer's rights and responsibilities;
3. A list of local energy-assistance providers;
4. Forms on which to declare an inability to pay; and
5. A statement explaining available time-payment plans and other options to secure continued utility service.

Restrictions for disconnection

1. If a customer must be involuntarily disconnected between October 15 and April 15 for failure to comply with residential disconnection provisions, it must not occur on a Friday, unless the customer declines to enter into a payment agreement offered that day in person or via personal contact by telephone by the electric cooperative;

2. The disconnection must not occur on a weekend, holiday or the day before a holiday, when utility offices

Local emergency energy-assistance agencies provide help to member facing disconnection

Cottonwood County Family Services	831-1891
Heartland Action (Jackson & Cottonwood Co.)	1-800-658-2448
Redwood County.....	1-800-658-2480
Jackson County Human Services	847-4000
Jackson County Sheriff's Department	847-4420
Martin County Human Services.....	238-4757
Martin County Sheriff's Department.....	238-4481
MN Dept. of Energy Services (Ask for fuel assistance)	1-800-657-3805
Minnesota Valley Action Council.....	1-800-767-7139
Brown County.....	354-3138
Martin County	238-1663
Nicollet County.....	934-5224
Sibley County	237-2981
Watonwan County	375-5748
Nobles County Family Services Agency.....	372-2157
Redwood County Human Services	637-4050
Renville County Family Services.....	320-523-5522
Renville Sheriff's Department.....	320-523-1161
Salvation Army's Heat Share (Jackson & Martin Co.)	238-9797
Sibley County Human Services	237-4000
SW MN Opportunity Council, Inc. (Nobles Co.)	376-4195
United Community Action.....	320-235-0850
Watonwan County Human Services.....	375-3294

If you live in an area that is not listed, call your electric co-op for details

are closed, or after the close of business on a day when disconnection is permitted, unless a field representative from the electric cooperative who is authorized to enter into a payment agreement, accept payment and continue service offers a payment agreement to the customer; and

3. If a customer does not respond to a disconnection notice, the customer must not be disconnected until the utility investigates whether the home is occupied. If the unit is occupied, the utility must immediately inform the occupant of the provisions of this section. If the unit is unoccupied, the utility must give seven days written notice of the proposed disconnection to the local energy-assistance provider before disconnecting. If, prior to disconnection, a customer appeals a notice of involuntary disconnection, as provided by the utility's established appeal procedure, the utility must not disconnect until the appeal is resolved. (U)

Fall is 'soup' er time for soup suppers! Share your soup recipes

Homemade soup takes off the autumn chill. Share your family's favorite soup recipes, whether it's for chicken noodle, beef, enchilada, chili, veggie soup and more! Mail to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by October 25. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Curried Buttermilk Squash Soup by Lois Lendt, Sleepy Eye

3 T. butter 2 large onions, sliced 1 T. curry powder
 2 14 oz. cans chicken broth ½ tsp. salt
 2 large butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cut in ½" chunks

In a five-quart Dutch oven melt the butter and cook onions until tender. Stir in curry powder and more butter if needed. Add squash, broth, salt and 2¼ c. water. Heat to boiling. Turn heat to low, cover and simmer until squash is very tender. Blend squash in a blender at low speed until very smooth.

Note: Another option is to roast the squash in the oven instead of boiling. Then just scoop out the flesh. Soup cooks a little faster that way. ☺

Cyber security focus increases with grant

— Continued from Page 1

Systems (PCS), plays a significant role in securing member information at the cooperative. PCS attended the meeting to describe how they are protecting that information and to hear other suggestions from NRECA. PCS was represented by Paul Reicks and John Pritchard. Pritchard holds a CISA certification (Certified Information Systems Auditor). Pritchard noted "It was encouraging to see that many of the questions by NRECA security experts have already been addressed by PCS."

NRECA will take the feedback and general scores to develop a program that can be used with more electric cooperatives nationwide. The Minnesota cooperatives will receive two more follow-up training events slated for six months and one year from now. ☺

Annual Connections Post Office form posted

Subscription Type	Rate	Notes
Individual	\$10.00	
Family	\$15.00	
Business	\$25.00	
Life	\$1,000.00	

The Post Office requires our Connections newsletter to annually post its circulation counts. ☺

#WhoPowersYou — Nominate local co-op members



The #WhoPowersYou contest is an online contest where we invite cooperative members (and employees) to submit photos and stories about fellow members who are making a positive impact in their co-op community, making their nominee eligible to win a cash prize.

Like last year, users can enter the contest by visiting WhoPowersYou.com

- Contest begins October 2.
- Contest ends November 4.
- Winners announced in December.

Only Touchstone Energy Cooperative members and employees are eligible to participate. Co-op employees are not eligible to be a contest nominee. Winners will be selected by a panel of judges. The prize winners will receive \$500 up to \$5,000 grand prize.

Locally, last year Gwen Fleace, Round Lake, nominated Cheryl Holthe, Jackson, who became one of the 10 finalists. 62 people were nominated last year.

To enter cooperative members will be asked to share a photo of their nominee and a brief description of how their nominee makes a difference in their community. ☺



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.
24386 State Hwy 4, PO Box 529
Sleepy Eye MN 56085

E-mail address: bcrea@bcrea.coop
Website: www.browncountyrea.coop
Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368
Office hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

James Mickelson, President — 794-6298
William Berg, Vice President — 354-4895
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 877-2633
Allen Hanson — 276-0691
Thomas Hayes — 228-8954
Reuben Kokesch — 359-2112
Greg Mages — 794-3540
Joel Christensen — 828-4550
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.



Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Staff notes

Our history, our future: looking back provides the path forward

“Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Yet sometimes remembering our history with the goal of repeating it can actually be a good thing. As the nation’s 30,000 cooperatives celebrate National Co-op Month this October, it is a great time to take a look back — and a look forward.

Take the 80-year history of your electric cooperative. Brown County REA was founded when neighbors worked together to bring electricity to our rural community. Big investor-owned power companies thought they couldn’t generate enough profit so they bypassed rural areas. Back then, there were frequent meetings among neighbors to discuss the formation of the cooperative. Once established, annual meetings were the “must attend” event of the year. The co-op — on behalf of the member-owners — committed to provide the community with electricity.

Fast forward to today — Brown County REA currently serves more than 4,000 members. We have returned nearly \$14,700,000 in capital credits to our members since 1958.

We understand the spirit that helped create this co-op must be continually nurtured. While times and technology will continue to change, the co-op’s commitment to you will not.

Although we started out to provide electricity, our impact, with your support, has grown.

As we continue to look toward the future, you can be confident that Brown County REA will commit to explore new ways to help our members and our community.

Over the years, as we’ve listened to you and your fellow co-op member-owners, we know that we have to keep pace as technology and consumers’ tastes evolve. As always, we welcome your participation as we plan for the future. ☺

Is your power out? Send us a text!

Follow these steps to set up Outage Texting:

- Call the cooperative office to make sure we have your cell phone number(s) recorded in our system.
- Go to www.browncountyrea.coop and register. Click on *Links* under the *Resources* tab, then select *Outage Texting Registration*.
- You will be given an outage “texting number.” Add this number to your “contacts” so it’s ready when an outage occurs. ☺

Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting September 28 at the Brown County REA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved updated Distributed Generation/Net Metering policy.
- Updated on activities from the first of three Cyber Security training sessions hosted at BCREA and attended by cooperative staff.
- Reviewed and approved the cooperative’s Limited English Proficiency Plan in compliance with federal law and grant requirements of USDA Rural Development.
- Informed of progress with underground construction projects and new underground services.
- Discussed recent MREA legislative visit to Washington, D.C. attended by BCREA Director Tom Hayes and CEO Mike Heidemann.

The next meeting occur October 26 at the Brown County REA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. ☺