

# Connections

June 2024

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 28, Issue 6

## Safety first! Powering your life, safely

While it is important to treat electricity with respect no matter the situation, the electric system is intentionally designed to be safe. Several features of the grid help to operate it safely and keep the public out of harm's way as well.

### Designed for safety

Power lines are located either high in the air or buried underground to keep people out of harm's way. Fences and signage installed around substations remind the public to stay away from energized equipment, as only qualified personnel are allowed inside.

Several safety features are located within substations as well, including disconnect switches to help employees easily see that the equipment they are performing maintenance on is de-energized.

Brown County REA also monitors unique conditions, such as extreme weather, on the electric system to be able to isolate equipment that may create a hazardous condition.

### Working with live lines

At times, employees from Brown County REA or our wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy, need to work on power lines or equipment while there is still power running through it. Our workers are carefully outfitted with special clothing and tools that do not conduct electricity to keep them safe, such as:

- Fire-resistant clothing: Electrical workers wear flame-proof and "arc-rated" clothing on the job.
- Rubber gloves: Technicians are equipped with rubber gloves and sleeves that provide a protective layer between themselves and equipment that has electrical current (or the potential) flowing through it.
- Footwear: Workers wear specially-rated footwear that is resistant to electrical hazards, compression and more.
- Eyewear: Workers wear specially-rated eyewear with side shields for extra protection.
- Hard hats: Hard hats are rated to protect from electrical hazards, as well as impact.



**BCREA line crews participate in monthly safety training to stay sharp for their day-to-day tasks. Journeyman Drew Hill is shown practicing the pole top rescue of an injured co-worker during the crew's annual pole top and bucket truck rescue training.**

- Hot sticks: These insulated sticks are used to safely perform certain maintenance activities on power lines that are "live."

### Members can help

Members of Brown County REA can exercise safety around electricity as well; keep a safe distance from overhead power lines, poles and transformers while working in the fields or transporting large equipment. It is also important to know the location of underground cable when digging. Plus, if you see something on the electric system that does not look safe, please contact Brown County REA at 1-800-658-2368. ☎

### At A Glance



**BCREA rate adjustments coming in September**

BCREA members will see the monthly Service Charge increase and a slight rise in energy charges for all rate classes beginning in September 2024. Learn the details on Page 5 and the CEO message that is found on Page 8. ☎

## Keep your cool this summer by ensuring your cooling unit is ready for the heat & humidity

It's the hottest day of summer and you are already dripping sweat. You turn your central air on and nothing happens! Prevent the panic when it comes to summer cooling with these ultra "cool" troubleshooting tips!

Your heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system is one of the most important and expensive systems in your home. Detecting issues early helps you plan for repairs or equipment replacement.

Equipment issues can affect your electricity use, which may result in higher energy bills. The age of your equipment can be a major factor in function. The lifespan of a heating and cooling system ranges from 15 to 20 years.

Proper maintenance and lower use increases the life of the equipment. To find out the age of your system, look for the manufactured date printed on the unit's nameplate. If you can't find it, search online using the model number or call the manufacturer.

If you live by the mantra, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," you could be left sweating this summer. If your system is approaching or past the 20-year mark, start saving for a new system and request replacement estimates. Watch out for these warning signs, indicating your heating and cooling system needs repairs or replacement.

### Air conditioning is not as cool as usual

If the air from your air conditioner is warm or not as cool as it usually feels, the equipment has an issue. It could be a problem with the compressor or a refrigerant leak. Contact a professional to get the issue checked, as special certifications are required for handling refrigerants. Many refrigerants, especially ones used in older systems,



**Be cool as a cucumber with a new cold climate heat pump, which is up to 300 percent efficient for lower monthly operating costs for cooling and heating.**

are harmful to the environment. Fix leaks before adding more refrigerant.

### Low airflow from vents

If you aren't getting good airflow, it could be an easy fix, such as filter replacement or opening closed dampers. If you've made these fixes and airflow is not at normal levels, contact a professional. A bigger problem may exist with a motor, fan or something else.

### Bad odors?

Heating and cooling systems sometimes smell when you first start them up for the season. Those smells should be minor and dissipate quickly. Any serious smells, such as burning metal, melting plastic or noxious odors, are a sign that your system is in trouble. If you smell those odors, turn your system off immediately and contact a professional.

### Strange noises?

Noise is associated with the fans and motors in heating and cooling systems. Take note of any excessive or new noises. If your system is making any clunking, clanging or whistling noises, turn it off and check the filter. If that doesn't solve it, call a pro.

### Running frequently?

Your system needs to run more to keep up on extreme weather days, but watch if it runs too often. Short cycling is when a system cycles on and off before completing the heating or cooling process. Contact a professional.

Several factors come into play when deciding to fix existing equipment or invest in new equipment. Consider the severity of the issue, repair costs, the likelihood of additional repairs, equipment lifespan and your budget.

The efficiency of your existing system is also a consider— *Continued on Page 6*



## Upgrade light switch to make cell phone a remote control

See the light! Enjoy easier access with your light switch at home. Make your light switch dimmable and also use it as remote control light switch by using your Smart phone.

Imagine dimming the lights in the living room without getting up from your recliner by using your cell phone. Better yet, shut off the bedroom lights from your bed using the cell phone app. The Feit Wi-Fi dimmer switch makes it all possible. The switch costs about \$23 from your local Ace Hardware Store or Menards. Otherwise, order similar switches from Amazon.

Instructions are provided on how to change it out with a few tools or hire an electrician. Always shut off the breaker first. Unhook the wires to the old switch and rehook up to the new switch. Then you download the app for your cell phone and grant it access to your home's modem and Wi-Fi. It is compatible with Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant for voice commands as well. Up to 20 of these switches can be grouped together on the app.

This requires using dimmable bulbs and requires a neutral wire. Ⓢ



**Dim your LED Lights with this dimmable switch from Feit or use the Smart phone app.**  
— Feit photo

### Safety

## Make big splash with summer safety tips

As summer arrives, people embrace outdoor activities, home improvement projects and increased use of electrical devices to keep cool. Staying safe around electricity is crucial to prevent hazards such as shocks, fires and other injuries. Follow these tips:

- Inspect extension cords before use. Check for any damage to cords, such as fraying or exposed wires. Ensure the extension cord is rated for outdoor use and can handle the power requirements of the devices you're connecting.

- Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlets are essential for outdoor areas. They automatically shut off the electrical circuit when they detect a ground fault, reducing the risk of shocks.

- Maintain a safe distance between electrical devices and water. Never use electrical appliances near a pool



or hot tub. Ensure that pool and hot tub electrical systems are on dedicated circuits with GFCI protection to prevent accidental electrocution.

- Schedule regular maintenance for air conditioning units to ensure they are functioning safely and efficiently.

Keep the area around your air conditioner free from debris to prevent overheating and potential fires.

- Do not plug too many high-wattage devices into a single outlet or power strip. This can overload the circuit and cause a fire. Protect sensitive electronics from power surges by using surge protectors, especially during summer storms.

- During a power outage, unplug electronic devices to prevent damage from power surges when electricity is restored. Consider installing a generator to provide power during outages, but ensure it is

used safely with the manufacturer's instructions plus a transfer switch to protect line crews.

These simple actions enable you to stay protected around electricity during your summer activities. Enjoy the fun and the sun — safely! Ⓢ

# Brown County Briefs

## Energy efficiency tip

Did you know ceiling fans can help you save energy? Ceiling fans create a windchill effect on your skin to make you feel a few degrees cooler. Raise the thermostat a few degrees and turn on fans to reduce air conditioning costs. Set fan blades to rotate counterclockwise during summer months and clockwise during winter months. Remember, ceiling fans cool people, but don't actually lower the indoor temperature. Turn them off when you leave the room.

## Twins Youth Clinic August 11 in Sleepy Eye

The Minnesota Twin free youth clinic is returning to Sleepy Eye's Prairieview Field on Sunday, August 11, from 10 a.m. to noon.

The event is free and open to youth ages 6-12. Fundamentals of hitting, throwing, fielding and defense will be taught in a fun and encouraging atmosphere. Equipment will be provided, but participants are asked to bring their own gloves.

As a partnership between Brown County REA's wholesale power supplier (GRE), the Minnesota Twins and the Twins Community Fund, this year's Sleepy Eye event is being hosted by Sleepy Eye Baseball Association. Register at [www.playballmn.com](http://www.playballmn.com).



## AC tune-up rebate

Keep your home's cooling system running smoothly and efficiently by having it tuned up regularly by a licensed, professional HVAC contractor, and cash in on Brown County REA's rebate. Members are eligible for a \$25 electric bill credit for the home cooling system tune-up every two years.

Complete the tune-up portion of the Heating and Cooling rebate form on our website. Submit the form along with a dated copy of the contractor's bill to Brown County REA to receive your bill credit.

## Congrats area graduates



Round Up Trust Board Member, Pat Roiger, right, presented a certificate at the Comfrey awards program to Kyla Wuertz, one of the seven scholarship winners.

## 5 WAYS TO SAVE THIS SUMMER

When summer temperatures rise, so do our energy bills. Here are a few ways you can reduce energy use and grow your summer savings.

### 1. Raise your thermostat.

The smaller the difference between the indoor and outdoor temp, the more you'll save.

### 2. Install window coverings

like blinds or light-blocking curtains to prevent indoor heat gain during the day.

### 3. Seal leaks with caulk and weatherstripping

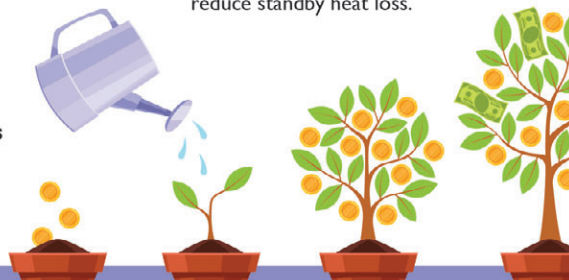
around windows and exterior doors. Air leaks force your air conditioner to work harder and run longer than necessary.

### 4. Run ceiling fans

for additional cooling but turn them off when you leave the room.

### 5. Lower your water heater thermostat

to 120 degrees to reduce standby heat loss.



## A look behind the scenes



BCREA CEO Mike Heidemann, far right, explains the workings of an oil circuit reclosure (OCR) to a group of attendees during building tours at the first Member Advisory Council meeting.



# Answers to some of your rate adjustment questions

## When does this rate adjustment go into effect?

The changes take effect on September 1, 2024, and will be first billed on the statement you receive and pay in October.

## How much will my bill increase?

For the most part, members will see the monthly Service Charge increase by \$10 and the energy charge will go up \$.007 per kilowatt hour. Members in the Large Power rate class (transformer size larger than 50 kW) pay a monthly demand charge which will increase from \$7.20 per kilowatt to \$7.75.

## Why is the Service Charge increasing?

The costs to deliver safe, reliable electricity to members each month are fixed; they exist regardless of how much energy Brown County REA sells. The service charge includes the costs to own, operate and maintain 1,530 miles of power line in the service area to serve 4,600 services. As costs to provide electric services increase at a faster pace than energy sales, the Service Charge is being adjusted to more accurately reflect the true

Rate adjustment, effective September 1, 2024				
Service Description	Current Service Charge	New Service Charge	Current Energy Charge	New Energy Charge
Residential	\$42	\$52	\$.095*/kWh	\$.1020/kWh
Three-Phase	\$65	\$75	\$.095/kWh	\$.1020/kWh
Large Power	\$70	\$80	\$.077/kWh	\$.0804/kWh
Large Power Demand			\$7.20/kW	\$7.75/kW

**\* Former Alliant Energy residential accounts will be changed to this rate.**

cost of delivering electricity to each member and ensure those costs are recovered fairly.

A recent Cost of Services Study, conducted for Brown County REA by STAR Energy Services, determined that a rate adjustment was needed

to ensure the cooperative's financial stability and maintain the quality and reliability of the services provided to members. The Board of Directors approved the rate adjustment in February 2024. ☺

# Rebates help electrify yard work

Looking to buy a battery-powered electric leaf blower, chainsaw, trimmer/weed whip or lawn mower?

Brown County REA is offering a rebate of \$25 for a minimum \$150 pre-tax priced leaf blower, chainsaw, edger, trimmer/weed whip and \$50 on a \$399 or higher-priced pre-tax priced electric push lawn mower.

You can also receive a \$100 rebate for purchasing an electric riding lawn mower with a minimum 36-volt battery.

To claim your rebate, provide a copy of your dated receipt with the purchase price and model number.

The rebate will be paid as a credit on your electric bill.

Limit one rebate per member.

If you are making the switch to electric lawn equipment, take advantage of this BCREA rebate program. ☺

Source: Consumer Reports

Making the Switch to  
**ELECTRIC LAWN EQUIPMENT**

Considering electric equipment to maintain your outdoor space? Check out the benefits of electric and considerations before making the switch.

**Benefits of Electric Equipment**

- Battery-powered equipment produces zero emissions
- No hassle and mess from gasoline and oil
- Quieter and more reliable than gas-powered equipment
- Require less energy to do the same amount of work as gas-powered tools

**Considerations Before Going Electric**

- Purchasing from a single brand can streamline charging
- Consider the size of your property and battery run time
- Backup batteries may be needed for larger properties
- Electric equipment is pricier up front

# Don't dig up trouble! Call Gopher State One Call first; watch for the colored flags & markings

No, the little flags are not lawn decorations, but safety notices.

Before doing underground digging more than 12 inches deep, call Gopher State One Call 48 business hours in advance (1-800-252-1166 or 811). You can also register your digging site online ([www.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org)).

You need to provide the address where you will be digging and what area is involved. Gopher State then notifies your electric cooperative, telephone companies, fiber, water, etc. These utilities have 48 hours (excluding weekends and holidays) to locate their underground utilities in the rights-of-way.

For example, with underground electric cable the co-op's contractor locates up to the meter. You will need to hire an electrician to locate the underground power lines on your side of the meter and property. Use white spray paint or flags to indicate the area that you need located before calling.

Contact Gopher State if you or your contractor will be digging more than 12 inches deep for:

- tree planting
- tiling
- new foundation, building or deck
- landscaping
- installing a fence or invisible pet fencing
- digging up a driveway, whether in the yard or ditch.


Once 48 hours passes, digging may proceed. Just hand dig in the areas within 24 inches of the flags. If no flags



**Know what's below. Call Gopher State One Call before you dig so underground locates, like this, can occur marking the underground electric cable, fiber, telephone, gas lines and more.**

or spray paint occurred, it means no underground utilities are in this area.

This is a critical safety step. Avoid electrocution and digging into underground electric lines. You don't want to be the one cutting underground power cable or fiber line and paying for those repair costs. Hitting a gas line is equally dangerous and expensive.

Safety first! Gopher State and your utilities thank you for your safety diligence. 

The color of paint or flags identifies the type of underground facility

WHITE	Area of Proposed Excavation
PINK	Temporary Survey Markings
RED	Electric
YELLOW	Gas, Oil, Steam, Propane
ORANGE	Communication, CATV, Fiber
BLUE	Water
PURPLE	Reclaimed Water, Irrigation
GREEN	Sewer


## Replace old central air with a heat pump to cut monthly costs

— Continued from Page 2

ation. Heating and cooling technology improvements have come a long way in the last 20 years. Lower operation costs offset the cost of a new system over time. Remember, the more expensive (and efficient) unit to buy often provides lower monthly costs and pays for itself.

Consider your options before you are in desperate need. Secure estimates from two contractors. Ask the contractor, "If this was your home, what type of system would you install and why?" The best solution for your home might be a different type of equipment, like a heat pump.

Factor in the savings available for

switching to a cold climate air source heat pump. The most efficient models qualify for 30 percent federal tax incentive up to \$2,000. Plus, check out the rebates available from your electric cooperative for air source, ductless and ground source heat pumps. See the co-op's website or call to visit with the co-op's energy expert. 



## Rib-tickling, tasty time! Share your favorite rib recipes with us

Get out a bib for some tasty ribs! Share your favorite rib recipes with us, whether it's pork or beef, whether grilled, baked or your secret BBQ sauce. Send your favorite rib recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to [christoffer@federatedrea.coop](mailto:christoffer@federatedrea.coop) by June 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

### Potato Salad by Adelle Fischer, New Ulm

Boil 6 medium potatoes and peel; slice or cube potatoes.

Boil 4 eggs and slice or cube.

Mix dressing in a bowl:	1½ c. mayo	1 T. vinegar
1 T. mustard	1 tsp. salt	1/8 tsp. pepper
1/3 c. dill pickle juice	½ c. sugar	

Add the dressing to the potatoes and eggs. ☺

### Mock Western Dressing by Barb Sellner, Sleepy Eye

2/3 c. ketchup	¼ tsp. onion powder	1 T. honey
1/3 c. vegetable oil	½ tsp. Worcestershire sauce	¼ tsp. salt
1/3 c. sugar	¼ tsp. garlic powder	

Mix together and enjoy. ☺



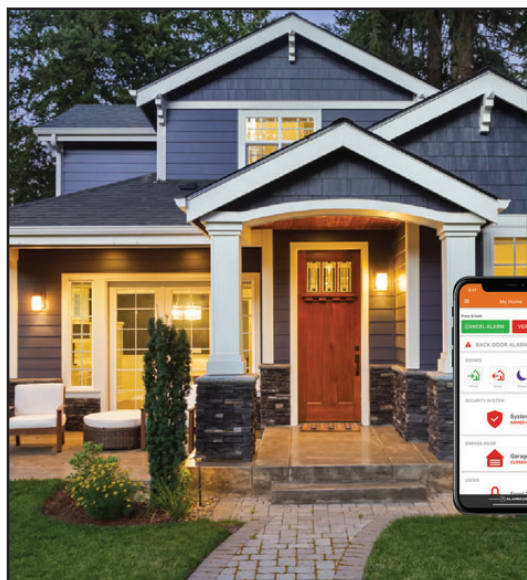
Switch to a 'star' performing dehumidifier

Stop using your old energy-guzzling dehumidifier that causes high summer electric bills. Switch to an Energy Star dehumidifier. Enjoy a \$25 Energy Star rebate from your co-op. Find the rebate form on our website. ☺

## Efficient, electric water heating



Call your local electric cooperative for your next water heater. It features a limited-lifetime warranty against leaks for the original owner.



## Security systems made easy

A security system from Heartland Security is an affordable, reliable way to help keep your home and family safe.



888.264.6380 • [heartlandss.com](http://heartlandss.com)  
Subsidiary of your local electric co-op

## Just make the 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 and tiling. Register at [www.gopherstate-onecall.org](http://www.gopherstate-onecall.org) or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺



**Mike Heidemann**  
Chief Executive  
Officer

## Staff Notes

### Rate changes coming in September

For a few months now, Brown County REA has been communicating with you about the Cost of Services Study conducted and the need for a rate adjustment.

You, our member-owners, likely see inflation in your day-to-day purchases for groceries, gas, clothing and other supplies you need. Brown County REA is no different. The poles, transformers, cable, meter sockets and countless other materials we use to maintain and repair the equipment that brings

power to your homes and other locations have gone up in price — in some cases doubled — in recent years.

Our largest expense, by far, is the cost to purchase power, accounting for 65 cents of each dollar spent by the cooperative. This includes not only wholesale power through long-term contracts with Great River Energy and Western Area Power Administration, but rising transmission costs due to the need for new transmission lines to accommodate more renewable energy.

Brown County REA's flat to declining energy sales due to weather, member self-generation and energy efficiency/conservation are not keeping up with inflation increases. The result — a need to generate more income prompting a rate increase.

At its February 2024 meeting Brown County REA's Board of Directors approved raising the monthly Service Charge amounts for all rate classes by \$10, and add \$.007 per kilowatt hour to energy charges. (See chart on Page 5.) In this process, we will merge the rate structures for former Alliant Energy members to match the Legacy rate classes. The rate adjustments take effect September 1, 2024, and will first appear on October billing statements.

We realize a rate increase impacts some members differently than others and hope members understand the rate adjustment is needed to ensure your cooperative's strong financial stability and maintain quality and reliability in the service we provide. Feel free to reach out to me or your director with questions. ☎



## Coffee on the Co-op is coming in July & August

Watch for information and a schedule of member coffee events in your area to learn more about the new rate structure and other co-op happenings. ☎



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

E-mail address: [bcrea@bcrea.coop](mailto:bcrea@bcrea.coop)  
Website: [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop)  
Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368  
Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

### Board of Directors

Thomas Hayes, President — 228-8954  
William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497  
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756  
Brad Sprenger — 317-5576  
David Wendinger — 276-3166  
Greg Mages — 794-3540  
Joel Christensen — 828-4550  
James Mickelson — 794-6298  
Landon Sletta — 439-6559  
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

## Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting April 25. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the March 2024 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
  - Reviewed and approved the cooperative's 2023 margin allocation of \$2,219,576.
  - Reviewed the 2024 annual meeting and set Thursday, April 10, as the 2025 meeting date.
  - Reviewed the USDA Rural Utility Services (RUS) Form 7 for 2023.
  - Reviewed proposed rate adjustments based on the Star Energy Cost of Services Study and approved revision. Rate changes will take effect September 1, 2024.
  - Reviewed results of the Safety and Loss Prevention Assessment Review, conducted April 11, by Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange.
  - Updated on operations activities including the completion of pole inspections.
- The next meeting is set for May 30 at the BCREA office, Sleepy Eye. ☎