"Generation in the right place is helpful; generation in the wrong place is hurtful." This is what we have been saying at VEC since 2012. With the rapid deployment of distributed generation over the past two years and the entry of large-scale solar to Vermont, this basic tenet is more important than ever.

The rule for generation is "use it or move it." Either there needs to be existing demand (ie "load") close to the generation, or sufficient transmission capacity to move the power to places of need. This has always been the case with Vermont’s transmission authority, VELCO. For the difference in the risks that two of us can monitor the safety of, you're successful. 

When Considering Distributed Generation, It’s Location, Location, Location!

By Christine Hallquist, CEO

Vermont Electric Cooperative

CEO Summary

When Considering Distributed Generation, It’s Location, Location, Location!

As employees of an electric utility, the staff at Vermont Electric Cooperative – particularly those engaged in field operations – work in an environment that poses well-known risks to their health and safety. Safety training, everyday safety precautions, and specialized equipment like utility-grade rubber gloves, therefore, come with the territory.

What is needed to create a safe work environment is not only equipment or reminders to be careful, as important as those are.

"Safety is a matter of reprogramming people’s values," explains VEC Safety Technician David Young. "There is so often a value placed in the speed of accomplishing a job. But it’s even more important to have all your fingers when you’re done."

John Varney, who is the Co-op’s Safety, Security, and Facilities Manager, dismisses any notion that he and David Young, whom he supervises, can effectively promote safety by positioning themselves as "safety cops."

"It defies the imagination," he says, "that two of us can monitor the safety practices for an organization of 107 people, 24/7. To me, it’s a matter of working toward changing the way people think and behave 24 hours a day – translating the things we all know about safety into people’s actual behavior."

And this can be done, he insists. He cites the cultural change in the U.S. toward using seatbelts in cars – the gradual erosion of resistance to this change in society’s norms, to acceptance, and finally expectation.

In other realms, though, people continue doing things they know are risky, such as standing on the top surface of a step ladder when cleaning out the gutters lining the roofs of their homes and outbuildings – despite the warnings that are often boldly printed on those surfaces.

"It goes back to psychology," says Varney. "You know you’re successful in changing how people think when they stop and make the extra effort to do what they know is right."

The gutted-cleaning example is fitting, for the scope of Varney and Young’s work extends not just to their fellow employees but to the Co-op’s entire membership across the northern tier of Vermont. For the difference in the risks that electricity poses to people who work for a utility and to the members the utility serves re: just a matter of degree.

That’s because the modern world is practically an electricity envelope. We live in homes lighted by electricity, use appliances and tools powered by electricity, and travel on roads bordered by an electric infrastructure (poles, wires, and equipment).

And where there are woods, there are potential danger related to VEC’s electrical infrastructure, and people cutting down trees only to have them fall on the power lines is one of the most common. Others include:

• traffic accidents in which a vehicle strikes a utility pole, sometimes with the added calamity of causing the power lines to fall onto the road or onto the car itself; 
• vehicles – dump trucks, for example – coming into contact with the overhead lines; 
• people digging without first calling 811, the Dig Safe number in Vermont, and striking buried lines; 
• objects like kite or extension ladder touching or becoming entangled with the lines.

Continued on page 6
Q: What is a planned outage? A planned outage is when VEC shuts the power off for a certain section of its system.

Q: Why does VEC need to initiate planned outages? VEC performs most maintenance functions with no impact to service, but occasionally we can’t avoid shutting down lines and substations. Some reasons for company-initiated outages include tree clearing, pole replacements, substation maintenance, and maintenance by our suppliers to their systems. When certain types of work are being done, we have to shut the power off to ensure the safety of the crews performing this work.

Q: How long do planned outages usually last? When we plan the work, we factor in our members’ tolerance for the outage, and we staff the job accordingly. For example, we try our best to minimize outages during extreme cold or hot temperatures. In those cases, we staff the job with as many crews as can safely perform the work to minimize how long the power is out.

Q: How many planned outages does VEC implement? On average, VEC initiates two planned outages per day, depending on work activities.

Q: Will I always get notified about a planned outage? How we notify members varies depending on the expected duration and size of the outage. For most planned outages, we either make a personal call or send an automated phone message to affected members. If the outage is expected to last more than five min and will affect more than 250 members, we will send a postcard if time allows, and even inform local media outlets. Members can help make sure they receive notification by keeping their phone number and mailing address up to date.

Q: How do I get information about planned and unplanned outages? For planned outages, VEC will notify you. For information about unplanned outages, you can visit our website at vermontelectric.coop/outage. If your power goes out and you aren’t sure why, you can always call us at 1-800-832-2667. We also post information on our Facebook and Twitter pages when there is a large or lengthy outage.

Planned Outages
Q & A with VEC Chief Operating Officer Jeffery Wright

By Jeffery Wright, Chief Operating Officer

Crews work to clear overgrowth from an electric line, the type of work that might require a planned outage.

Vermont Electric Cooperative will host its 78th Annual Meeting of the Membership on May 21 at Smuggler’s Notch Resort. VEC’s annual meeting and election are great opportunities for members to exercise their voice. Since VEC is a cooperative, members elect local representatives to serve on the Board of Directors, which sets VEC policy.

VEC is seeking petitions from eligible candidates for three positions on the Board of Directors that will open in May of 2016. Each position will be for a four-year term.

Below is a list of the seats that are up for election and the towns they represent:

**District 7**
- Alburgh, Grand Isle, Isle LaMotte, North Hero, South Hero

**East Zone At-Large**

**West Zone At-Large**
- Alburgh, Bakersfield, Belvidere, Berkshire, Bolton, Cambridge, Eden, Enosburg, Essex, Fairfax, Fairfeld, Fletcher, Franklin, Georgia, Grand Isle, Highgate, Hinesburg, Huntington, Hyde Park, Isle LaMotte, Jericho, Johnson, Milton, Montgomery, Morristown, North Hero, Richford, Richmond, Sheldon, Shelburne, South Hero, Starksboro, Stowe, St. Albans Town, St. George, Swanton, Underhill, Walthertown, Westford, and Williston

In order to run for the Board, a candidate must be a VEC member, may not be employed by the Cooperative, and may not in any way be employed by or have financial interests in a business selling electric energy or supplies to the Cooperative. Candidates must have a principal residence within VEC service territory and in the district or zone in which they are running for election.

VEC is seeking candidates who have the ability and time to fulfill the responsibilities of the Board, which include participating in monthly board meetings and committee activities. The Board generally meets in the afternoon on the last Tuesday of each month at VEC’s main office in Johnson. Directors receive a stipend and mileage reimbursement for attending meetings and have training opportunities to learn more about energy issues and the cooperative model.

Please contact the administrative office at 802-730-1172 to request application materials.

Completed applications, including a petition signed by VEC members, are due by 4:30 p.m. on April 5. The election will take place from April 26 through May 20 by mail and online and in person at VEC’s annual meeting on Saturday, May 21.

**Manage Your VEC Account with**

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VEC Staff Years of Service

VEC is lucky to have dedicated employees who spend years and, in many cases, decades contributing their work and talent to the Co-op and our members. In October, VEC recognized 25 employees for dedicated years of service at an All-Employee Meeting. VEC employees are recognized at five year milestones, and three of the employees recently recognized have worked at VEC for over 30 years! We are thankful to have such talented and hardworking people to help us fulfill our mission in accordance with the seven cooperative principles.

A hearty thank you and congratulations to the following VEC employees:

5 YEARS
MATT ANDERSON
LIZ BLANEY-BROWN
RYAN FORKEY
ISAAC GILLEN
CHRIS INGALLS
GEORGE JACOBS
GRAHAM JEWETT
CAROLINE MASHIA
DYLAN MURRILL

10 YEARS
SARA PACKER
SCOTT ROCKWOOD
RICH RYDER

15 YEARS
Laurie Desautels
CHRISTINE HALLQUIST
MIKE HEMOND
BRIAN RICARD
MARGARET VIENS

20 YEARS
MARK BENNETT

25 YEARS
YVON FORTIN
SCOTT GILLESPIE
MARK HINTON
STEVE ROSSIGNOL

30 YEARS
STEVE COULTER
DEB MACHIA
CHRIS SHELTRA

Thank You!

Newport Operations Supervisor Chris Lawson and CEO Christine Hallquist present Lineworkers Mark Hinton and Yvon Fortin with awards for 25 years of service.

Richford Operations Supervisor Mike Hemond presents Lineworker George Jacobs with an award for 5 years of service.

Chief Financial Officer Mike Bursell presents Controller Caroline Mashia with an award for 5 years of service.

Johnson Crew Leader Rich Hughes presents Lineworker Dylan Morrill with an award for 5 years of service.

VEC to hold 78th Annual Meeting of the Membership

When: Saturday, May 21, 2016 @ 10:00 a.m.
Where: Smuggler’s Notch Resort, Jeffersonville, VT
Why: It’s an opportunity for you to exercise your voice as a member-owner of this cooperative! Join us to hear about today’s energy issues and share your thoughts with VEC’s directors and staff. Keep an eye out for your official Notice of Annual Meeting, which will be mailed in April. Hope to see you there!
Status of VEC’s Net Metering Program

We know that some members are concerned that we have reached our net metering cap for 2016. Net metering is the program that allows members to install solar, wind, or other sources of renewable energy on their properties, connect to the electric grid, and sell excess power back to their utility. The net metering program closed at the end of November and will stay closed until January 1, 2017 when the new rules for net metering will come into effect.

As a member-owned, nonprofit utility, VEC makes every effort to be responsive to the concerns of members. Over the past few years, we have consistently heard that members are concerned about electric rates and the cost of service, and also that they want to see more renewable energy utilized to meet our energy needs. We do not believe these are conflicting goals. Both goals can be achieved if we consider the needs of all of our members and make thoughtful policy choices with a long-term perspective.

Here are answers to some of the questions we’ve been hearing.

Why did VEC hit the cap so soon?
The solar net metering rate of $.19 or $.20 per kilowatt-hour, coupled with federal tax credits caused a huge increase in the number of applications, many of which are large commercial projects. About 70% of our 2014-2016 reserved capacity for net metering is taken up by these larger solar projects, which generally are not colocated with homes or businesses. If the net metering program were limited to smaller projects, we would not have hit the cap so soon.

Why is there a cap at all?
The cap was put in place by the state legislature to limit the financial exposure that the net metering program creates. Vermont utilities are required to pay either $.20 or $.19 per kilowatt-hour (which increases every time we have a rate increase), depending on the size of the project. These rates are above our retail rates and far above the wholesale rates we pay for other power sources, including renewable ones. We are required to pay this rate even as solar installation costs have dropped in recent years. We could do away with the net metering cap if the net metering rate were more in line with the market rate.

Who is affected by the cap?
Members interested in installing solar who are not on the current net metering list must wait until January 1, 2017 to submit a net metering application to the Public Service Board. Anyone who wants to install an off-grid system would not have to go through the net metering program. The federal tax credits for solar installations will likely be extended beyond 2016 and will still be available to those who install in 2017 and beyond.

In conclusion, VEC’s job as a non-profit, member-owned utility is to deliver reliable, cost-effective power to members. We welcome renewable generation in the right location and at the right price. In fact, we are working with solar developers to build several megawatts of solar in locations that will benefit the grid at a price that makes sense. We hope the net metering rules being developed for 2017 will create a sustainable program that supports increased distributed generation at a cost-effective rate.

In Vermont, we need to work together to create the renewable electric grid of the future, which will require innovation, investment, and a tough look at the real-world challenges that stand in the way of reducing carbon-based power sources. This project will require considerable investment of money and collaboration among all stakeholders, including developers, legislators, regulators, utilities, and anyone who uses electricity. Spending too much on net metering now (and for ten years because those rates are locked in) drains long-term resources that will be critical to this endeavor. We must use our resources strategically and work together to get it right.

Public Notice

Vermont utilities maintain electric line rights-of-way with several methods, including the selective use of herbicides on trees and brush. They also encourage low-growing shrubs and trees which will crowd tall-growing species and, thus, minimize the use of herbicides. The application of herbicides may start as early as April 1.

Requests to utilities for notice by mail, however, must be made by February 15. Persons owning or occupying land within 1,000 feet of a utility right-of-way may request in writing that the utility

Some utilities identify their poles with metal letters and numbers, e.g., V.E.C. (Vermont Electric Co-operative), or V.E.L.C.O. (Vermont Electric Power Company). These markings are not found on every utility pole. However, by checking of several poles on a line, you should be able to find a marked pole and determine which utility owns it.

If you have further questions or concerns contact:
Agency of Agriculture
James Lealand
118 State St., Montpelier, VT 05602
1-802-828-2431

Consumer Affairs & Public Information
Dept. of Public Service
112 State St., Montpelier, VT 05620
1-800-622-4496 or 1-802-828-2332

PUBLIC NOTICE
HERBICIDE USE NOTIFICATION

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1. Take control of the thermostat. Lower the heat as everybody leaves for the day and before going to bed. Or use a programmable thermostat; it will turn the heat down for you, and it will have the house warm for you according to your schedule. It costs more to keep a house constantly warm than to heat it up as needed.

2. Drafthy windows? If you have functional windows, it makes more financial sense to improve them than to replace them with new energy-efficient windows. Caulk any gaps and cracks around window frames. Be sure that windows can shut fully. Put up interior window plastic, available in kits at hardware stores. Install low emissivity (low-e) storm windows. For drafthy doors, use weather stripping and door sweeps.

3. Keep your heating system in shape. Oil-fired systems need annual maintenance. Gas systems and heat pumps typically need a checkup every two years. And a new filter will go a long way toward maintaining the efficiency of your furnace and decreasing your energy bills.

4. Let the heat reach you. Dust or vacuum radiators, baseboard heaters, air return vents, and heat duct openings regularly and make sure that furniture, carpets, and drapes aren’t between you and the flow of heat.

5. Shut downers when you’re not using the fireplace. An open fireplace damper pulls warm air from the house, even when there is no fire. Shut downers after ashes have gone cold.

6. Keep cold out and warmth in. A typical house has many places where air can move between living spaces and the attic, and between the basement and outdoors. The result is colder rooms and higher heating bills. The solution is to seal gaps and to then make sure you’ve got the right amount of properly installed insulation. Call Efficiency Vermont to find a qualified contractor near you or visit www.efficiencyvermont.com/insulation.

7. Stop paying for escaping heat. Seal the seams and joints of your furnace ducts to stop costly heat leaks. Insulate ducts that go through unheated spaces like attics or garages. Efficiency Vermont can help you find a qualified contractor near you.

8. Light up those dark winter nights for less. Replace your incandescent light bulbs with ENERGY STAR® LEDs (light-emitting diodes) or ENERGY STAR CFLs (compact fluorescent light bulbs) and use up to 75% less energy for lighting.

9. Look for the ENERGY STAR label. If you’re planning to purchase a new heating system, appliances, or home electronics, look for the ENERGY STAR label to find the most energy-efficient models on the market.

10. Have questions? Contact Efficiency Vermont’s Customer Support team with any questions about your energy use and to get help taking control of your energy bills. Call 888-921-5990 toll-free, or send an email to info@efficiencyvermont.com.

Efficiency Vermont was created by the Vermont Legislature and the Vermont Public Service Board to help all Vermonters reduce energy costs, strengthen the economy, and protect Vermont’s environment. For more information, contact Efficiency Vermont at 888-921-5990 or visit www.efficiencyvermont.com.

Members - Be Alert to Phone Scams

VEC wants members to be vigilant about phone scams that threaten people with electricity disconnection if they do not pay immediately. The caller will pretend that they represent their electric utility and give the person a number to call to make their electricity disconnection if they do not pay immediately. When they call that number, they might even hear a recording claiming they represent their electric utility and give the person a number to call to make their electricity disconnection if they do not pay immediately. The caller will pretend that they represent their electric utility and give the person a number to call to make their electricity disconnection if they do not pay immediately.

To avoid being scammed, VEC members should call only the legitimate VEC phone numbers 1-800-832-2667 or 1-800-635-2351. If you have any concern about whether a call is legitimate, tell the caller you will call them back at the legitimate utility phone number. Do not provide payment or any other personal information and hang up immediately.

If you believe you have received an illegitimate payment call, contact the Vermont Attorney General’s Office Consumer Assistance Program at 1-800-669-2424 (in-state) or 802-650-3183 (for out-of-state callers) or by visiting www.void.com/consumer.

VEC Launches New Program to Reduce Carbon and Costs in Maple Sugaring Operations

Last fall, VEC announced a new incentive program to assist maple sugaring operators to move to a future of lower production costs and lower carbon emissions. With over 400 maple sugar producers in its service territory, VEC is committed to identifying and assisting members that can benefit from fuel-switching and emissions-reduction opportunities through new technology and customized solutions.

“The carbon reduction and cost savings potential in the maple sugar industry are truly staggering,” according to Jeff Wright, VEC’s Chief Operating Officer. “There is tremendous opportunity to help our members in one of Vermont’s finest traditional industries save money and reduce the amount of carbon going into the environment. We are launching the first step in this new program through a partnership with Dominion Grimm who manufactures the ECOWAP product, and we hope to expand the pilot project in the future to other./n
d and services.

The EcoVap is an electric maple sugar evaporator that has total recovery of steam energy with no smoke or steam stack. It has very low energy consumption per gallon of syrup with 22 times less consumption of energy than an oil-fired evaporator. An EcoVap in operation at Maple Sugar Mountain in Belvidere VT has used just over one kilowatt-hour of electrical energy to boil each gallon of sap. The carbon offset from an equivalent propane or oil evaporator is roughly 30 tons of CO2 emissions, which is equivalent to about 80,000 highway miles driven or taking 7 cars off the road.

Maple Sugar Mountain owned by David Mann, Roger Mann Jr., and Bill Baker, bought the first EcoVap in the United States. It was installed and began operating during the 2015 maple sugar season. “We were very pleased with the high quality of syrup produced by the electric evaporator, as well as the low cost to operate the unit,” stated David Mann.

Through this new program, maple sugar producers will be eligible for incentives from VEC when they purchase new electric EcoVap technology to run or expand their sugaring operation. During the initial pilot project, VEC will cover the cost of the transformer upgrade that would be required to switch to the EcoVap technology.

In early 2015, the Vermont Legislature passed legislation that requires Vermont utilities to implement Energy Transformation Projects so that utility customers and members would be encouraged to switch to fuels that produce less carbon. VEC is developing an energy transformation program to meet this requirement that is consistent with the needs of members in the more rural parts of the state.

Chuck Ross, Vermont’s Agriculture Secretary appreciates this focus and strategy. “Maple is Vermont’s signature product— we lead the nation in annual syrup production, and high quality maple products are a hallmark of the Vermont brand. Efficiency innovations and our proud tradition of best-in-class maple are why Vermont continues to be a leader in this industry.”

VEC welcomes all maple sugaring operations in our service territory to contact us about the EcoVap at 1-800-832-2667 or support@vermontelectric.coop

Youth Members - Want to Learn More About Energy?

Why does energy matter? Do you know where energy comes from? How has energy use changed over time? The United States Department of Energy has a new video series out that highlights each of the 7 Essential Principles of Energy, available on YouTube. You can start with “Energy Everywhere: An Introduction to Energy Literacy.” Maybe you want to explore the topic of Energy for an upcoming school project? Contact us if you have questions about your local electric utility.

If you work at a school, you can contact us to schedule a school presentation. Call 1-800-832-2667 or email support@vermontelectric.coop for more information.

Safety Technician David Young shows students a piece of glass that formed when a live wire was driven or taking 7 cars off the road.
A felled tree on a line shows what can go wrong when taking down trees close to power lines.

For the public, of course, education is paramount, so VEC visits school classes and finds other ways to engage groups. Consistent with this is the “Safety Moment” scheduled into the VEC Annual Meeting each spring. Over the past three years, Varney has taken time at the beginning of the meeting to discuss:

• how drivers should approach work zones for utility projects, road construction, or other interruptions to traffic flow (“That’s a big issue,” he emphasizes. “Statistically, there’s a significant number of accidents in work zones”).
• the danger of cutting trees around power lines (”Wood conducts electricity. We encourage people to give us a call if they think there’s a tree that needs to come down; often we’ll go cut it for them”);
• or other interruptions to traffic flow (“That’s a big issue,” he emphasizes. “Statistically, there’s a significant number of accidents in work zones”).
• the danger of cutting trees around power lines (”Wood conducts electricity. We encourage people to give us a call if they think there’s a tree that needs to come down; often we’ll go cut it for them”);
• and what people should do if they hit a utility pole with their cars (”Rule of thumb: stay in your vehicle, even if the lines are touching the car; if the car catches fire or for any other reason you must escape, “bunny hop” out of the car, then do the same as you move away from the accident; this reduces the chance that your feet will encounter different amounts of voltage in the ground, which is where the greatest danger of electrocution lies”).

VEC’s Strategic Plan also includes specific measures to improve safety practices by employees.

“I strongly believe that the most effective safety program is driven and managed by the employees themselves,” says Varney. “Part of our strategy is to continue the effort to have more employees involved in our internal safety effort. We set goals and measure our progress every year.”

In this respect, he says, Young is one of VEC’s best assets, partly because as a union member he has an effective “peer-to-peer” relationship with the staff. “It takes the right person to do that successfully,” says Varney, “and David is that right person. He’s a very talented personality.”

A big project the Co-op has tackled concerns the Voluntary Protection Program (VPP), in which a workplace such as Vermont Electric partners with VOSHA – Vermont’s affiliate with the federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration – to qualify for VPP certification. It’s been a long-range effort for the Co-op, and Varney feels it’s almost within reach.

When it happens, it will attest to VEC having made worker safety the priority it should be. And – like the public’s adoption of seatbelts – it will prove that by pulling together the staff has made leaps and bounds toward (as John Varney said) “changing the way people think and behave, 24 hours a day.” Where safety is concerned, nothing less will do.
Be Prepared – How to Stay Safe and Warm This Winter

The days are short and nights are cold and whether we like it or not, winter is here. Snow and ice storms are an inevitable part of winter in Vermont and can lead to downed power lines and outages. As we prepare our homes and cars, it’s also important to plan for the possibility of a power outage should you find yourself in the dark after a severe winter event. Most of your storm preparation can be set before a winter storm warning is even announced. Put together an outage kit with these common, durable items and store it in an easily accessible location:

- sleeping bags and/or warm blankets;
- dry and warm clothing;
- extra batteries;
- battery-powered alarm clock;
- portable radio;
- battery-powered flashlights;
- a phone that does not require electricity.

If a member of your household depends on electricity for life support, be sure to notify VEC at 1-800-832-2667. Also make sure you have portable oxygen tanks on board!

Once the lights go out, follow these steps. First, check to see if your neighbor’s lights are on. If they are, the problem could be in your home. Locate your fuse box and the main breaker switch on the breaker box. If you still see lights on position. If everything looks good, try turning on and off both the main power switch on the fuse box and the main breaker switch on the breaker box. If you still don’t have power, call VEC at 1-800-832-2667 or use the SmartHub phone app to report the outage.

While the power is out, the most important thing is to stay safe. Always stay clear of downed power lines, debris resting on a power line, and any water close to a downed power line. Turn off or unplug appliances such as DVD players, TVs, microwaves, stereos, and laundry machines. This will help reduce initial demand for electricity when the power comes back on, which, if too great, can overload the system and cause the power to go off again. It also helps protect your equipment from possible voltage fluctuation. You may want to leave one or two lights on so you’ll know when the power is restored. While heating sources such as a wood stove, fireplace, or propane space heater can be used with normal caution, you should never use a gas-powered oven for heating or a gas or charcoal grill inside the home. Use a gas-powered oven for heating or a gas or charcoal grill outside in a well-ventilated area. Use a backup power source, and a temporary relocation plan.

Now when winter storms take your power out, you’ll know what to do to stay safe and warm while we work hard to get your lights back on.
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