Despite damage to the VEC electric grid caused by Tropical Storm Irene -- totaling more than $1.1 million and outages affecting more than 12,000 members -- VEC was able to restore power to all its members within 60 hours. While Mother Nature spared us the worst of Irene, credit for a safe and fast restoration effort is due in large part to the combination of an emergency response workforce of hundreds of utility workers and VEC’s use of leading edge technology.

At its core, VEC’s emergency response requires the efforts of dedicated workers willing to brave difficult and often dangerous conditions to get the lights back on. Without line workers, mechanics, control center operators, member service representatives and more, the job simply could not get done. However, with VEC’s steady deployment of cutting edge technologies -- including meters that can communicate in two directions (also known as smart meters), an integrated outage management system, and web-based communications -- the human effort is now enhanced by technology and innovation.

For example, we will always need line workers to repair damaged utility poles and string new electric lines, but our outage management system helps our control center deploy line workers directly to the source of the outage. Control center operators spend less time identifying the outage, and field personnel spend less time searching for the cause.

The following is an overview of how innovative technologies helped us prepare for and respond to Tropical Storm Irene. As always, our top goal was to restore power safely and expeditiously.

Calm before the storm

In the days prior to Tropical Storm Irene’s arrival, Vermont’s electric utilities paid close attention to weather forecasts that predicted with an increasing degree of certainty that we would face serious weather conditions and possibly widespread power outages. High-tech computer weather simulations of the storm track did not bode well for Vermont, and utilities moved swiftly to be prepared when Irene hit. This was just the first example of the role technology would play in helping utilities prepare and deploy hundreds of workers that launched a monumental emergency restoration effort.

VEC employees were put on standby for a major storm event. Many employees made arrangements to be on hand for a multi-day event and arrived to work on Sunday with overnight bags in hand. A storm of Irene’s magnitude requires VEC to increase its workforce with contract line workers and tree crews in advance of its arrival. VEC’s operations staff found that it could not secure an adequate auxiliary workforce, because utilities up and down the Eastern seaboard and in New England, all bracing for Irene, were competing for the same labor resources.

A quick email to a list-serve of co-ops across the United States solved this problem by yielding an overwhelming show of support from the Midwest and beyond. One of the co-op principles is based on cooperatives helping cooperatives, and in no time, tracks were rolling to Vermont to be ready when Irene arrived.

With the possibility of severe damage and multi-day outages, borne out by what actually happened in southern Ver...
Vermont Electric Co-op

An agreement to purchase power from the end of the fall concrete will be poured for transition to begin. Shortly thereafter, construction of clean, affordable electricity will be erected. Turbines capable of producing 63 megawatts ber. Located in VEC’s service territory, 21 wind renewable generation project in early Septem increase supply after 2030.

KCW Regional Update

Green Mountain Power (GMP) began construction of the Kingdom Community Wind renewable generation project in early September. Located in VEC’s service territory, 21 wind turbines capable of producing 63 megawatts of clean, affordable electricity will be erected in Lowell and will connect to the VEC electric grid. With project completion anticipated for December of 2012, the electricity produced will power more than 24,000 homes, and will be distributed to VEC members and GMP customers.

On August 31, the Public Service Board gave the final go ahead for project construction to begin. Shortly thereafter, construction of a work road up the mountain began and by the end of the fall concrete will be poured for the first half-dozen turbine bases. Vermont workers and Vermont-based companies are involved on many aspects of the project, including on-site inspections to economic analysis and from vegetation management to road construction. Already, more than 90 Vermont companies have been involved with the project, including JA McDon-ald of Lyndon Center, Bates & Murray of Barre, and New England Tree Experts of Hardwick. To involves with the project, including JA McDon-

Director Profile Carol Maroni Director – District 3

“I have always been a patient ad- vocate,” says Carol Maroni, RN, VEC’s newest board member, representing Dis- trict 3. “And now, I’m an advocate for Co-op Members.”

Carol, a Massachusetts native, moved to Vermont when she realized she needed more space than Massachu-setts provided.” Carol had always felt a pull to Vermont, and when her subscription to Yankee magazine delivered a “house for sale” feature devoted to “The Ver- mont Experience,” just before a planned ski trip to Stowe, her inter-
est in the Green Moun-
tain State was renewed. She began writing let-
ters to the owners of one of the homes fea-
tured in the issue, and then purchased their home on 68 acres along an unpaved stretch of road in Craftsbury.

played the interactive process of those fo-
rusting Carol’s understanding of power supply and demand, while spark-
ing an increased interest in energy policy. “I love that our legislative people are so reachable,” she said. “I’ve always been a Vermont politician, and I love that people have a voice.”

Carol had dis-
cussed the forum and her interest in Vermont Electric Cooperative’s Mark Woodward, who encour-aged her to run for a position on the VEC Board. At the time, there was not a seat open in Carol’s dis-
trict, so her direct in-
volvement was delayed.

Carol attended the VEC board meeting in April 2011, where the board discussed and voted against a new contract with Vermont Yankee. She remembers feeling disappointed that the District 3 director was not at the meeting, she wanted to meet her Board representa-tive. Following the meeting, she discov-
ered that her representative had resigned her board seat that morning. Carol decid-ed to run for the vacant seat, and earned the position in a seven-way race during a special election this summer. Carol will serve on both the Governance and Finance Committees of the board.

Carol says that she believes her po-
sition on wind turbines on ridgelines set her apart from the other candidates in the election. “I didn’t want my position on wind turbines to be an issue. I would rather see a person I’d meet would ask about the tur-
bines, and a large majority told me they were against them, so I came out against the project.”

Carol’s own home is located within three miles of the Kingdom Community Wind project, and within six miles of the northern-most turbines, she said. Carol feels that the requirements set forth by the State of Vermont to mar-
de that 20 percent of the power supply be from renewable sources by 2017 is pushing utilities to move too quickly on development of new projects—projects that will ultimately change Vermont’s ridgelines. “The hard part is who knows what the truth is? Who really knows? Be-fore we even know what’s happening in Sheffield, Lowell is happening. I wish we could just slow down.”

Carol roots as an advocate show as she speaks passionately about wanting to be a voice for the Members of District 3. “I really want to hear from people. I want to know what people are thinking and feeling. I want people to feel comfortable calling their representative. I want to be who the Co-op is a truly is a Co-op,” she said.

At this time, Carol says her role will be to ensure members have a voice in deci-
sion-making, and that there will be all venues of information. “It’s good that I don’t mind asking questions,” she said. “We need to make sure that people have information, and that we listen to their concerns.”
VEC Seeks Eastern Zone Director

VEC is seeking applications from qualifying candidates for a vacant position on its twelve member Board of Directors. The Eastern Zone Director at Large position became vacant with the death in July of long-time director, Bert Lague. The Board of Directors will appoint a VEC member to serve in this role until a successor is elected at VEC’s next annual meeting in May.

In order to be considered for appointment, interested VEC members should file an application by November 4, 2011. In accordance with board policy, applicants will be reviewed by the Director Search and Selection Committee which consists of three Board members appointed by President Tom Bailey. The committee will review applications and make recommendations to the full Board. The Board will then vote to appoint a qualified individual recommended by the committee.

VEC is seeking candidates who have the ability and time to fulfill the responsibilities of the Board which includes participating in all monthly Board meetings and committee activities. Board members are democratically elected by VEC members in their district or zone. The Board of Directors meets in the afternoon on the last Tuesday of each month at VEC’s main office in Johnson.

Persons applying for positions must be VEC members, may not be employed by the Cooperative, and may not in any way be employed by or have financial interest in a business selling electric energy or supplies to the Cooperative. Candidates must have a principal residence in the Eastern Zone of the service territory.

Below is a list of the towns that make up the Eastern Zone:


Please contact the administrative office at 802-730.1172 to request application materials. Completed applications are due by 4:30 p.m. on November 4, 2011. It is expected that the appointment will be made at the Board of Directors meeting on November 29, 2011.

For more information please visit our website at www.vermontelectric.coop.

Transmission Project Update

The Public Service Board (PSB) granted final approval in late August for VEC to move ahead with a major transmission system upgrade in the Jay, Westminster, and Lowell area, voted on by VEC members in July. At the same time, Green Mountain Power’s Kingdom Community Wind (KCW) project also received final authorization to proceed and construction began in early September.

More than 40 years old and last upgraded in 1969, this portion of VEC’s electric grid is past its optimal, reliable life. It also services communities that have seen growth in residential demand, along with growth at the area’s largest employer, Jay Peak which projects increased demand of 70 percent or more over the next few years.

To date, much work has been done in sorting out right of way concerns along the project corridor so that existing rights of way can be widened to 50 feet. The project is located next to 116 properties along a 16.9 mile stretch. At the time of writing, easements have been secured on all but nine properties.

Tree clearing along the corridor began in September and is underway along Route 105 in Jay and will proceed southward. Construction has also started at the Jay Substation, located just south of Route 242, and the Lowell Substation, located across from the Lowell School. People may also notice activity behind the Degree Auction House in Westminster, where the lay-down yard is being set up for the transmission work.

Construction is scheduled to be completed in mid-summer 2012. Both GMP and VEC are jointly paying for the projected $12 million construction cost of this transmission project with GMP contributing 58 percent of the cost of construction and VEC paying 42 percent. Operating costs of the transmission system will be shared by both utilities during the term of a 25 year agreement which will enable GMP to move wind power from KCW over VEC’s transmission system.

Patronage Capital - A Co-op Advantage

On March 22, Standard & Poor’s Ratings Services (S&P) raised Vermont Electric Cooperative’s (VEC) credit rating to A- from BBB and gave VEC a stable outlook. Reasons cited by S&P for VEC’s stronger financial position include effective use of smart grid technology to improve system reliability, a healthy power supply portfolio, and improved relations with VEC’s regulators.

With this improved financial standing, VEC directors face important decisions about how to use surplus operating funds, including the possibility of returning what is known as “patronage capital” to VEC members.

Here are a few questions and answers to allow you to better understand the issue of patronage capital and what it means to you as a member-owned cooperative:

What is Patronage Capital?
Every month, you and all VEC members are billed for electric service and VEC pays the expense to provide that service. Patronage Capital is your share of what’s left over at the end of the year after we pay our operating expenses. In a for-profit company that would be the profit.

How is Patronage Capital determined?
Each year, Patronage Capital is allocated to members in proportion to the dollar amount each member was billed for electric service during that year.

Can I apply my Patronage Capital allocation to the payment of my bill?
No, not at this time. Your electric bill includes only a notification of your current Patronage Capital allocation balance. If the VEC Board of Directors determines that VEC’s financial health can support a Patronage Capital refund, credits could be applied to your electric bill at that time.
“We’re a technology-forward company, but the human element is still of the utmost importance,” said Liz Gamache, Manager of Corporate Services.

VEC’s call center staff fields nearly 7,000 calls each month from within VEC headquarters in Johnson. When the phone rings, the call center representatives are never sure what to expect on the other end of the line, but each call is handled with the goal of meeting and exceeding member expectations.

As a member-owned cooperative, communications with members are of critical importance—a priority that is reflected in the Co-op’s strategic plan, with a special focus on members. “We have a seasoned staff that knows our members, and there is tremendous value in that,” said Liz. “It’s not enough to send a bill once a month. It’s about providing added value throughout the month.”

She explains that while in outage situations, the call center reps mainly handle outage calls; the staff also handles a wide variety of other calls throughout the year. “Our call center reps can help members find solutions ranging from weather forecasts to investigating net metering options, and more.”

In a challenging economic climate, some members find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, yet having reliable electricity is a basic necessity. Call center reps help connect members to social services agencies and programs that can help support members at their time of need. In addition to organizations like Community Action, and Vermont 2-1-1, the call center reps also serve as a liaison with Efficiency Vermont. The call center reps are trained to handle the most common efficiency questions, but when the questions become too complicated, they connect the member directly to a person at Efficiency Vermont to continue the service in a seamless fashion.

Kathy Thompson, a call center rep, who has been with VEC for 14 years, says that the most rewarding part of her job is when she can truly help a member and she is able to make a difference. Kathy remembers a farmer that got far behind in his bills and had accumulated a lot of debt. Kathy worked with the farmer to create a plan to pay off the debt. “I kept in connection with them until the member service department got involved,” said Kathy. “Sometimes, it’s a matter of watching out for them, and just giving them a little reminder.”

Kathy explains that they now use a contact tracking system to log their interactions with members, so that no matter who answers the phone when a member calls, the information on the member’s situation is current and any member service rep can pick up where the last rep left off.

“If you are having problems, just call,” says Kathy. “We’re here to help; that’s what we’re here for.”

Angela Daniels, a call center rep with 10 years of experience, agrees. Angela enjoys talking with members to figure out why their bills are higher than anticipated, acting as a trouble-shooter over the phone. Angela explains that she can often help members figure out what is causing a sudden change in usage, even over the phone. She remembers a woman who called to express concern over her much higher than usual bill. By starting the process by talking to the member about usage habits, the member then had a discussion with her husband, and they were able to realize that the husband had left a space heater running in the garage, which was causing the usage spike on their bill.

“It’s rewarding if you can help them get caught up on their bills or help them figure out how to make changes to improve their bills,” says Angela. “We are here, and we are happy to help.”

Angela says she encourages members to take advantage of wattWATCHERS, an online tool that allows members to monitor their energy usage. “The sooner you know there is an issue, the sooner we can get it fixed,” she says.

wattWATCHERS is one of the many tools available to help members communicate with VEC. The Co-op is also using social media tools to help support communications with members. “We use technology more and more to enhance the customer experience,” says Liz. “Members become more active on Facebook in power outage situations.”

Liz explains that Facebook has been a helpful link to members during outages, not only to share information about the outage, but also to celebrate with Co-op staff when the outage has been resolved. In addition, members have enjoyed the benefit of the outage page on VEC’s website, which provides estimated restoration times to help members plan accordingly when the power is out.

The Co-op also has a new Integrated Outage System that allows customers to pay bills automatically and handle account inquiries. Liz explains that some people are comfortable handling these items without needing to talk directly to a call center rep, and the new system helps alleviate some of the call volume coming through the call center so that the reps can focus more time on members in more challenging situations needing more help.

The new IVR system also allows the Co-op to send out pre-recorded messages to members to share important information. “We’re being careful not to use this feature too much,” explains Liz, “but we find value in this feature during critical events.”

Members may remember receiving a message prior to Hurricane Irene, asking members to be prepared for prolonged outages due to the expected severe weather.

Sue Bernier, Member Service Manager, explains that technology enhances the experience. Items that are tracked included calls not answered within 20 seconds, the percentage of abandoned calls, the percentage of bills not rendered monthly, the percent of meter readings not performed, and much more. “We are held to a very high standard,” she says. “We have met or exceeded all of our targets.”

In addition to the custo members served by VEC, the Co-op also serves a number of large corporate accounts, which require a different type of support. Dave Lahar is the Key Accounts Manager in charge of these accounts. Dave is also responsible for supervising billing, the meter technicians, and providing technical support within the member service department. “I can help make sense of some of the more technical support questions about things like efficiency,” says Dave.

Dave explains that larger accounts can take advantage of an e-bill system through the VEC website. Members can receive their bill online, can pay their bill online, and can even choose to go paperless,” says Sue.

Sue explains that VEC now offers information to members through on-hold messaging. “If you are on-hold, you can now hear information about important events, safety tips, and more over the phone.”

Sue describes a set of standards established by the Public Service Board, which provides benchmarks on various measures of service, quality and reliability in an e-bill system.
have their bills calculated not only on consumption, but also demand. He explains that even if two businesses use the same amount of energy, the demand they place on the system can be very different. He uses an example of a saw mill and a mini mart—two businesses that use the same amount of energy in a 24-hour period, but in very different ways. The saw mill likely is open only for a portion of the day—possibly one 8-hour shift, for example. During that time, a high demand for power is placed on the electric system as a whole. The mini mart, by contrast, may be open for a full 24-hour period, but the demand for an equivalent amount of power is spread out through out the day, rather than concentrated in a short period of time. In this example, the mini mart would see a lower power bill than the saw mill for the same amount of power.

Dave says that he has been able to work with companies to help identify areas where they could make changes to their workflow to spread their demand over a longer period of time to create savings. He says that Blue Seal Feeds over a longer period of time to create their workflow to spread their demand to areas where they could make changes to work with companies to help identify tasks that could be moved from the first shift to second and third shift to redistribute the demand for power. “Sometimes, we can help redesign the load to help reduce costs,” says Dave.

Dave also administers the net metering function at VEC, helping nearly 200 members with their own small scale renewable energy sources to produce their own power. Dave says that he can also help members decide where to focus their time, energy, and resources when looking to develop renewable energy projects at their homes. “I can help answer questions on the available renewable options,” says Dave. He says he can also help members understand the state incentives, tax credits and other resources available to help members implement renewable energy projects at home.

“We have a wonderful, seasoned staff in our member service department here at VEC,” says Liz. “Of course, as a Co-op, member service is something that we all do here. Looking ahead we will continue to use technology to make member service convenient, while maintaining a personal touch with our members.”

Senator Patrick Leahy recognizes VEC’s national leadership role in using technology and innovation to develop our smart grid. During a visit on August 8th to the VEC Control Center, Senator Leahy congratulated VEC on receiving Power magazine’s first ever Smart Grid Award.

Left to right: Scott Bockwood, Mike Allard, Senator Leahy, Kris Smith and Alan Esposito

Remembering Bert Lague

By Robert P. Northrup

The recent death, on July 27, 2011 of Bert Lague, one of VEC’s longest serving trustees, is not only a severe loss to our member-owned utility, but of course to his wife, Jeannine, and their large family, his border patrol co-workers and the entire community of Derby Line. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

I had the opportunity and pleasure of working with Bert for many years on the VEC Board of Directors. Our mutual time on the VEC Board went back to when the utility was in serious financial difficulty because of many unwise investments in projects such as Seabrook. We worked together as the Co-op dealt with those problems and emerged from bankruptcy as a healthy member-owned utility—as it is today. And through these tough times, Bert was enthusiastically elected and re-elected as the Co-op’s treasurer and he served in that post until his untimely passing.

For most of the time that we spent together on the VEC Board of Directors, we worked together very harmoniously. However, there were times as we were agonizingly working through the enormous financial problems of the utility that we found ourselves in disagreement. However, during those times when we did not see “eye to eye” we maintained not only our civility, but our close friendship. And, after the problems were solved, we continued to work together in harmony.

For me, this is one of Bert’s most important and compelling attributes. To be able to battle over issues and, at the same time, maintain mutual respect and real friendship, is indicative of the inner nature of a person. And, in my experience with Bert Lague that was a very important and salient quality of the man.

It was very evident at Bert’s funeral from the large outpouring of grief that the loss of a member of our community would be deeply missed by all who knew him.

Long-time VEC Member, Robert (Bob) P. Northrup served on the VEC Board of Directors from 1982 – 2006 and as VEC President from 1984 – 2006.

VEC employees and board members extend our deepest sympathies to the family of Bert Lague. Bert’s leadership and friendship will be deeply missed.
Vermont Electric Co-op

Innovation” cont from page 1

Each year in September, employees reaching special milestones are celebrated at an employee meeting. This year, fifteen employees were recognized for years of service ranging from five years to forty years and thanked for their dedication to VEC and our members.

YEARS OF SERVICE MILESTONES

40 years
Shirley Messier, System Administrator

35 years
Mike Allard, Manager of System Operations

Kerry Perry, Manager of Power Supply and Rates

25 years
Evan Mercy, Field Engineer

20 years
Doug Hasleton, Construction Manager

Shawn Juarez, 1st Class Lineman and Group Lead

15 years
Donna Coan, Operations Coordinator

Nancy Tourville, Field Technician II

Janet Wheeler, Call Center Representative

10 years
Harry Abendroth, Manager of Regulatory and Planning Engineering

Angela Daniels, Call Center Representative

Brian Farrar, 1st Class Lineman

Shawn Holbrook, 1st Class Lineman

Troy Reynolds, Field Engineer

5 years
Chad Lantos, 1st Class Lineman

2011 RETIREMENTS

Also of note are the retirements in 2011 of three long-time employees: Field Technician Danny Perkins, a second generation VEC employee; Field Engineer Richard Dodge; and Mapping System Supervisor Richard Simays who said good-bye after 46 years of dedicated service to the Co-op.
Many Vermonters choose to reduce their monthly electric bills by using wood to heat their homes. Others are busy cleaning up trees damaged by high winds in recent storms. With these activities, chain saws are heavily used, and, according to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, each year approximately 36,000 people are treated in hospital emergency departments for injuries from using chain saws. “The chain saw is one of the most efficient, productive, and dangerous portable power tools used in any industry. If you learn to operate it properly and maintain the saw in good working condition, you will avoid injury as well as be more productive,” says VEC Safety Manager Les Burns. Vermont Electric Cooperative would like to provide a few chain saw safety reminders:

**Before Cutting**
- **Gear up with personal protective equipment.** Always wear safety glasses, earplugs, cut resistant pants or “chaps,” sturdy gloves and boots, and a hard hat.
- **Inspect your saw.** Check controls, chain tension, and all bolts and handles to ensure they are functioning properly. And ensure that all necessary safety features such as a chain brake, throttle lock, chain catcher, on-off switch, hand guard, stabilizers, and anti-vibration system are in good working order.
- **Keep your sharp.** File the chain using filing guides and gauges at the first sign of dullness. Consider keeping a sharpened chain handy rather than stopping to sharpen or pushing on a dull chain. Oil the bar with a quality oil of proper weight for the season.
- **Take a look around.** Identify whether hazards are present in the area where you will be working. Never cut near a power line. Clear the area of obstacles that might interfere with cutting the tree. Ensure the area is clear of people and pets.

**While cutting**
- **Start smart.** Before starting, put on the chain brake. Hold rear handle firmly while the saw is on.
- **Watch for potential kickback.** It’s the force that sends the bar flying back at you as fast as 60 mph. It happens mostly when cutting with the tip of the saw, a.k.a. the “hazard corner.” Always grip the handle firmly with both hands, hold the saw close and don’t reach, avoid cutting with the hazard corner and cut wood only at full throttle.
- **Plan the cut.** Determine the falling direction and how to deal with forward lean, back lean, and/or side lean trees. Provide a retreat path so you can reach safety while the tree is falling.
- **More tips:** Use only the bar and chain designated for your saw; never cut above chest height, bend at the knees not the waist when cutting at ground level and stop rolling logs by maintaining the shape of tree-length piles for stability.

**Danger Trees** (Trees damaged by weather conditions like high winds, ice or snow)
Cutting a tree near a power line is a dangerous activity, and VEC reminds members to call the Co-op when a tree near a power line needs to be cut down. If a tree you cut does fall on a power line, DO NOT attempt to remove the tree yourself as you may be electrocuted or at the very least receive a severe shock. Report the situation immediately by calling 1-800-802-2667.

“Reinventing” color content from page 1
be aggressive and entrepreneurial. At the same time, a co-op is liberated from the constraining need to please profit-seeking investors. Conversely, though nonprofits and co-ops share a commitment to the greater good, tax-exempt nonprofits are limited to the somewhat constraining list of charitable purposes in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

In pursuit of the greater good, electric cooperatives like VEC confront a particular challenge. Call it the curse of success: having wired up rural America in the 20th Century and brought the benefits of electricity to those in need of it, electric cooperatives must seek new defining purposes for the 21st Century. Today, energy efficiency, and the dire need for green energy in a world beset by carbon-induced climate changes, are surely the challenges that electric cooperatives can and should be poised to meet.

It is also worth noting that electric cooperatives are potentially vulnerable in ways that investor-owned utilities are not. For a publicly traded electric company, the market—is, i.e., the expectations of investors—provides a form of discipline, as does oversight by securities regulators. Electric cooperatives avoid such scrutiny. Similarly, in many states, electric cooperatives are not subject to rate regulation and general utility oversight that applies to for-profit electricity providers. Although Vermont fully regulates its electric co-ops, it is still fair to say that policymakers expect that when a utility is owned by its customers, it will do right by those customers.

The only way to accomplish this is for the members to assert themselves as owners, and for management to take seriously the need to cultivate a new connection to the membership. As the stories elsewhere in this issue amply demonstrate, VEC is a model of how member engagement can assure that an electric cooperative remains true to its founding ideals of democracy and public service. At a time when so many people, throughout Vermont and across the country, are yearning for institutions that are truly worthy of their highest aspirations, you, the members of VEC, own and operate such an institution. So celebrate Co-op Month—you’ve earned it!

Donald M Kreis is Associate Director and Assistant Professor of Law, Institute for Energy and the Environment, Vermont Law School. Vice President, Cooperative Fund of New England, Treasurer, Hamver Consumer Cooperatives Society (manufacturers), and biggest fool co-op with $70 million in sales).

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**Q: Our electric bill always seems to increase in the autumn months, especially beginning in October. Why is that and what can we do about it?**

A: There are a few typical reasons for rising electric bills as the season changes. The most likely culprit is lighting. Days are shorter, so lights are on more. The cure for this is energy-saving lighting; use compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) instead of incandescent bulbs. CFLs use as much as 75% less energy. And don’t wait until the incandescent bulbs burn out; the longer you wait, the longer you’ll be overpaying to keep the lights on.

Another likely culprit is your heating system. If you have a forced-air furnace, its blower fan uses about a kilowatt-hour of electricity for every unit of gas or oil used. Be sure to keep your system cleaned and tuned (yearly for oil, every two years for propane or gas). Keep furnace filters clean and keep vents clear of dust and of anything blocking them, like furniture, rugs, and drapes.

There’s also a tendency to spend more time indoors as the season gets colder, so people use their game stations, computers, TVs and other electronic devices more. Many of these devices are high energy users, so turn them off when you’re not using them. Also, be aware that you’re paying to keep power flowing to a lot of today’s electronics even when they’re off. So, plug them into an advanced power strip, which will automatically cut power to any idle equipment you want.

Last, but not least: Electric dryers. If you have one, and you only dry your laundry indoors in the summer, you’ve got a likely reason for higher electric bills the rest of the year. Thanks for a great question!

**Q: We’ve had CFLs in our house for years. They’re great, but now I’m hearing that LED lights are even better (run cheaper, last longer). I also hear LEDs are expensive to buy. I can’t see getting rid of CFLs that are working fine. What do you folks think? Is it worth replacing all our CFLs with LEDs?**

A: Probably not just yet. It makes better financial sense to wait until you need a bulb for a new lamp or until you’re replacing a burned-out CFL (compact fluorescent light). That’s because the current purchase price is high for LEDs (light-emitting diodes). When you already need to buy a bulb, you’ll only be paying for the difference between the cost of the LED and the cost of the CFL you would have bought.

LEDs are likely to get less expensive over time, as is the case with so many new technologies. I’m looking forward to the price going down because you’re right: They save more energy and last longer than CFLs. For example, if you want as much light as an old 60-watt bulb, an LED bulb will use about 20% less energy than a CFL giving the same amount of light.

If you’re ready to buy LEDs, be aware that the quality of different brands varies widely. That situation is likely to improve in time too, but it’s already easy to find quality LEDs by looking for the ENERGY STAR® label. Efficiency Vermont currently offers rebates on specific ENERGY STAR qualified LED lighting. Ask about rebates at participating lighting retail stores. To find a store near you, visit www.energystar.gov.

HAVING A QUESTION ABOUT ENERGY USE IN YOUR HOME?
ASK THE HOME TEAM!
Visit us on the web at www.efficiencyvermont.com or call toll-free: 888-921-5990 to speak with a customer service representative.

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**Efficiency Vermont**

Home energy experts

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**Chainsaw Safety**

**Start smart.** Before starting, put on the chain brake. Hold rear handle firmly while the saw is on.

**Watch for potential kickback.** It’s the force that sends the bar flying back at you as fast as 60 mph. It happens mostly when cutting with the tip of the saw, a.k.a. the “hazard corner.” Always grip the handle firmly with both hands, hold the saw close and don’t reach, avoid cutting with the hazard corner and cut wood only at full throttle.

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