

**WESTERN
COOPERATIVE
ELECTRIC**

WESTERN COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC **NEWS**

FROM THE MANAGER

Self-Regulation



Darrin Lynch

“Why is another vote necessary for self-regulation?”

This letter is to explain the upcoming opportunity for you, as a member of Western Cooperative Electric, to vote on who should set rates for your electric cooperative.

Kansas law dictates that the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) has authority over rate matters for electric utilities. Since 1992, however, not-for-profit electric cooperative members like you have had the right to vote whether they want the KCC to oversee rates or whether they want to self-regulate. In 1994, native members of Western voted to self-regulate on rate matters, allowing Western's member-elected Board of Directors to set rates that are best for Western's members.

As a member of Western, you are, no doubt, aware that cooperatives are fundamentally democratic organizations. As not-for-profit organizations, it is the goal to provide the best service at the lowest possible cost. Any excess revenue beyond what is needed to provide reliable electricity is returned annually to Western's members through a patronage allocation.

While Western's native customers have been self-regulated since 1994, your Board of Trustees, have followed proper procedures in setting rates: members have been notified 10 days in advance of the time and place of any board meeting when rates were discussed and voted on; those meetings were open to members; and members were notified of their right to request the KCC to review rate changes.

Why then, you must be asking, is another vote necessary for self-regulation?

In April 2005, Western, along with the oth-

er five Sunflower member cooperatives, formed Mid-Kansas Electric Company, LLC (Mid-Kansas), to acquire the electric assets of Aquila's Kansas Electric Network. This acquisition, a plan that included several stages, has benefited both the Mid-Kansas members, who are now Western members, and Western's native members.

Since 2007, Mid-Kansas customers (former customers of Aquila) have been receiving service from Western. However, another step was necessary in order for Mid-Kansas customers to become official members of Western.

I am pleased to report that the final stage of the acquisition was recently completed when the KCC approved the transfer of the former Aquila customers from Mid-Kansas to Western. One requirement in the acquisition is that all Western members must have the opportunity to vote on who should set rates for Western.

When the KCC controls your electric rates, it adds layers of regulation that increase costs and could harm reliability. In the coming months you will receive information about why your Board of Directors is urging you to again choose self-regulation and keep control of your electric rates at home. Western staff and Board will also be available to answer your questions about the vote, which will occur by a mail-in-ballot.

For more information please visit our website at www.westerncoop.com. If you have additional questions, please call Western at 785-743-5561 or toll free in Kansas 800-456-6720.

Darrin Lynch, General Manager

Keeping Warm Air in Your Home and Money in Your Pocket

Since experiencing the recent harsh cold winds and below zero temperatures, having a nice warm home in which to retreat is wonderful. The only problem is that making that home nice and warm can be expensive. It is worth making sure that your home heating system is as efficient as possible so you are not wasting your hard earned money.

Some of the more common areas to find air leaks are:

- ▶ Behind or under knee walls
- ▶ Wiring holes
- ▶ Plumbing vents
- ▶ Furnace vents
- ▶ Dryer vents
- ▶ Windows and doors



Turning your thermostat down when no one is home will help you save on your bills.

Some of the air leaks you can probably fix yourself with some caulk, weather stripping, or adding insulation. Other leaks might deem a contractor's help to repair.

There are other steps you can take to save on your utility bill and increase the efficiency of your home as well. One of the easiest ways is to make sure the furnace filter is clean. Clean or change the filter monthly to keep air flowing freely. Dust and dirt slow down air flow, which makes the system work harder and ends up wasting energy and costing you money.

Another step is to install a programmable thermostat. This can help to automatically turn the

heat down when no one is home and turn the heat up when you desire a warmer temperature. Unless adjusted, the heating system will operate according to the thermostat setting, even if you are not at home.

Finally, when it comes time to replacing your Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system, investing in energy efficient equipment will help you save money on heating bills. HVAC technicians recommend having your system evaluated if it is over 10 years old or if it is not keeping your home comfortable. If your system needs to be replaced, visit with your installer about getting the most efficient unit you can afford. Doing so can help you save significant amounts on your monthly heating and cooling bills.

Dining in the Dark: Keeping Your Food Safe During an Outage

Storm-induced power outages can take you by surprise. If you've lost power and have a refrigerator full of food, make sure time and temperatures are on your side.

If your home's power is interrupted for two hours or less, losing perishable foods shouldn't be a concern. When an outage is prolonged, it's time to decide when to save and when to toss food away.

A digital quick-response thermometer can be one of the most useful tools you can wield in your battle to preserve food. The gadget checks the internal temperature of food, ensuring items are cold enough to eat safely.

Use these food safety tips to help you minimizing food loss and reduce the risk of foodborne illness:

Refrigerated Food

- ▶ Keep refrigerator doors closed as much as possible. An unopened refrigerator keeps food cold for about four hours.
- ▶ If food (especially meat, poultry,

fish, eggs, and leftovers) has been exposed to temperatures above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for two or more hours, or has an unusual odor, texture, or color, get rid of it. Remember the American Red Cross food safety rule: "When in doubt, throw it out."

- ▶ Never taste food to determine its safety or rely on appearance or odor.
- ▶ Use perishable foods first, then frozen food.
- ▶ To keep perishable food cold, place them in a refrigerator or cooler and cover with ice.

Frozen Food

- ▶ A full freezer stays colder longer. Freeze containers of water to help keep food cold in the freezer. If your water supply runs out, melt ice
- ▶ If you keep the door closed, a full freezer keeps the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full).
- ▶ If food in the freezer is colder than 40 degrees Fahrenheit, is partially

thawed, and has ice crystals on it, you can safely refreeze it.

- ▶ Always discard frozen or perishable foods that have contacted raw meat juices.

Tip of the Month

These days, it may be easier to trim your refrigerator's energy use than it is to trim your waistline. Consider this energy-saving and maintenance regimen to keep your refrigerator in shape. Set the refrigerator temperature above 37 degrees Fahrenheit. Make sure door seals are in place and are snug when closed. And keep outside coils unobstructed and clean; dirty ones could over work the unit's compressor.

