



An Equal Opportunity Provider & Employer

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

P.O. Box 278, WaKeeney, KS 67672
800-456-6720

www.westerncoop.com

www.facebook.com/WesternCoopElectric

WESTERN COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC

NEWS

Western Cooperative Electric, Inc.

Board of Trustees

Craig Crossland
President

Terry Hobbs
Vice President

Richard Schaus
Secretary-Treasurer

Landon Heier
Trustee

Frank Joy
Trustee

Marvin Keller
Trustee

Charles Luetters
Trustee

Susan Rohleder
Trustee

Dale Weinhold
Trustee

General Manager

Tom Ruth
General Manager

Contact Us

635 S. 13th Street
P.O. Box 278, WaKeeney, KS 67672
785-743-5561
FAX: 785-743-2717
www.westerncoop.com

Like us on Facebook

Be sure to LIKE us on Facebook! Just go to www.facebook.com/WesternCoopElectric to find co-op news, energy tips, photos from co-op events and more!



FROM THE MANAGER

Empowering our Consumer-Members through Technology



Tom Ruth

Throughout the past several months, we have communicated some of the benefits and improvements generated by converting to a new software

system. While this transition began last December, Western was excited to launch the customer care and billing portion on June 14.

First I would like to thank our dedicated employees and staff. A software conversion of this magnitude does not happen overnight. It took many extra hours of training and a commitment to the future of Western to allow for such a successful implementation.

Our new customer care and billing system allows our consumer-members to have more information than ever before and the ability to interact with their co-op in a modern way.

The SmartHub platform is one of the most significant benefits we are pleased to offer our consumer-members. SmartHub is an easy, convenient control center for all your account needs. You can pay your bill, view your electricity usage and billing history, report outages, and more, all from your computer, phone, or tablet.

Along with all of the excellent consumer-facing products and services, Western will have a new bill design starting with the July bills. To familiarize yourself with the new bill design, take a few moments to review the "How to Read your Bill"

Continued on page 16B ▶



HAPPY
★
4TH OF JULY
★★★
INDEPENDENCE DAY

Our office will be closed on Monday, July 5, for the holiday.

Empowering our Consumer-Members through Technology

Continued from page 16A ►

article. This new bill design gives our consumer-members more information on their electric accounts than ever before.

By understanding your electric usage, we hope to educate our consumer-members on when and where they can use electricity more efficiently and ultimately save money.

The next portion of the software rollout will take place in December, with the addition of a new outage management system that includes a real-time outage map. The outage map function will give our consumer-members an up-to-the-minute overview of when and how many outages are occurring on the system. The new outage management system will also allow our linemen to better coordinate and effectively restore outages.

The lasting benefits of this software conversion will give our consumer-members the convenience and information that will serve as a foundation for the future of your electric cooperative. As the energy industry continues to evolve, Western is striving to take advantage of technological advances to better serve our consumer-members and reduce costs in the process.

For Western to meet our goal of finding new ways to serve our members, we must continue to evolve with our industry and make operational adjustments as we strive for a balance of cost reduction and a brighter future for our consumer-members.

Smith Retires After 16 Years With Western

Customer Service Representative

SANDY SMITH recently retired after 16 years with Western Cooperative. Always a friendly voice, Smith was dedicated to helping Western's consumer-members with any questions or issues they were experiencing.

"It doesn't feel like it has been that long ago when I started working for Western," said Smith. "Over the past few years, things had started to change quite a bit from when I started. Now, we do so much more on our computers. The days of keeping handwritten ledgers or looking up customers on the Rolodex are gone."

During her time with Western, Smith focused on assisting oilfield consumer-members in the native portion of Western's service territory.

"Sandy will be missed," said Office Manager Christina Lowry. "She always had a positive presence in the office, and helping people was her main concern."



Sandy Smith (right) pictured with Colleen Klein recently retired after serving as a customer service representative for 16 years.

Smith was hired a few years before the Aquilla acquisition in 2007 that nearly doubled the size of Western's membership and added linemen outposts in Plainville, Ellsworth and Olmitz.

"It was a busy time, that's for sure," Smith recalled. "We had to help our new members through the transition and let them know the benefits of being part of an electric co-op."

Smith, a resident of Hays, looks forward to spending more time with her family during her retirement, "I won't miss the commute to the office on those winter days, but I will miss all the great people I worked with, and I'm excited to start this new chapter in my life," said Smith.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY Tip of the Month

During summer months, run large appliances that emit heat (like clothes dryers and dishwashers) during the evening when it's cooler. This will minimize indoor heat during the day when outdoor temperatures are highest.

SOURCE: NRECA



Don't Fall Victim to Utility Scams

Millions of Americans are targeted by scammers every day through phone calls, emails, text messages, online or in person. Scammers' tactics can change daily, which is why consumers need to stay on top of the latest scam reports from local and national news outlets, as well as your local utility companies.

Just last month, Western Cooperative members were targeted through a phone scam in which the scammers demanded immediate payment and threatened to shut off power if the money was not received. Remember, Western will never call you and demand immediate payment without notice.

We want you to be aware of two trending scam tactics. One is the overpayment trick, which occurs when a scammer contacts you and claims that you have overpaid your utility bill. The scammer will say they need your personal banking information to deposit the credit back to your checking account. Don't fall for this scam! If you make an overpayment on your energy bill, Western will automatically apply the credit to your account, which will carry over to your next billing cycle. Another trending scam is smishing (short for SMS phishing). Many consumers know to watch out for suspicious emails, but we tend to trust text messages sent to our smartphones. Always question suspicious texts, especially from someone claiming to represent a utility. Western will only send you important updates via text if you've signed up for SmartHub. These are just a couple examples of trending scams, so it is important to watch for any red flags.

Here are a few reminders on how to take control of the situation when you've been targeted by a scammer:

- ▶ Take your time. Utility scammers try to create a sense of urgency so you'll

act fast and hand over personal information, especially over the phone. Take a moment to think about the situation before acting.

- ▶ Be suspicious. Scammers typically request immediate payments through prepaid debit cards or third-party apps. Unusual requests like this should raise red flags. Remember, if the request seems strange and out of the ordinary, you're likely being targeted by a scammer.
- ▶ Confirm before you act. If you're contacted by someone claiming to represent Western or another utility but you're unsure, just hang up the phone and call the utility directly. You can always reach us at 785-743-5561 or 800-456-6720 to verify the situation.

Our increasingly connected world provides scammers with more opportunities to connect with unsuspecting consumers. Be vigilant, and please report any utility scams to Western so we can post a warning on our social media pages. Together, we can help prevent our friends and neighbors from being victimized.



AVOID UTILITY SCAMS

Scammers will threaten you with anything from shutting off your power to legal action. Don't fall victim to these types of scams.

- ▶ Our employees will never show up at your door to demand payment.
- ▶ Never give personal information to an unknown caller or visitor. Our representatives have access to the details they need to service your account.
- ▶ Demands for immediate payment by wire transfer, cryptocurrency, gift cards or cash reload cards should immediately raise red flags.
- ▶ If you think you've been contacted by a scammer falsely representing the co-op, please let us know as soon as possible.

The infographic features a blue background with binary code patterns. A hand is shown holding a smartphone displaying a yellow call icon and the text 'UNKNOWN CALLER'. A yellow speech bubble with an exclamation mark is positioned above the phone.

INTRODUCING YO

One of our top priorities at Western Cooperative is to find new ways to better serve our consumer-members. During a recent software conversion, Western re-designed our bills to give our members more information about their electrical usage and accounts. The reverse side of the bill will provide a detailed explanation of charges along with a message center



Business Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Mon – Fri
Summer Hours: 7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Mon – Fri
Phone: 785-743-5561
Toll Free: 800-456-6720
 westerncoop.com

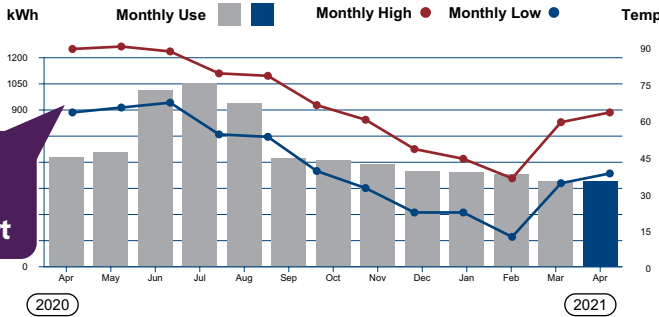
Total amount due and current billing due date

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE
\$73.24
 Due Date 05/31/2021

Account #: 99999999
Name: JOHN A DOE
Billing Date: 05/06/2021

Your member account/customer information

Monthly Energy Use



Daily Readings

16 kWh AVERAGE DAILY USE

\$2.32 AVERAGE DAILY COST

52° AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURE

Average daily use, cost and temperature

Monthly Readings

This Month 490 kWh

Last Month 490 kWh

This Month Last Year 628 kWh

Monthly Usage comparison for current month, last month, and this month last year

Payment stub to use if you are mailing in your payment, please detach this stub and enclose it with your payment



Western Cooperative Electric Assn., Inc.
 PO Box 278 - 635 S 13th St.
 WaKeeney KS 67672

Account Number 99999999
Current Charges Due 05/31/2021 \$73.24
Late Amount Due After 05/31/2021 \$75.20

180470052840001000007115000007254052520218

Mail Payment to:
 Western Cooperative Electric Assn., Inc.
 PO Box 278
 WaKeeney KS 67272-0278

2279 1 AV 0.395
 JOHN A DOE
 1234 N MAIN ST
 PLAINVILLE KS 67663-2822

5 2279
 C-7 P-11



YOUR NEW BILL

that will contain important messages from Western, including a summarization of the February's winter storm ECA Deferred Expense Recovery balance remaining. This new bill design goes into effect in July, and we hope it empowers our consumer-members with more information to monitor usage and explore cost-saving opportunities.

Your meter detail

Account Number: 99999999 Service Description: Service Address: 1234 N MAIN ST

Meter	Billing Period	Days	Readings	Meter Multiplier	kWh Usage	Rate Type		
From	To	Previous	Present					
132506208	03/31/21	04/30/21	30	35201	35691	1	490	Residential Service
Previous Account Activity			Current Activity					
Previous Balance			\$71.15	KWH-Main		490 kWh @ 0.10133		\$49.65
Payment Received - Thank You			-\$71.15	Eca		490 kWh @ -0.003857		-\$1.89
Balance Forward			\$0.00	Customer Charge				\$20.00
				ECA Deferred Expense Recovery				\$2.00
				Otis Franchise Tax				\$3.39
				Current Charges				\$71.15
Total Amount Due						\$73.24		
						DUE DATE 05/31/2021		

Previous charges and payment history

Current charges and balance

The remaining balance of the deferred Winter Storm Uri expenses can be found in the Message Center.

Message Center

- You have 23 payments remaining of \$2.09 for the ECA Deferred Expense Recovery. Remaining Balance \$47.91. If you would like to pay the total amount in full, please call our office during business hours. DO NOT add the amount above to your current electric bill. Any additional payments sent with your monthly bill will be applied to your account as a credit, and the ECA Deferred Expense Recovery will remain on future bills.
- Our offices will be closed on Monday, September 6th, in observance of Labor Day.

Western Co-op Message Center – Updated monthly to notify you of upcoming events, available programs, useful tips, and more!



account management at your fingertips

- SET BILL REMINDERS
- BILL PAYMENT
- SAFE & SECURE
- SERVICE USAGE DETAILS
- CONTACT CUSTOMER SERVICE
- FREE
- Sign up today!

Help Us Keep Your Contact Information Current

Please update my contact information

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Comments

Update your contact information

Other Ways to Pay Your Bill



Online
Pay your bill at
westerncoop.com



Pay-By-Phone
1-800-456-6720
24 Hrs/Day



In-Person
Headquarter Office
635 S. 13th St.
WaKeeney, KS
67672



SmartHub App
Manage your account
online or with your
mobile device. Visit:
www.smarthubapp.com

Convenient ways to pay your bill



- PAY YOUR BILL
- MONITOR USAGE
- REPORT AN OUTAGE

Winter Storm Uri Charges Begin in July

Answering common questions

February's Cold Weather Event, also referred to as Winter Storm Uri, caused the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) to issue its first Energy Emergency Alert in its 80-year history. With this event's unprecedented nature, many of our members continue to question what happened and why. We are here to answer those frequently asked questions and help our consumer-members better understand how the storm impacted Western Cooperative.

How does price of natural gas impact electricity costs?

Natural gas is used to produce the steam that spins turbines to produce electricity. The widespread, prolonged Cold Weather Event created a shortage of natural gas due to the impact of frigid temperatures on gas wells and increased demand for the fuel. The situation resulted in Sunflower (Western's wholesale energy provider) having to pay record-high prices for natural gas used to generate electricity, not only from its own gas units, but also for electricity generated by natural gas units in the SPP's Integrated Marketplace. Sunflower had no choice but to pay record-high prices for the commodity because electricity from natural gas units was vital to keeping homes and businesses warm during the frigid weather pattern.

Why wasn't Sunflower hedged against the possibility of something like the Cold Weather Event happening?

One way to hedge high power costs is to have diverse generation portfolio. For example, Sunflower's generation portfolio includes wind, solar, natural gas, coal, and a small amount of hydro. During the storm, when wind was not available and the natural gas prices were spiking, the energy produced by Sunflower's coal-fired unit at Holcomb Station helped reduce the cost impact of the storm. Holcomb Station saved Western's members nearly 20 cents per kWh, equating to approximately \$200 per residential meter.

Ample gas storage facilities or large fixed-price contracts are expensive alternatives that Sunflower

Western borrowed \$7.5 million so that our members can spread their increased costs for the event over 24 months starting in July.

has explored in the past but, to this point, have proven to be cost-prohibitive. Trying to balance the lowest possible generating costs with expensive hedging mechanisms creates a tricky proposition. To compensate for these hedges, members would have to pay higher generating costs month after month when there is a possibility that what happened in February will never happen again.

Why doesn't Western absorb the higher costs resulting from the Cold Weather Event?

Every month, the cost of fuel (ECA) is a pass-through cost on electric bills. The cost is usually very affordable and stable. Electric cooperatives do not make a profit on the cost of fuel, and they must recover the cost of fuel each month to remain financially stable. Cooperatives set electric rates to recover the cost for providing electric service and maintain the financial strength required to operate an electric utility. Any excess revenues generated by the co-op are returned to the members in the form of capital credits.

What help is available to mitigate the increased ECA cost on my bill caused by the Cold Weather Event?

Following Winter Storm Uri, Western's Board of Trustees approved the creation of the Deferred Expense Recovery Rider. Western borrowed \$7.5

Conserving energy can be the easiest way to mitigate larger bills

million so that our members can spread their increased costs for the event over 24 months starting in July. Western will pay the loan's interest and fees and not pass those costs to our membership. If you leave Western's lines before the total deferred amount has been recovered, the remaining balance will be due as part of your final bill. In addition, the State of Kansas has helped low-income residents combat the higher bills through programs like Kansas Emergency Rental Assistance (KERA).

What is the status of the investigations?

The Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) continue to look into what transpired during February's Cold Weather Event. We hope to provide the membership with more answers once the investigations conclude and are made public.

What can I do to avoid higher bills in the future?

Conserving energy can be the easiest way to

mitigate larger bills. Look for "10 easy ways to save energy this summer" below.

If I have an alternative means of electricity generation, how can I be notified by Western if there is another energy emergency or the price to generate power spikes again?

The Cold Weather Event was a constantly evolving situation where our social media pages and website became the best tools to keep people informed.

Direct communication will be available for consumer-members who sign up for SmartHub. Users will have the ability to opt in to important text or email alerts from Western.

Instead of paying the deferred expense off over 24-months, can I pay now?

Yes, after July 1 if you would like to pay the total amount in full, please call our office at 785-743-5561 or 800-456-5561 during business hours.

Do not add the deferred expenses to your current electric bill. If you send additional payments in with your monthly bill, a credit will be applied to your account, and the amount of the deferred expense will remain on future bills.

FREE AND EASY Ways to Save Energy

1 Close or lower window coverings during the heat of the day.



2 Set your thermostat a few degrees higher than normal.



3 Take cooler showers (this is better in the summer anyway!)



4 Use countertop appliances or a microwave instead of an oven.



5 Better yet, grill or smoke food outdoors.



6 Unplug that extra fridge, especially older, inefficient models (they have to work even harder in a hot garage.)



7 Optimize your programmable thermostat's features (around 40% of homeowners never program them.)



8 Check the airflow around windows and doors (add weatherstripping if needed.)



9 Unplug all chargers and electronics before leaving the house.



10 Shut the front door (don't air-condition the outdoors.)



Western Welcomes Jenna Pierson as Our Summer Nex-Generation Intern



Jenna Pierson

Soon to be a junior at Quinter High School, **JENNA PIERSON** will intern at Western Cooperative this summer in the member services department.

Pierson, a Collyer resident, loves to draw and keeps busy with her five family dogs (four French Bulldogs and one English Mastiff). During her internship, Pierson will gain work experience by performing data entry, customer service and graphic design.

Download SmartHub Today

Life is fast and it can be hectic, but paying your bill doesn't have to be complicated. With our SmartHub web and mobile app, it won't be. We wanted to take the opportunity to give you some valuable information that will help you prepare for the launch of SmartHub.

SmartHub can help you take control of your account like never before. SmartHub has several features that make managing your account as easy as possible. Whether through the web, or your smartphone or tablet (Android or iOS), you'll be able to pay your bill, contact customer service and get the latest news. As soon as you log in, you'll be able to view your billing history and make a payment with just a couple of



clicks. You'll be able to see your current bill, along with bills from the previous months. Making payments through SmartHub is fast and easy. The first time you make a payment,

either through the web or through your mobile device, you'll be able to securely store your payment information for future transactions. The next time

you need to pay your bill, it will only take a couple of clicks. You'll also be able to see important notices with SmartHub. You'll be able to select how you want to be notified about your bill, including email and text messaging.

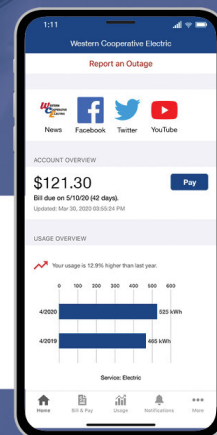
If you have any questions or issues with the registration process, visit our frequently asked questions at westerncoop.com/smarthub.



INTRODUCING SMARTHUB



On the go and in control.



SMART MANAGEMENT. SMART LIFE. SMARTHUB.