



The Pancake Feed is **BACK!**

August 20, 2022: 7 AM to 12:30 PM
REA Operations Center

NEWSLINE

July 2022

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Slammed with Three Major Storms in 6 weeks

Memorial Day 2022 was indeed memorable! Unfortunately, many throughout the REA service territory were negatively impacted by storms that hit our area in the late afternoon on May 30th. Many homes, grain bins, barns, boats and vehicles were damaged or destroyed.

“Our last significant, multi-day storm was during the summer of 2013,” said REA CEO Al Haman. “Unfortunately, we’ve had three events within the last six weeks and two of the storms left us with major damage to our facilities.”

For the Memorial Day storm, a clear line of devastation ran from east of Glenwood northeast through Forada, Miltona and Eagle Bend. There was also extensive damage to the west. “The storm destroyed three miles of overhead power line in the Elbow Lake area,” Haman said. “This line was a major source of power for many members. Rather than taking time to rebuild it overhead, we made a quick decision to install underground power cable in its place. A project of this magnitude would normally take several weeks, but with long hours and large contractor crews, all cable installation and salvage of the damaged poles was completed in six days!”

Due to the amount of cable installed, we may have to defer projects budgeted for 2022 completion. We are searching for cable to resupply our inventory, but shortages will make it difficult. “We were able to take delivery of an emergency shipment of poles within 24 hours of the storm. A big thank you to our pole provider - Bell Lumber and Pole!” exclaimed Haman.

On the third day of the storm restoration, we had over 35 linemen working in the field from four outside organizations assisting REA. “Much of this effort on Wednesday and Thursday was focused in the Elbow Lake area of the service territory,” Haman said. “Safety is always an emphasis - we did not have any reports of injuries, vehicle accidents, or major difficulties with equipment. This is quite amazing when you realize the amount of chainsaw work involved, lifting and pulling of wire/poles, and the electrical hazards of line work.”

“Thank you for all the hard work and seemingly endless hours that everyone at REA has put in after the big storms that roared through the area. You are greatly appreciated!”

- Kim & Randy



Al Haman
CEO

A Note from your CEO Continuing the Fixed Charge Discussion

Over the past year, I've discussed the need to align the monthly fixed charge more closely with the cost of serving each REA account. You've read about a possible change to the fixed charge in the newsletter and heard about it at the District Meetings, the Member Advisory Council meetings and at the Annual Meeting.

I've asked for member input and I have received phone calls, letters and emails, all of which have been shared with the REA Board of Directors. It's given me a chance to listen to our member's concerns and to explain why the change is needed. I want to share some of the more common questions and comments along with my response.

"What is included in a minimum system fixed charge?"

The minimum system needed to light a light bulb at every service is comprised of the meter, service from the transformer, and the wire and poles that connect the service to the nearest substation. It accounts for the co-op's investment in equipment like poles, wires, transformers and substations, as well as labor to provide members with safe and reliable electric service. The fixed charge supports REA's fleet of vehicles and equipment, line maintenance, right-of-way clearing, member service support and administrative responsibilities. Each member needs at least the minimum system to receive electricity from REA.

"Why is the fixed charge so high?"

The easy answer is that the cost of installing and maintaining utility equipment like poles, wires, transformers and substations are high. The most transparent way for a co-op to recover these costs is to design a monthly fixed charge to recover the minimum equipment cost to provide a member with access to the cooperative's electric system. A recent cost of service study indicates REA's cost of service is \$51.02 per month. Our current fixed charge is \$29.25.

The cost to install and maintain poles, wires, transformers and substations is not cheap. Service equipment for a new account costs \$2,900. The

cost to build a mile of single-phase overhead or underground line is \$60,000 - \$90,000. These represent fixed costs to the cooperative.

If a member heads south for the winter, spends limited time at their cabin in the summer, or has taken steps to conserve energy, the costs to the cooperative do not change and must be recovered for the co-op to remain financially sound.

"I have been a member of the co-op for a long time. Shouldn't the monthly fixed costs have been recovered by now?"

If you've been a member for a long time, there is a good chance that very little of the equipment that was initially installed to provide you with electric service is still in place. Poles and wires need replacing due to age and weather. Transformers may need upgrading to accommodate your increased electric load.

Metering technology becomes obsolete and needs to be replaced.

The cooperative is constantly at work maintaining the distribution system and clearing trees and vegetation in order to provide members with reliable service. The fixed costs that were initially incurred to provide a longtime member with service have been replaced with new fixed costs as the cooperative performs the necessary maintenance and technological improvements to keep the system operating reliably. Storm damage is also an example of a fixed cost.

"I only use a small amount of electricity; the fixed charge is unfair."

Suppose one member uses only one kilowatt-hour (kWh) of electricity and another uses 1,000 kWh. The cooperative still incurs the same cost to build the line, maintain the distribution system and deliver electricity to both members. The co-op's rates are set to recover costs as fairly as possible so you have lights, air conditioning or other comforts provided by electricity when you need it, regardless of how much energy is used by individual members.

The Board and staff continue working on a plan to better align the cost of service with the monthly fixed charge. I'm confident I can provide you with that plan in the coming months.

REA Board of Director Meeting Highlights - May 2022

- » Reviewed the Financial Report for April 2022. The gross margin was ahead of budget for the month. In addition, budgeted expense caught up to actual for some items, making operating expense under budget for the month. Kilowatt-hour sales remain ahead of budget for the month and year.
- » STAR Energy Services Safety Compliance Specialist Lisa Tickhill presented the Safety Year in Review and answered questions from the Board.
- » Reviewed details from the REA Annual Meeting held on April

- 28, 2022. 338 memberships registered with 419 total guests. In the contested District 4 director election, 15% of eligible voters voted. The Board discussed a request to provide members the option to donate to the REA Scholarship Program instead of receiving a yearly capital credit check. The Board decided not to pursue this option at this time.
- » Reviewed and approved the land purchase for the new Lake Mary Substation.
- » **The regular July Board Meeting will be Tuesday, July 26, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.**

Small Change Can Make Big Changes with Operation Round Up®



Through the contributions of Runestone Electric Association's participating members, the Operation Round Up® Trust Board recently approved **\$14,500** to assist local community programs during its quarterly meeting.

The REA Operation Round Up Trust Board, a voluntary board of seven REA members, reviewed and considered 34 grant applications and distributed funds to 29 projects and programs this past quarter. Community-based projects and programs have received nearly \$1.1 million since the program's inception in 2003.

The next round of funding deadline is August 12. Apply at www.RunestoneElectric.com.

Community:

- » The Caring & Sharing Room (\$1,000)
- » City of Lowry (\$1,000)
- » Bethel Cemetery Association (\$250)
- » United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties Osakis Backpack Attack (\$1,000)
- » Garfield Community Club (\$500)
- » St. Luke's Cemetery Association (\$250)
- » Let's Go Fishing (\$500)
- » Bethel Memorial Cemetery Association (\$250)
- » Vikingland Band Festival (\$750)
- » Saturday Art Market (\$250)
- » Kensington Area Heritage Society (\$500)
- » Trysil-Bethesda Lutheran Cemetery Association (\$250)
- » Katy's Swing Band (\$500)
- » Van Loon Cemetery Association (\$250)
- » Shalom Piece Makers (\$250)
- » Elk Lake Beach (\$300)
- » Life Connections (\$1,000)
- » West Central Communities Action (\$500)
- » Starbuck Depot & Museum (\$500)
- » Hoffman Farmer's Market (\$500)

Fire Departments & First Responders:

- » Glenwood Fire Department (\$1,000)

Youth:

- » Starbuck Kids Safety Camp (\$500)
- » Alexandria Area High School Trap Team (\$250)
- » Minnewaska Area Post Prom (\$200)
- » Alex Brush & Palette Club (\$250)
- » Grant County 4-H Federation (\$500)
- » Brandon-Evansville Summer Rec (\$500)
- » Youth Outdoor Activity Day (\$500)
- » Change Makers WCA Schools (\$500)



Operation Round Up Spotlight: Home Care and Repair Program



WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA
Communities Action

Located in Elbow Lake, West Central Minnesota Communities Action Inc. offers a Home Care and Repair Program. This program provides various homemaking, chore and maintenance services by volunteers and a full-time maintenance provider. The service is offered to help adults 65 and older maintain their independence at home. Basic cleaning, grocery shopping, yard work, mowing and raking leaves, shoveling, snow blowing and light maintenance are just a few examples of services offered. The program is available to residents of Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens, and Traverse counties.

According to Judy Oatman, the Home Care program means the difference between her being able to continue living safely in her home and having to move because she cannot perform tasks by herself.

It also means she doesn't have to worry about her dog, Gussie. Gussie has been her companion since her husband passed away and is always at her side. Judy stated she doesn't know what she would do without him.

"Lead Maintenance Provider John Jirik, is like family to me; he is a gift from God and meant for this position," said Oatman. "He always goes above and beyond for me and explains things without making me feel incapable of figuring things out. Without this program, I would not be able to stay in my home."

Home Care and Repair Program has an annual cost-sharing fee that each client pays and a per-hour charge for tasks. The cost per hour is based on net income. To learn more about Home Care and Repair program, please call 218-685-7008.



Judy Oatman, John Jirik and her beloved dog Gussie.

Avoiding Electric Shock in Real Life

This story first ran in July 2021. We thought the information was so important that we needed to share it again!

“We had a scary situation at our family cabin in Northern Minnesota earlier this summer. We have a little shack down by the lake that has power, and so my uncle had plugged in his on board battery charger. The following morning, another uncle noticed dead fish floating in the water around the dock. Something was wrong, so we unplugged the battery charger.

After investigating, we found that the old shack only had a two-prong outlet with no ground. We also discovered a problem with the wiring on the battery charger. The neutral conductor was making contact with the charger case and the case was in contact with the aluminum hull. Without a grounded conductor or GFCI to clear the fault in the outlet, the boat hull, other connected metal and the water surrounding the boat were energized.

Luckily the charger was plugged in after everyone had come out of the water for the day. It could have been a disaster if the charger had been plugged in while my family and our dogs were in the lake. Thankfully we noticed the dead fish early in the morning before anyone had entered the water.

We wired a GFCI outlet in the shack to fix the situation, and my uncle replaced his battery charger. We feel pretty fortunate that nothing bad happened with this dangerous situation.”

- REA Lineman Ross King



GFCI Outlets by the lake

The National Electrical Code requires GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) protection for any outdoor outlets. It's recommended to follow manufacturer guidelines for testing.

For more information, visit esfi.org.

NEWSLINE

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Board of Directors

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- District 5: Mike Loken, Secretary
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- Al Haman, CEO
- Sue Lundeen, Editor
- Ally Koudela, Communications Specialist

In Case of a Power Outage

- » Please call 800-473-1722 for 24-hour service. Please report any tree branches in lines, twisted wires, broken poles and if your neighbors are also out of power.
- » Be sure to have a corded phone or a charged cell phone in the house, because cordless phones won't work when the power is out.
- » Program the number above into your cell phone for easy access.
- » Never assume we know you are without power. Always call to report an outage.

REA will use reasonable diligence to furnish adequate and dependable electric service, but it cannot and does not guaranty continuous and uninterrupted service.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer

Sign up to get text messages from REA on control days!
Simply text #loadcontrol to 22300.
Msg and data rates apply.

GFCIs



Your Protection from Electrocutation



Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters have saved thousands of lives since their introduction to the National Electrical Code in the 1970s. Make sure your home is properly protected against ground faults with the correct installation of GFCIs.

50%

The Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that 50% of home electrocutions have been prevented by the introduction of GFCIs.

GFCI Protection is required for outlets installed in:

Bathrooms 	Garages 	Outdoors 	Balconies, Decks, and Porches
Kitchen Countertops 	Within 6 ft of a Sink 	Laundry Areas 	Within 6 ft of a Bathtub or Shower



FREE! BASEBALL CLINIC!

SUNDAY, AUG. 7 / ALEXANDRIA, MN
OPEN TO EVERYONE, AGES 6-12!

FIELD:
ALEXANDRIA AREA HS
SOFTBALL COMPLEX
4300 PIONEER RD SE
ALEXANDRIA, MN 56308

TIME:
10:30 AM - 12:30 PM
REGISTER:
WWW.PLAYBALLMN.COM

IN CASE OF WEATHER:
DISCOVERY MIDDLE SCHOOL

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