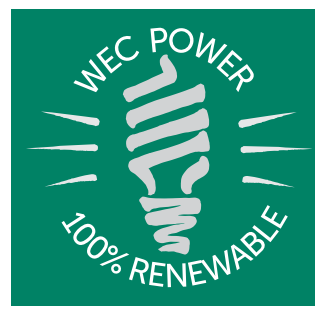




www.washingtonelectric.coop

CO-OP CURRENTS



Vol. 81, No. 7

The newsletter of Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., East Montpelier, Vermont.

October 2020

Cooperatives Offer Essential Services, and So Much More

By Don Douglas

October is Co-op Month, when cooperatives and their members celebrate the principles under which all co-ops operate, and the benefits of belonging to co-ops.

In October 2020, cooperatives look mightier than ever, as a community-centric, democratic alternative to corporations. Co-ops are required to practice fiscal health and keep money in local economies and in their own members' wallets.

When WEC and many of its fellow Vermont cooperatives consider what's good for our communities, they take a holistic view. WEC provides electricity, an essential service; but it's never been just about that. Cooperatives are about people in communities coming together to envision and create the future they want.

These are some of the ways WEC continues to provide so much more than just electric service:

- The Community Fund quickly changed the way it makes grants and gave more than \$6,000 to state organizations working directly to bring food to food-insecure Central Vermonters. All Community Fund monies come from the generosity of members who donate their capital credit refunds. At the same time, our sister co-op, Vermont Electric Cooperative, also directed its Community Fund monies toward nutrition initiatives. Patty Richards here at WEC and Rebecca Towne at VEC, the leaders of these co-ops, co-wrote a commentary about this work to support our communities during a crisis. It's reprinted here on p. 4.
- With so many Vermonters attending school and work from home, broadband is finally understood statewide as an essential service and an equity issue. Internet access is also key to the success of our future economy. For more than a year

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Act Now: State Doubles COVID Arrears Grant, PUC Allows Cutoffs to Resume

If you're behind on your WEC bill as a result of COVID-19 related hardship, the state now offers up to \$880 to pay your bills.

At the same time, the Public Utility Commission (PUC) just announced utilities may resume cutoffs for non-payment.

If you need help paying your bills, call Member Services now to get assistance and avoid cutoffs: 802-223-5245 or toll free at 1-800-932-5245.



WEC's power plant at Coventry Landfill harvests landfill gas to create stable, inexpensive electricity that powers two thirds of WEC members' homes. While the phrase "renewable" seems strange applied to garbage gas, WEC puts a landfill byproduct to good use.

Garbage Gas: The Renewable Resource

2020 marks 15 years of WEC's landfill gas power plant. Most years, WEC and Casella Waste Systems host an open house at Coventry Landfill with the aim of showing the public how Vermont's only active landfill works. It's not just about trash: attendees learn about single-stream recycling, composting, and how WEC makes electricity out of gas produced by the landfill.

Even though the event is canceled for 2020, trucks full of waste still drive up to Coventry, decomposing garbage continues to create methane, and WEC's power plant continues to scrub and burn

Taking a naturally occurring harmful byproduct, using it instead of wasting it, preventing it from entering the atmosphere, and choosing it over fossil fuel or nuclear generation: that's why garbage gas is renewable.

that gas to power two thirds of WEC members' homes.

So how can landfill gas, made up of the harmful greenhouse gases carbon dioxide and methane, be considered a renewable resource?

Is garbage gas renewable?

This is not gas that is drilled, fracked, or otherwise extracted

from the earth in order to burn. It's not a fossil fuel. This gas is produced by organics from our household waste decomposing within the landfill. As long as we create waste, our waste will create methane. That may make methane

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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It's Co-op Month: Commentary by Patty Richards and VEC CEO Rebecca Towne, p. 4.

Weatherization: The clock is running out on Efficiency Vermont's best-yet incentives. Start the process today. Energy Coach, p. 4.

Time to prep: Storm season in a pandemic: make sure you're ready. P. 8



Innovation in the field: WEC's Operations team tried out a new forestry head on its rights of way. Photo essay p. 6.

President's and General Manager's Message

Beyond Electric Service, WEC Offers Members Support

*Help accessing state grants for past due utility bills,
broadband expansion getting closer, weatherization and device incentives, and more*

State ups offer to \$880 to pay past due utility bills

Barry: During this pandemic, many of our members are having difficulty paying their bills. It's hard to see this economic disruption to our neighbors. Unpaid bills add more rate pressure for the Co-op, but fortunately, the state's stepping up to help people who can claim COVID-related hardship. Patty, how much is the state offering now?

Patty: To back up a little, we have 370 members who are 90 days past due. The total is now \$205,000. Normally at this point in time, we run about \$30,000. So COVID has had an incredible impact on our members and the amount of money that is past due. At the same time, the PUC has issued

a moratorium on disconnects. Those members that haven't paid still owe their past due amounts: those accounts don't evaporate. We're reaching out to everyone who is 90 days past due to ask them to please call us, because they may be eligible for assistance from the state's arrears program.

Also, I want to share that the state has increased the maximum grant amount. Now a member household can get \$880 toward their past due bill. It's significant.

Barry: Patty, what's the average arrears account? How much would \$880 clear up?

Patty: By way of a simple average, it's about \$560. This state grant could

wipe out some past due accounts completely. When you apply, you need to answer some questions. You have to report a COVID impact causing you to fall behind on bill payments. Again, it's a state program, rather than a WEC program, but we are here to help people through the process.

Patty: We've collected about \$40,000 so far through the state's program to offset a \$205,000 shortage. We encourage all members past due to apply. That's because anything we're short, other members have to cover. I know it's hard to ask for help, but in this case, it not only helps you, but it helps your neighbors and the rest of WEC's members. The program is due to end in November, so it's a short window. Call us and we will help you get started. Any of our Member Service Representatives can help you get started with the application. Just call us.

Barry: Please call today. And for help with rent and other bills, there are more state programs. A good place to start is with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development COVID resource page.

No October Community Meeting

Patty: Normally, every October we go out and hold a dinner and meeting in a different WEC community. It's a neighborly event, a Q&A, and a fundraiser, because we pay a community group to serve dinner for everyone. Well, we can't do it this year due to the pandemic. And we're not planning on a virtual meeting at this point, because it's hard to be as effective that way.

Barry: The real benefit with the Community Meeting is for our members to sit in the same room and share a meal with staff and the Board and be able to talk about subjects that matter to them. It just doesn't have the same effect on a screen. Although there may be some benefit of having a WEC total territory virtual meeting for Q&As, so we'll keep that idea in discussion with the Board.

Broadband process speeding up

Barry: I think it would be good for people to know that our Board and staff

Are You Past Due on Your WEC Bills Because of Health, Financial, or Other Impact from COVID?

You could get up to \$880 from the State of Vermont toward your arrearage. Unpaid bills put rate pressure on other members. Contact Member Services today to access this state funding.

For other Vermont COVID recovery financial resources, visit accd.vermont.gov/covid-19.

are continuing to work very hard on rollout of high speed internet to member homes. We've been working with the Communications Union Districts [CUDs], particularly CV Fiber, EC Fiber, and Kingdom Fiber to see how we can make this happen.

Why don't we already have statewide high speed internet? Because it's not an easy task to roll it out. At the Co-op, we need to be careful about the financial impact on our members. All our members receiving electric service are not necessarily also going to be customers of internet service. So, at this point, it looks like we'd expand fiber within our electric service that could be leased out by the CUDs and others to go the final mile to members' homes. I just want to caution that there is a lot to consider and it's hard work to make it successful in as short a time as possible.

Patty: Inside the building, it's been a big staff focus. We've got Dan Weston [Director of Engineering & Operations] assessing the line miles and infrastructure. Cheryl Willette [Director of Finance] is working on the financial modeling. Bill Powell [Director of Products & Services] has been the lead on a member survey to ask questions, like: If we bring broadband to your home, would you sign up?

A ton of work is going into this, and we're still working on the details. We're full steam ahead analyzing what we need to do to get broadband to our members, and hopefully we'll have a good sense of where we are by the end of the year.

Barry: It's been a total organizational

Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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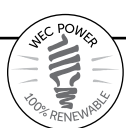
Patty Richards Donald Douglas Jean Hamilton Anne Reed Katie Titterton

The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson, at 224-2332, or visit wec.coop/board-of-directors.

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Got something to say?

Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: Co-op Currents.



effort. That's what WEC is all about. At our last Board meeting, your Board continued our full support of the work our staff is doing to make this a success for every one of our members. If this was easy, telecom companies would have you hooked up already. We're not looking at this being a money maker. We're doing what we do best, which is to support our members in our 41 towns, for whom internet is a critical need as presented by the pandemic, and to encourage economic vitality in all our communities. That's what drives us.

Patty: The broadband effort we're embarking on is very similar to the electrification effort in the 1930s. There were villages and people "off the beaten path" who were left behind as the utilities at that time electrified towns and population centers. The Co-op was established because the investor-owned model wasn't serving people farther away from town centers.

Barry: The success of the electrification movement that established nearly 1,000 co-ops in the US had the assistance of government money. We will be looking to both our state legislators and our congressional delegation to make sure that if grant funds come through to the state, that they earmark preference for co-ops doing this effort. Because once again, we're not acting to line stockholders' pockets. We're doing this to benefit our Co-op members. There are more than 200 co-ops in the country also engaged in this effort. I want to thank all the members who've sent letters and emails and responded to the surveys on the website. It's important for us to hear from you.

Weatherization and other incentives

Barry: I just attended the Energy Action Network summit. As far as greenhouse gases, go, they're continuing to hone in on the transportation and thermal heating areas. The electric industry is now only responsible for two percent of our carbon dioxide output because of the high amount of renewables in our portfolios. Of course, WEC has a 100 percent renewable



We need to encourage all members past due to apply. That's because anything we're short, basically, other members have to cover. I know it's hard to ask for help, but in this case, it not only helps you, but the rest of the membership.

— Patty Richards

power supply, most of which is in state. The state's efforts must now be directed at transforming our transportation and thermal heating sectors, electrifying them, using local biomass for heat, and building out our public transportation system as it electrifies.

Patty: Electricity keeps getting greener in Vermont, which means the more we can push thermal and transportation power into the electric arena, the fewer emissions overall.

We've seen a surge in incentive dollars for lawn care equipment. The engines used for homecare and lawn maintenance tend to be high polluting devices, so replacing them with battery powered equipment is a real win for air quality and our environment!

Also, EV incentives have really ticked up. We

are very happy to see this trend and expect it will continue to grow!

Barry: I thought the article in last month's *Co-op Currents* on weatherization was great. It highlighted the process as experienced by one of our members in Walden. This work is available to all members through two great organizations, Capstone in the central/southern part of our service area and Neighborworks/HEAT Squad in the Northeast Kingdom. Both work really well with people who don't have the ability to do this on their own.

I have one friend who took advantage. Her home is 50 percent tighter and she's definitely feeling the effect of the warmth. She had cellulose blown her attic and walls, her basement and crawl space foamed, and installed a new heat pump water heater. It's made a big difference in her life and she's on very limited income. Financing options now make this accessible to just about everybody. Please call us if you need any help connecting with Neighborworks or Capstone.



Patty: As it turns colder, we start thinking, "Oh, I should have tightened up my house when it was warm out!" But it's not too late to do weatherization programs. If you light a candle in your home and you see a lot of flickering, that's a sign you need more insulation in the walls. When you get the work done, you don't just see reduced heating bills, you actually feel better inside your less drafty house. Your house is more welcoming and warm all the way around. If you're not able to do it this year, make a plan for next year. If you've got a drafty house, take advantage of these state programs we have.

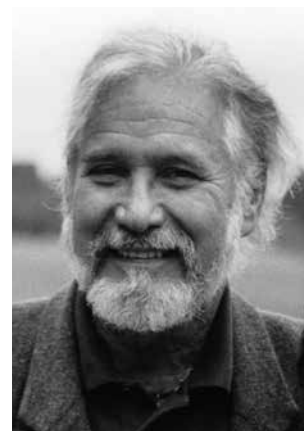
Barry: The thing Patty always highlights is we are trying to lower your total energy bill. A tighter house means you can consider going off fossil fuel or adding a heat pump to reduce your fuel oil or propane use. The total amount of dollars you spend on energy will be lower. That's the key.

Vote!

Patty: I recently moved, and I found out the town I moved from removed me from the state's voter database. So I scrambled to get re-registered, and the town clerk in my new town was amazing (thank you Shari). I just got my ballot in the mail. If you've moved, check to see if you're on the voter registration list at the state secretary's office. It's important to get everybody out to vote.

Barry: I think this is part of our values, being members of a co-op which has democratic principles and we vote on issues at our annual meeting. It's extremely important for participate in the democratic process and make Vermont's total number of voters a record this year. We have to participate. Everybody should receive an absentee ballot in the mail; please take the time to get educated and fill it out. Put it in your mailbox sooner than later.

Patty: If you didn't get an absentee ballot in the mail, contact your town



If this was easy, telecom companies would have you hooked up already. We're not looking at this being a money maker. We're doing what we do best, which is to support our members in our 41 towns, for whom internet is a critical need as presented by the pandemic, and to encourage economic vitality in all our communities.

— Barry Bernstein

clerk today. The town clerk will get you registered, as they are all super helpful!

Congratulations, Patty!

Barry: Now, for some really good news. I would like to congratulate our friend and manager on her new marriage!

Patty: Awww. Thank you, Barry!

Barry: That comes from all of us on our board and all our employees. It's pretty exciting. She does have an extra smile on her face.

Patty: Ingrid and I had a wonderful ceremony at our house on September 5th. We had a few friends and family over, and we had a great day. We pitched a tent, made all the food, set up lights and a dance floor, and we had a joyous and spirited celebration. We even had

fireworks to celebrate. Everybody who came pitched in. We had the best time. So many memories. They say it takes a village to accomplish things and I can truly say that our circle of people pulled off an incredible day. Community and cooperative ways were alive and well on September 5th!

Barry: And COVID-safe!

Patty: COVID-safe. Everyone from out of town was tested, we had sanitizer on every table. It was just a fantastic day. Ingrid's father, who just turned 90, walked her down the aisle and had a smile on his face from ear to ear. That still makes me so happy, to remember his face and smile.

Barry: Once again, as our manager often reminds us, stay safe, wash your hands, wear your mask. As someone who's an elder, you wearing a mask helps me in terms of my health protection. It helps people you love who are vulnerable. I'm extremely proud that Vermont has done such a great job on this. We're in it together and we'll get through it together. 🧤

COVID-19 WEC Office Guidelines

- WEC's office in East Montpelier is open from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
- If you need to visit the office outside open hours, you must make an appointment.
- One member or member family in the building at a time.
- Maintain six-foot distance from other people, please.
- You must wear a mask to enter the office.

Thank you!



Caledonia and Orleans County members, contact HEAT Squad: www.heatsquad.org / 802-438-2303

Orange and Washington County members, contact Capstone Community Action: capstonevt.org / 802-479-1053 / 1-800-639-1053

Cooperatives: in the Business of Strengthening Communities

By Patty Richards and Rebecca Towne

This summer, both of our rural electric cooperatives, Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC) and Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) made grants to organizations promoting food security in our respective service territories. In seeking ways to support our members, especially during the pandemic, we wanted to offer direct benefits to people in our communities.

One volunteer at a local food shelf that received one of our grants said the donation “could not have come at a better time,” because of the spike in need. As non-profits ourselves, we are inspired to support the hard work of these other non-profits who make sure our members have access to nutritious food.

This focus on current needs is just

one recent example of WEC’s and VEC’s longstanding commitment to the fabric of Vermont—to our main streets and our rural economy. We are not just in the business of electricity—we’re also in the business of strengthening communities.

Cooperatives benefit communities. It’s always true, but perhaps it’s never been as clear as it is right now. VEC and WEC are both owned and democratically controlled by our members, and are based in the communities we serve. We are autonomous, but we support each other: when a storm hits WEC territory, VEC sends crews to help, and vice versa. And we work to develop our communities in ways that support our members.

One way that WEC and VEC support our communities is through our respective Community Funds.

Both WEC and VEC members who

are able to do so contribute to our Community Funds by donating their refunds of patronage capital, also called capital credits, or by rounding up their electric bills. (Patronage capital, or capital credit, is co-op members’ share of money that remains at the end of the year after we pay our operating expenses.)


Our Community Funds - which were the sources of our recent food security assistance - then make grants to fellow non-profits in our service areas that improve the well-being of our members, community and environment.

Much the way a dollar spent locally stays local, a dollar spent at a cooperative has the effect of weaving security into our communities. For instance, a co-op member who is experiencing economic hardship may benefit from the very non-profits that are supported by their own co-op’s Community Fund.

This is a healthy cycle in the best of times. Now, in a time of such great uncertainty, cooperative members can rely on the security of shared ownership, democratic control, equity, transparency, and neighbors helping

neighbors.

We are grateful for the participation of our members and we especially thank those in a position to contribute to our Community Funds. We are grateful to the non-profits that are filling service gaps in order to feed and shelter our community members in need. And we are grateful to each other and our fellow cooperatives and collaborators.

A community that supports its cooperatives (and vice versa) is stronger and more resilient for it. We’re proud to be part of Vermont’s infrastructure: not only in the form of the poles and wires that bring electricity to our members, but as an autonomous, member-owned co-op community, working to keep our money in our local economy and to helping our members get through this crisis. 

Patty Richards is the general manager of the Washington Electric Co-op.

Rebecca Towne is the chief executive officer of the Vermont Electric Co-op.

This commentary previously ran in the Times Argus and the Caledonian Record and is reprinted by permission.

Co-op Principles



1. Voluntary and Open Membership

— Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control — Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.

3. Member Economic Participation — Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. They usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and Independence — Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

5. Education, Training and Information — Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders — about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

6. Cooperation among Cooperatives — Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for Community — While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.

ENERGY COACH SAYS:

Now Is the Time to Weatherize

Remember, Efficiency Vermont rebates for weatherization are as high as they’ve ever been. Financing is more affordable than ever. Book an energy audit of your home and start the weatherization process to keep your home warmer, your fuel use lower, and to save money.

Start by contacting the Energy Coach today: energycoach@wec.coop.



Co-op Month


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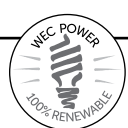
now, WEC leadership has focused on how to bring high-speed internet to its members homes with speed, reliability, and financial prudence (or, as Board President Barry Bernstein once put it, “We’re going to meet the bull before we buy him.”).

- WEC continues to put muscle behind its commitment to work against climate change. It goes beyond 100 percent renewable power portfolio: Button Up incentives continue to financially support members shifting to electric devices and weatherizing their homes. This year, WEC launched a rate structure, years in the works, that makes electricity a more affordable option to fossil fuels for heat and transportation. And behind

the scenes, WEC continues to raise its voice with larger rural electric cooperatives, encouraging them to address climate change and offering our blueprint as a way forward.

At WEC, crews are always at work to keep your power reliable, and when you call the office with a question, a real person who probably knows your name is there to talk with you. At WEC, you receive a credit on your bill every fall; refunds for the years you’ve paid your bill and there were margins at the end of the year. And at WEC, you’re encouraged to write in to *Co-op Currents*, ask questions at member meetings, and run for a seat on the Board.

It’s Co-op Month. Join or support our local sister cooperatives—food co-ops, credit unions, and many others. And rest assured that your electric co-op is always working in the best interest of us, our neighbors, and our future. 



Garbage Gas

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renewable in a strict interpretation, but from an environmental perspective, it's still harmful.

Many landfills simply flare the gas, releasing unused heat into the atmosphere. That's definitely not green. What WEC does is capture this potent greenhouse gas and direct it through engines where it is burned to make electricity.

Taking a naturally occurring harmful byproduct, using it instead of wasting it, preventing it from entering the atmosphere, and choosing it over fossil fuel or nuclear generation: that's why garbage gas is renewable.

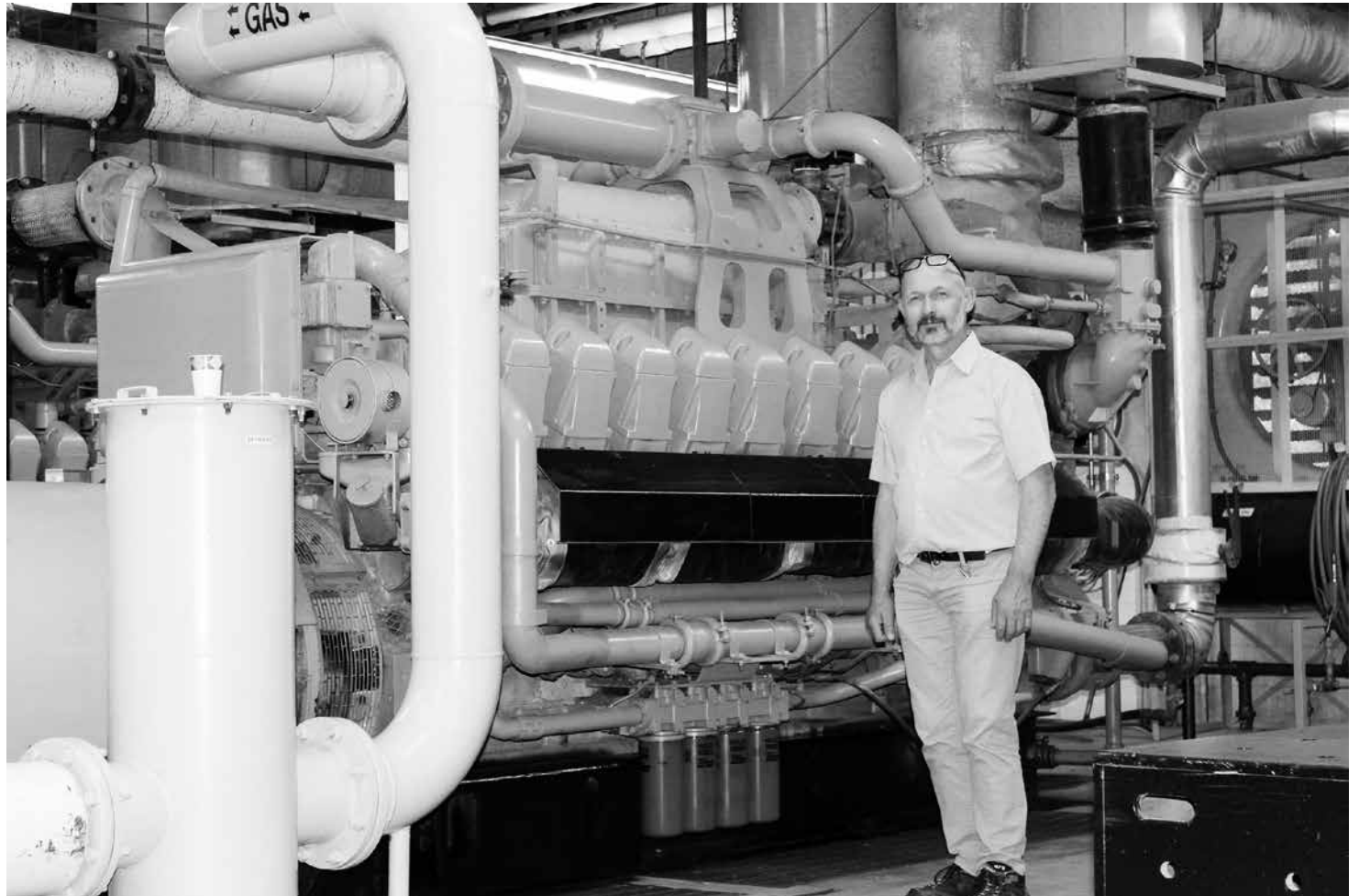
"I am so proud of our operation up here, and I'm so proud our membership had the vision to approve this plan 16 years ago," said General Manager Patty Richards. "If every landfill operator partnered with an electric utility, we would drastically back down fossil fuel sources of electricity and prevent so much methane from entering the atmosphere." In past years, the EPA has estimated landfills are responsible for almost 18 percent of the country's methane emissions.

A brief history

A lot depended on good timing, said Roger Fox, WEC's Vice President, at a recent open house at the plant. WEC contracted with a landfill in Massachusetts in the early 2000s, which gave the Board and membership a sense of the value of capturing and using landfill gas for power. So, when Casella looked for a partner interested in building a power plant at the landfill, WEC was interested.

WEC arrived early to the landfill gas harvesting movement, and, Fox said, the Co-op showed sound judgement when it decided to build the facility. The Coventry plant has provided a renewable, affordable, stable source of power for the Co-op for the past 15 years.

"It was fortuitous. It was groundbreaking," said Annie Reed, WEC's Secretary. "It's been a great investment for our Co-op and our members." In recent years, the Board voted to install a siloxane removal system (SRS): a giant drum that scrubs the gas of engine-harming compounds found in synthetic detergents and cleaners. The SRS



WEC Board member Steven Farnham inside WEC's power plant. You can't see his ear plugs, but he's wearing them--it's loud in there.

system has improved engine efficiency and dramatically reduced the need for maintenance.

A briefer explanation of how it works

As matter in the landfill breaks down, it creates gas that must be captured and released—or else the landfill would explode. At Coventry, a vacuum system sucks the gas from about 150 wells to WEC's plant. There it's chilled, scrubbed, and burned in five enormous engines. That energy is transmitted to a VELCO substation in Irasburg, and from there, it enters the electric grid.

And in good Vermont fashion, when engineers change the oil in the engines, it's cleaned and repurposed to heat WEC's Operations warehouse.


Update on landfill issues

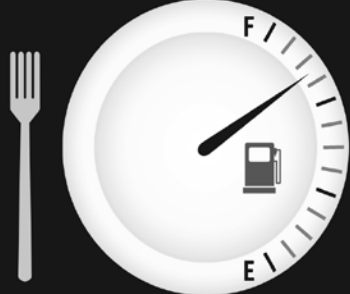
A few developments have occurred since the 2019 open house. A group opposing Coventry's 51 acre expansion agreed in a settlement to drop their appeal of Casella's landfill solid waste permit. There will be no landfill leachate sent to Newport's wastewater treatment plant until 2024 (barring major leaps in water treatment technology), and Casella

will take additional steps to control odors. In November 2019, Casella received an Act 250 permit for the expansion.

And in July 2020, Act 148, — Vermont's Universal Recycling Law—took effect. This effort to divert recyclables and compostables from the landfill effectively bans households from throwing away organic matter.

Richards doesn't think the new law will impact methane production right away. "We've crunched the

numbers on this," she said. "The landfill is projected to continue producing methane at the same scale throughout our 30-year contract with the landfill. As long as the stuff in the landfill breaks down into greenhouse gas, we'll continue converting it to electricity. I think it's great that Vermonters are diverting compostables from the landfill, and I think it's great we remain in a position to use an environmentally damaging waste product for a good use." 



Food is energy for your body;
POWER UP YOUR FOOD BUDGET WITH 3SQUARESVT.



Get help paying your grocery bills, because no Vermonter should have to choose between feeding their family and paying their utilities this winter.

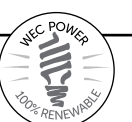
With 3SquaresVT, eligible Vermonters get money every month to buy food at grocery stores, farmers markets, and now, even online. So you can shop for the food you want, when you want it.

3SquaresVT Helps Vermonters and Vermont's Economy

Signing up for 3SquaresVT helps boost the Vermont economy and powers up your food budget. There are enough benefits for everyone who is eligible and enrolling never takes away from anyone else. 3SquaresVT is here for all of us when we need help. You've earned these benefits just like you've earned your social security benefits.

Get Started

The first step to accessing 3SquaresVT benefits is to determine if you are eligible. Call **855-855-6181** to learn if you qualify, for more information visit www.vermontfoodhelp.com.



Scam alert

Scammers are targeting WEC members and other utility customers throughout the state. They pretend to be calling from the utility, then demand payment over the phone and threaten disconnection.

If you get a call like this, hang up, and call WEC at 802-223-5245 or toll free at 1-800-932-5245.

WEC will never, under any circumstances, demand payment by phone or threaten disconnection if payment is not immediately made by phone. Currently, no utilities are permitted to disconnect their customers.

If you need help paying your WEC bill, WEC will support you with a payment plan. You may even qualify for a state grant to help pay past-due utility bills during COVID.

Whatever you do, don't fall for the scam.

Line Crews Demo New Forestry Equipment


On a beautiful September morning, somewhere on the line between Topsham and Newbury, WEC line crewmembers drove a new machine on a steep, thicketed right of way.

Two and a half hours later, they'd cleared close to 900 feet. Lineman Eddie Wallace, seasoned by more than a decade climbing with tree crews, said, "You'd be hard pressed to cut two spans in a day," by human effort alone. "We just did four."

The machine is essentially a skid steer equipped for forestry work. With 120 horsepower, carbide teeth and 15 inch clearance, it's made to tackle terrain and dense vegetation. There's no way something like this could replace human power: tree crews are necessary for side trimming and for roadside work, or clearing along the steepest ledges. But WEC's staff prides itself on innovation. When new forestry technology looks like a potential fit for the Co-op, they like to test it.

In this case, Safety & Environmental Specialist Rick Stergas is working with crews to pick a variety of sites on WEC's lines to see what the machine can do. "We're trying to collect the data and understand the comprehensiveness of the machine," he explained. That information will be presented to WEC's Power & Operations committee this month, and eventually the Co-op will decide whether to pursue the machine, either for lease or purchase.

One outcome the crews will study, said Second Class Lineman Pat Morrissey, is what regrowth will look like in areas cleared by the forestry head. The head mows over vegetation going forward, and then going backward, tears out smaller trees and pulverizes larger stumps. Clean-cut stumps generally sprout dense regrowth; crews believe the shredding action of the machine will slow that. "We're hoping regrowth is deterred for a period of time. If we can pull saplings out by the root, it'll gain us time, and time is money," said First Class Lineman Jamie Dailey.

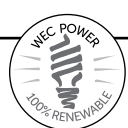
Dailey isn't just talking about the time spent doing the clearing work. Looking from span to span, Dailey explained, "The thing about outages is, if the right of way is clear, and I can look from that hill to that hill, I've just saved an hour of time." During an outage, if he and his team can spot the location of a downed wire and avoid walking through dense vegetation and blowdowns in the dead of night to find it, that outage will be restored that much faster. And reducing outages for WEC members is the end goal. 



Lineworkers Eddie Wallace, Jamie Dailey, and Pat Morrissey (seated) with the trackloader with forestry head. "It's got a lot of torque to it, but it doesn't kick debris as far," as other forestry equipment, noted Rick Stergas.



Pat Morrissey demonstrates how the machine demolishes vegetation in rights of way. Here, he pushes into a balsam, mows it over, and shreds the stump. Crews are interested to see if pulverizing stumps slows regrowth.



Get to Know Your WEC

Eddie Wallace, Apprentice Lineman

Have you ever wondered who is fixing that line up your road, or who you spoke to when you called in about an outage or a bill? Co-op Currents profiles Co-op staff in this feature.

You may not recognize Eddie Wallace if you see him standing on the ground. Though he's been a WEC employee for only about a year, he's a seasoned climber who worked with the Co-op for closer to a dozen years with right of way tree crews. Eddie started doing tree work at age 16, "and I just started climbing from there," he said. Climbers have an inherently dangerous job. Climbers cut down high-risk trees in the



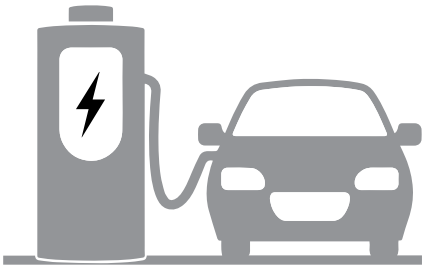
right of way that could cause outages were they to fall on the lines. Where bucket trucks can't go, people do; high up in the trees and adjacent to high-voltage wires.

With this climbing background, it was a natural switch for Eddie to start working on the lines. "Doing tree work, I went as far as I could go," he explained, and he enjoys the benefits of working for the Co-op and learning new skills.

Eddie grew up in Chelsea, and now lives in Newbury with his wife and two sons. He enjoys hiking, hunting, and fishing with his family and their labradoodle, Jake.

Button Up 2020 Incentives

Incentives for Transportation



WEC

- Up to \$1,900 in member incentives towards a new plug-in Electric Vehicle (EV)
- \$1,200 for an all-electric vehicle (AEV)
- \$950 for a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV – gas and electric)
- An additional \$700 incentive is available for income qualifying members

Efficiency Vermont

- EV incentive not available

Agency of Transportation

- In 2020 AOT provides up to \$5,000 in additional incentives for EVs: driveelectricvt.com/why-go-electric/purchase-incentives

Incentives for Weatherization



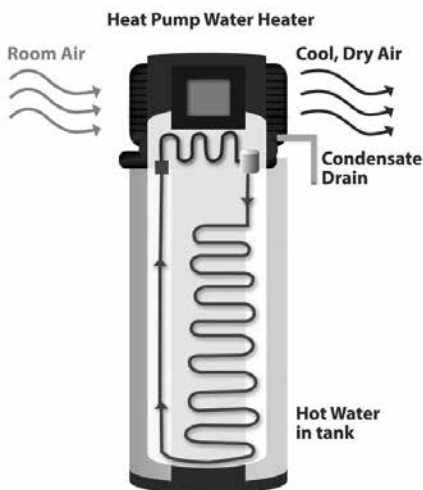
WEC

- Weatherization improvements to building shell: \$600 for Home Performance with Energy Star contractor

Efficiency Vermont

- Weatherization improvements to building shell: up to \$2,000 for Home Performance with Energy Star contractor; up to \$4,000/50% of project costs with an Efficiency Excellence Network contractor

Incentives for Heat Pumps



WEC

- Qualifying heat pump in "high performance" house
- \$250. (incentives for eligible heat pumps based on verified building shell meeting 2020 thermal performance standards; contact WEC Button Up for specifications)
- Heat pump hot water (HPWH) system
- \$250. (HPWH incentive available where a fossil-fueled (oil/kerosene/propane) hot water system is replaced)

Efficiency Vermont

- HPWH incentive up to \$800
- Cold Climate Heat Pumps (HP):

Equipment Capacity (mini-split)	EVT incentive 2020
≤2 tons	\$400
>2 tons	Up to \$650

- Centrally ducted HP: up to \$4,500
- Air to water HP: up to \$500

Incentives for Pellet Stoves, Furnaces, and Boilers



WEC

- \$250 for either a qualifying pellet stove or a wood stove. Stoves must be installed by qualified installer.
- Pellet furnace: \$500
- Pellet boiler: \$1000

Efficiency Vermont*

- Pellet stove: \$750 when installed by qualified contractor
- Pellet furnace: up to \$6,000
- Pellet boiler: up to \$6,000

* Offers subject to change. See EfficiencyVermont.com for current details.

Co-op Currents Opportunity for Student Journalist

WEC's member newsletter is looking for a youth journalist to research and write an article for *Co-op Currents*. The successful writer will work with *Co-op Currents'* editor and editorial committee, will receive a byline, and will be paid *Co-op Currents'* normal freelance stipend for their work.

The opportunity is open to current high school aged students living in member households and/or students enrolled in a member high school. 2020 high school graduates not enrolled in college full-time are also welcome to apply.

Topics may include: energy issues, climate change, state policy, the student's own community, cooperative principles, any combination of the above, or another topic. A successful pitch will also demonstrate a fresh angle, curiosity, focus, and alignment with WEC's values.

The editor and editorial committee will work with the student on contacting sources, structuring, and editing the article.

This is a competitive opportunity. One pitch will be selected by WEC's editor and editorial committee.

Students: to apply, email a pitch about the topic you would like to pursue

- indicate whether you belong to a member household, member school, or both

- attach one brief writing sample that includes primary sources

Please send all materials to currents@wec.coop by October 31.

802.224.2329 • energycoach@wec.coop



Be Prepared for the 2020-2021 Storm Season


The 2020-21 winter storm season is approaching. Being prepared for storms and outages is always important in rural Vermont. This year, COVID-19 throws a wrench into many of our backup plans: new safety precautions may prevent us from staying over at a friend's house or in an emergency shelter, for example.

And we can't count on some of the things that encourage us when the sledding is tough. Normally, during the marathon restoration that follows major outage events, a team of volunteers and fellow staff prepare and serve hot communal dinners to the line crew late every night. These days, that particular form of relief and camaraderie looks

less likely.

We can hope for a mild storm season, but for several years in a row, the end of October and start of November has brought major storms to Vermont. So, WEC's operations team has spent the summer getting prepared. Crews have been cutting and cleaning out rights of way, hoping to prevent as many outages as possible.

And that's what WEC is asking of its members, as well: to be prepared.

Preparedness is taking responsibility for the safety and comfort of yourself and those around you. That means staying informed, having the supplies you need, and making wise choices. 

Members Write

Benefits for Electric Bikes?

Recently I took a test ride on a couple of electric bikes. I was surprised when the sales person told me I could get a \$300 credit from Green Mountain Power, plus an additional \$300 credit from the merchant I was speaking with, if I was a customer of Green Mountain Power.

Why doesn't the WECop have such a program?

I've read of the electric car benefits at WECop, but how many of us are going to spring for an electric car?

Can we expect that the WECop will soon offer an electric bike benefit?

— Bud Haas, Bradford

Bud, thanks for the opportunity to "plug" WEC's electric bike incentive! Looks like we need to let our local bike vendors know about our program.

WEC offers \$200 toward the in-state purchase of a new electric bike. (GMP's incentive is also \$200, in fact, not \$300.) In fact, e-bikes are one of the most popular Button Up incentives during these pandemic times.

Members interested in purchasing an e-bike or any other electric device can find information about WEC's incentives on wec.coop or by contacting me at energycoach@wec.coop. We have incentives for electric push mowers, commercial lawn mowers, electric vehicles, and electric vehicle supply equipment (EVSE).

And because it's getting chilly, let me remind everyone we have incentives to help you weatherize your home, and Efficiency Vermont incentives have never been better. Contact me for support.

Thanks for writing in, Bud, and happy pedaling!

— Bill Powell, Energy Coach and Director, Products & Services

E-bikes are one of the most popular Button Up incentives during these pandemic times.



As e-bikes catch on, this could be the parking lot of the future. WEC offers a \$200 incentive to members purchasing e-bikes from Vermont vendors.

Photo by Raphael Nogueiro on Unsplash



Jamie Dailey

In major storms, trees can fall on wires--sometimes far up the line, sometimes close to your home. Make sure you're prepared for outages, and never touch or approach a downed wire!

WEC's Emergency Preparation Recommendations

Be aware:

- Pay attention to local weather reports
- Sign up for school closings, road alerts, and weather alerts on electronic devices
- Follow travel precautions
- Address potential storm hazards on your property, like a chimney that needs cleaning or a dead tree limb hanging over the driveway

- Disposable plates, cups, and eating utensils
- A fire extinguisher
- Charged phone and car charger
- Charged EV or full tank in gas car
- Shovels and/or tuned up snow-blower
- Masks or face coverings and hand sanitizer
- Whatever else you may need! Wood supply, camp stove, etc.

Check your supplies:

- 3-5 days of nonperishable food for each family member, including pets
- Extra medication, oxygen, or other health essentials
- Water
- Portable radio
- Flashlights
- Spare batteries
- Candles
- Matches or lighter
- Wind up or battery alarm clock
- Safety pins
- Zip-top plastic bags
- Moist towelettes or baby wipes
- Frozen ice packs
- Large cooler or ice chest
- Sleeping bags or blankets
- Warm, dry clothing
- Duct tape
- First Aid kit
- Personal hygiene supplies
- Diapers and other baby supplies
- Manual can opener

Have a plan:

- Do you have backup heat that does not rely on electricity?
- If you have special health needs, do you have ice packs to keep medication cold, backup oxygen, or a generator?
- Do you have someone you can call if you need assistance?
- Do you have neighbors who may need special assistance? If you can assume responsibility to check on them, do their family members have your contact info?
- Does your town have an emergency action plan?
- Do you have a place you can go if you need to leave town for a few days?

More preparedness tips and strategies are at wec.coop/energy-services-safety/what-to-do-if-the-power-goes-out.

