

The

Enlightener



North Star
Electric Cooperative, Inc.

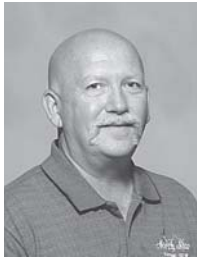
Your Touchstone Energy® Partner



VOLUME 50 NUMBER 2

BAUDETTE, MINNESOTA

FEBRUARY 2005



Some important thoughts

By Dan Hoskins
General Manager

As I sit here thinking about the information that I am about to share with you, I still can't help but think about the tragedy and devastation in Southeast Asia from the Tsunami. Can you imagine, the day after Christmas, while everyone is enjoying the sun and the beach, eating breakfast or sleeping, and without warning, waves of water start to come on shore. The first one four feet, then the second one 16 feet, and moving at about 500-600 miles an hour. This water then traveling inland over a mile, destroying everything in its path.

Now the aftermath, almost 200,000 missing or dead; "200,000 people," I can't imagine, and then there are the five million or so who are homeless or without family or something. You know, no matter what I write about it, it just can't hold a candle to the tragedy, suffering and pain that must be in those lands. So, after you read this, sit back, count the blessings that you have, no matter how small, and then take a second and pass one of those blessings their way; they can sure use them.

Let's talk about a couple of things. First of all, in last month's article, we discussed the Conservation Improvement Program, under which North Star Electric must be compliant with State regulations. If you didn't read the entire thing, we have taken it one step further. There are people out there who are in need of our assistance in one way or another, and one way is the local food shelves. So, what we are asking of you is to go to your local North Star Electric office, either in Baudette or Littlefork, and for every \$1 you donate to the food shelf, North Star will give you a free energy-efficient light bulb for your home (up to six per household). And before I forget, "Thank You" in advance for your thoughtfulness.

Load control, my favorite subject, and after talking with a lot of you folks, it must be one of your favorite topics also. Well, maybe not your favorite, but at least on your minds. But I do understand why we are on your minds, since during the past two years, we have exceeded 400 hours of load control, and this year is, and will be, no different. (424-35-001-02 Mervin Mannausau) With more than 390 hours of load control, as of this writing, we are on course for another 400-600 hour year, but that was our forecast, and that is what we have been telling you, but you know with a good backup system, a lot of you probably can't even tell when the heat switches from electric to standby.

Although all of us here at North Star understand the load control concept, so you know, we would rather have no load control and be able to sell you power through those 400 hours of control. But with the contracts our members signed to get that terrific off-peak rate, it's still a great price for a terrific product. One more thing: Did you know that there are

approximately 4,000 heating hours in a heating season, and if we about control 400 of those hours, that's only 10 percent of the time . . . not too bad.

The last thing I would like to visit with you about is Automated Meter Reading (AMR). This technology has been out there for a number of years and they have been improving this product all along. Since April of 2004, we have been studying AMR to see if it is a technology that would be beneficial, reliable and economical and be a viable product for both North Star Electric Cooperative and you, our members.

Last month, we presented the results of our studies to the Board of Directors of North Star, and I can tell you that,

Continued on page 3

Hopefully, by the end of 2006, North Star Electric will have a fully implemented Automated Meter Reading system.

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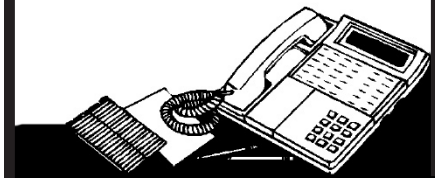
Baudette 218-634-2202
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e-mail us at nsec@wiktel.com
Visit our Web site at
www.northstarelectric.coop
P.O. Box 719, Baudette

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December 2004 Operating Report

Revenue (includes annual seasonal billing)	\$ 1,113,255
Cost of Power	\$ 430,516
Operation, Maintenance, Administration	\$ 314,306
Depreciation, Interest	\$ 134,926
Margin on Operations	\$ 233,507
Average use per Residential	2,330
Total kWhs Sold	15,876,527

Off-peak loan program for automatic backup systems

If your off-peak backup heating system is in need of repair or replacement, we may be able to help.

From 1977 to 2000, we had an average of 34 hours of load control per heating season. This past heating season, we had 414 hours. The years of 20 to 40 hours of control are gone. This year, Minnkota Power Cooperative estimates 400 to 600 hours of load control.

You must have a reliable backup heating system.

North Star Electric will lend up to \$2,500 for upgrading members' existing off-peak backup systems when the following terms and conditions are met:

1. On approved credit.
2. \$2,500 maximum.
3. 6 percent interest.
4. 1 to 3-year term.
5. Payment will be added to existing electric bill (\$25 minimum per month).
6. \$35 filing fee.
7. Must be existing off-peak member.
8. Automatic backup system only (no wood or manual systems).
9. Must furnish sales receipt from contractor or vendor.
10. Job must be completed before loan is approved for payment by our member services department.
11. Outstanding loan balance at termination of service is due in full.

WE NEED YOUR METER READING!

Please read your meter on or as near the 25th of EACH month as possible. We must have your reading by the 5th of the next month to avoid an estimated bill. If a bill consecutively estimates two times, the crew will read the meter and a \$15 fee will be added to the account.

— Please Note —

Bills that are past due will be charged a 1.5 percent late payment fee. Bills that are 30 days past due will also be charged a \$2 delinquent notice fee.

North Star conservation improvement program 2005

You can participate in the efficiency revolution led by ENERGY STAR by insisting on the ENERGY STAR label whenever you buy any home appliance. You can find out more information about ENERGY STAR and advanced household appliances at the ENERGY STAR Web site: www.energystar.gov. North Star rebates are only available on appliances that are listed on the ENERGY STAR Web site. We will also need a copy of the dated receipt you received from your appliance dealer where you purchased your appliance.

Rebate forms are available at both the Baudette and Littlefork offices and at some of the area appliance dealers.

The rebates will be as follows:

Ground-Source Heat Pumps	\$500
Air-Source Heat Pumps	200
Central Air Conditioners	100
Refrigerators	100
Clothes Washers	100
Room Air Conditioners	50
Dishwashers	50
Dehumidifiers	25
Freezers	25

Some important thoughts . . . From page 1

hopefully, by the end of 2006, North Star Electric will have a fully implemented Automated Meter Reading system. North Star Electric employees and board members are always looking at ways to improve our system and improve our service to you; AMR is one of those ways. This technology is not just a meter reading technology; it has many other options that North Star will be looking at implementing for years to come.

Oh, yeah, one more thing, our Armed Forces are still in Iraq. Plus we have Armed Forces practically everywhere in the world, making sure that the freedom we enjoy today is still there for our kids tomorrow, so don't forget about them.

God Bless you and our Troops.

CURRENT ELECTRICAL INSPECTORS

State law requires that every new electrical installation in any construction, remodeling, replacement or repair shall file a certificate for inspection with the State Board of Electricity and be inspected by a Minnesota electrical inspector.

■ *Koochiching and St. Louis counties:*
Lee Herseth
 10078 Gappa Road
 Ray, MN 56669
 Phone: (218) 875-3028
 7:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. (Mon. thru Fri.)

■ *Roseau and Lake of the Woods counties:*
Laurence Otto
 60426 County Road 12
 Warroad, MN 56763
 Phone: (218) 386-2299
 7:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. (Mon. thru Fri.)

Reliable backup systems a must

Because increased load control hours are predicted in the future, electric off-peak heating installations must be capable of 400 hours or more of interruption each winter season.

In order to realize the full benefits of the load management program, it is very important that our members work with a qualified heating contractor to ensure that they have an automatic, adequate and well-maintained backup heating system.

The electric off-peak heating program continues to provide great value to members today, just as it did when it was first utilized in the late 1970s. The winter heating season is here, and North Star Electric stands ready to assist our members with their electric home heating options.

*Neither rain,
 nor snow,
 nor the dark
 of night . . .*



Electric co-op line workers are trained to deal with any power emergency. But there's one thing that can't be taught: dedication. Dedication to duty is a quality line workers are born with. That's why you'll see them in a driving storm repairing downed power lines. That's why your power is restored in the middle of the night.

That's why they decided to be line workers in the first place. And they expect no special awards or recognition.

It's reward enough for them to know your family is safe and warm – regardless of the weather.



Office notes

From Ann Ellis, Manager of Finance and Administration

“Don’t be unhappy if you don’t get everything you want. Think of the things you don’t get that you don’t want.”

—Unknown

AMR

The board has approved moving ahead with an AMR (Automated Meter Reading) project. It will be done in phases starting with the Wheeler’s Point area and then Kabetogama. By the end of 2006, we hope to be finished. In the meantime, we will be changing out meters with an electronic model. Please continue to read your meter until we let you know that the automated portion is ready to go.

Capital credits

We will be allocating capital credits soon – for both electric and DBS. The allocation of capital credits relating to the DBS business is new, as we had not recorded a profit until 2004. (251-21-056-04 Joseph Leonard) With a gain realized when the business was sold, we will be spreading it to all of our subscribers, based on the amount of programming they purchased during the 10 years when we had the satellite TV business.

Member connections card

We are planning to canvas our area businesses asking them to partner with us in a campaign that we hope will promote shopping at home. We plan to offer our members a Touchstone Energy Member Connections Card that will entitle our members to discounts at local establishments. In exchange, we will promote the participating businesses on our Web page, this newsletter, the annual meeting and open houses. If you are a business owner and would like more information, please contact Carolyn at our Littlefork office (1-888-258-2008).

At your service we remain. . .

Chill out with an energy saving tip!

Chill out with an efficient fridge. Refrigerators are the most energy intensive appliances in a home, but with a few steps you can keep your energy costs to a minimum. Check that your refrigerator isn’t too cold. Recommended temperatures are 35 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit for the fresh food compartment and 5 degrees for the freezer (stick a thermometer in a glass of water and read it after 24 hours.) Long-term storage freezers should be kept at 0 degrees (for the freezer, stick the thermometer between frozen pack-

ages). Frost buildup decreases energy efficiency, so regularly defrost manual-defrost refrigerators and freezers. Replace your refrigerator door seals if they are not airtight; cover liquids and wrap foods – uncovered foods release moisture and make the condenser work harder. Finally, if you’re in the market for a new refrigerator, pay attention to the Energy Guide label, which lists electricity use in kilowatt hours – the lower the better. Courtesy of Department of Energy’s Web site www.eere.energy.gov.

Make plans to join us in June 2005 for our annual POWER PLANT TOUR



Watch for more information in our April issue of *The Enlightener*.

Great fun, great food, great accommodations and educational as well

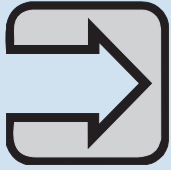
Gopher State One Call



**It’s the LAW
CALL BEFORE YOU DIG**

Minnesota Statewide One Call Notification Center

1-800-252-1166



West End News

By *Steve Ellis*

Baudette District Operations Supervisor



We have been working on our summer 2005 plans; they include 2.2 miles of three-phase underground replacement in the Pitt area and some old cable replacement in the Twin River area north of Baudette. We will also be doing some line changes south of Baudette in the Erickson Mill area to accommodate Minnkota's new 230-kV to 69-kV substation that is due to be built this summer.

A new project that should be well received is the Automated Meter Reading (AMR) system that we will begin installing this spring. We will be starting on the Wheeler substation; if all goes well, we will also do the Kabetogama substation this year. The plan, at this time, is to have our entire system AMR complete by the end of 2006. What this means to our members is that they will no longer need to read their own meters which, for most, will be a very welcome

change. This change will also allow us to do many things in-office, rather than dispatching line workers and trucks, thus saving us time and money to use on other needed projects.

Just wanted to make a note about the lighting in the Wheeler Point area north of Baudette. These lights in the resort area, which are on the county road, are paid for by Adrian's, Ballard's, River Bend, Sportsman's Lodge, Lake of the Woods Taxidermy and Wigwam. I thank these businesses for their support and willingness to give, for the safety and convenience of all who travel and use that area.

The crews will be in your area this spring doing line inspections and meter reading. If you have any questions or concerns, you can let them know when they are there or contact me at 218-634-2202. Stay safe and enjoy the winter season!

Problems paying your electric bill?

Energy assistance may be available!

If you are receiving a low income or suffering from a temporary financial shortfall, the following agencies may be able to assist you with your electric bill. We urge you to contact them immediately to avoid disconnection if you feel you are eligible for aid.

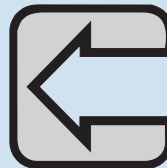
- **Lake of the Woods County Community Services**
P.O. Box G-0200
Baudette, MN 56623
Phone: 634-2642
- **Northwest Community Action Council**
312 N. Main St.
P.O. Box 67
Badger, MN 56714-0067
Phone: 218-528-3258
or 1-800-568-5329
- **Koochiching County Community Services**
1000 5th St.
International Falls, MN 56649
Phone: 283-7000
- **Kootasca Community Action, Inc.**
2232 2nd Ave. E.
P.O. Box 44
International Falls, MN 56649
Phone: 283-9491 or 1-800-559-9491
- **Kootasca Community Action, Inc.**
1213 SE 2nd Ave.
Grand Rapids, MN 55744-3984
Phone: 1-800-422-0312
- **Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency**
702 3rd Ave. S.
Virginia, MN 55792-2797
Phone: 1-800-662-5711
or 218-749-2912



East End News

By *Allan Baumgartner*

Littlefork District Operations Supervisor



The deep snow has stopped our brush clearing operation. We still have plenty of work to do this winter, removing large trees from our rights-of-way and trimming some of them away from our lines. Our work now is in the line maintenance area of our operation. Regardless, all work requires snow removal right now.

The line workers have been busy changing out the old air-gap transformer lightning arresters. (555-29-011-01 James C. Rasmussen) Sometimes when hit by lightning, the strike can crack or damage this type of arrester, which usually does not cause an outage, but may cause blinking on the entire line until it is located and changed out.

There have been some pole change-outs completed with more

scheduled for this winter.

We have four projects to complete this year to finish our 2002-2005 Work Plan. The largest job is a 6,200 ft., three-phase underground line just west of Pelland Junction. We are in the planning stages for replacement of several old underground power lines for this summer/fall.

We have had five outages in January. Most were individual problems with the exception of the January 16 outage. At 4:45 a.m. (and -37 degrees), we had an underground fault on our main feeder out of the International Falls substation feeding south to Ericsburg. By doing some switching, the crew was able to restore power by 7 a.m. that morning. Then, on January 21, we scheduled an outage to dig up and repair that cable.



Highlights of the board of directors meeting

January 6, 2005

These are the highlights from the board of directors meeting held on January 6, 2005. Detailed minutes are available at the Cooperative for member review. Regular board meetings are generally held the first Wednesday of every month. If you wish to speak with the board or have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda, please contact Manager Dan Hoskins at least one week in advance to be included on the agenda.

All directors were present. They acted upon usual, routine business. In addition, they voted to approve the Distributed Generation Tariff prepared by Minnkota Power, which sets the guidelines for purchase of electricity generated by a member, to move the May and August board meetings to May 11 and August 10, to accept the Safety Committee minutes, to vote opposed to the MREA resolution changing the dues structure, to increase the capital budget to purchase a backup system for the Littlefork District shop and to move ahead with the AMR (automated meter reading) project with Cannon and NRTC.

Management and operations report

Manager Hoskins reported on the rate change selected by Solvay, that a small claims court action against the Cooperative regarding an easement was settled in the Cooperative's favor, and review of policy and the bylaws to improve the process of director elections and member participation in decisions. He also reported on Operations Department activities including plans to stake the final work plan project internally to save money, outages, bids on the two vehicles sold, expected delivery and lower-than-expected cost for the new vehicle, announcement of retirement of long-time employee Steve Anderson, the steel-frame cold storage building that will be constructed this year, the ASV replacement in Littlefork and hiring Matt Brown to join the Littlefork District as

an apprentice lineman. He provided an extensive presentation of the proposed AMR (automated meter reading) project and the study of the various options.

Office report

Finance Manager Ellis provided the financial report and also reported on health insurance premiums and cost savings associated with the wellness program. She also reported that interest earned on security deposits will be changed to 2.5 percent, job shifting in the office, plans to offer a Member Connections discount card to local businesses and tracking trends with past-due electric bills.

Compliance and member services report

Manager of Compliance and Member Services Haukaas reported on load management, wholesale billing peaks recorded, CIP projects including giving away compact fluorescent bulbs and WildBlue. In August, 2003, there were 521 members responding to a bill stuffer interested in WildBlue, but now there were only 21 – only 8 percent of those needed to break even. Director Hanson asked if the Cooperative would market outside our electric service territory to see if there would be interest, especially with businesses, before a decision to proceed is made. Concern about the investment thus far was discussed, and it was decided to invite NRTC Representative Tom Thorson to the February board meeting to discuss this further. WildBlue is a service that is not territorial, and therefore, other vendors will be able to provide WildBlue in our area.

Board reports

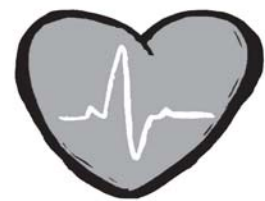
Director Polkinghorne reported on the Minnkota monthly board meeting. Director Bergan reported on the Square Butte board meeting.

Keep good family medical records

Not only do family medical records avoid hasty scrounging for needed facts and save time when filling out your medical history for a new doctor, they can also provide valuable information for diagnosing or preventing possible health problems. Some diseases, such as diabetes, asthma allergies, cancer, high blood pressure, depression, and alcoholism, run in families. The more your doctor knows about your family history, the better he or she can treat you. Some things to include in your family medical records:

- Your own medical history, and one for each member of your immediate family, including dates and other information about immunizations, hospitalizations, surgeries, medications, and treatments such as radiation therapy. Include any allergic reactions to medications.

- As much health information as you can find about your parents and siblings. If you can list anything about grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and nieces and nephews, so much the better. Include diseases or conditions they have had and their ages at the time.



Heart facts

- In one year, the average human heart circulates approximately one million gallons of blood through the body.
- The average heart beats about 100,000 times every 24 hours. In a 72-year lifetime, that's more than 2.5 billion beats.
- The heart rests between beats for a total of 40 years in a lifetime of 70 years.

Pick up your FREE compact fluorescent lamp

Stop by either our Baudette or Littlefork office to pick up a FREE compact fluorescent lamp. If you would like more, additional lamps are just \$1.00 each. (Limit six lamps per household.)

The money raised from this will go to our area food shelves. This way you can save money on your electric bill and help the food shelves in our area at the same time.

Parents of high school seniors

Are you aware of North Star Electric's Knowledge Scholarship? To qualify, the parent/guardian must be a member of North Star Electric, and your child must take a short test about your cooperative that provides electricity to your home. North Star Electric will be awarding five scholarships, one for \$1,000 and four for \$400, plus a chance to win one of eight \$50 cash awards for scoring more than 50 percent on the test.

Most of the test answers will be included in the six pages of study material that North Star provides. A couple hours of study time could pay off with a \$1,000 scholarship. Last year, only 42 took the test.

Energy tip:

Compact fluorescents save money and energy

ENERGY STAR labeled light bulbs, or compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), are up to 75 percent more efficient than standard incandescent light bulbs, give off the same light output and last up to 10 times longer.

CFLs have changed a lot in recent years. They are available in various sizes to fit almost any lamp, chandelier or other light fixture, including dimmable and motion detector fixtures. The bulb's appearance ranges from a globe shape to two slender tubes twisted like a coil.

"You'll find the quality of light is equal to that of incandescents," said Phil Smith, energy specialist. "And there is no hum or noise that is sometimes associated with older tube-shaped fluorescent lights."

CFLs emit the same amount of



light as standard bulbs, but because they use significantly less energy than incandescent bulbs, they have lower wattage ratings than people are accustomed to purchasing. For example, a 15 watt CFL replaces a 60 watt incandescent bulb, an 18 to 20 watt CFL replaces a 75 watt bulb and a 25 to 28 watt CFL bulb replaces a 100 watt bulb.

While all CFLs use less energy than incandescent light bulbs, it is a good idea to watch for the ENERGY STAR symbol when shopping around.

The potential savings on energy bills is significant. The typical household spends about 10 to 15 percent of its electrical bill, an average of \$110 a year, on lighting.

Source: Minnesota Department of Commerce

❄️ **Snowmobilers** ❄️

Beware of hazards! Respect property rights!

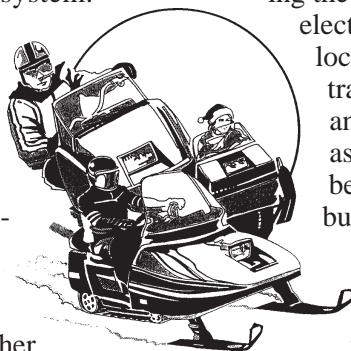
As snowmobiling becomes more popular, the number of accidents are increasing. Very few accidents occur on Minnesota's trail system. Most accidents occur along roads and ditches. Obstacles encountered along roads and other cleared rights of way can be very dangerous, especially in low visibility conditions.

North Star Electric Cooperative and the other Minnkota Power Cooperative associated systems have poles, guy wires, metal enclosures and pedestals installed on hundreds of miles of rights of way. When snowmobiling, be aware of these obstacles. Guy

wires need special attention as they can be difficult to see.

Some snowmobilers are mistaking the private property where electric transmission lines are located for snowmobile trails. North Star Electric and the other Minnkota-associated systems have been granted easements to build and maintain lines in these cleared areas, but the land still belongs to the landowner. Be sure to check with the landowners before snowmobiling on their property.

Enjoy snowmobiling in Minnesota, but keep safety in mind. Slow down, don't drink and stay alert for obstacles.



Six reasons for not talking with your neighbor

One thing rural electric cooperatives are known for is their neighborliness. Each co-op is run by a board of directors made up of neighbors.

But talking with your neighbor over the backyard fence is not always the best way to compare electric bills.

Your bill may be higher than one neighbor even though your house is smaller. It may be lower than the neighbor on the other side of the road though your house is larger. You pay for what you use – no more and no less.

There are many reasons why one family may use more electricity than another even though they may have the same appliances and the same (or a fewer) number of people at home. Here are a half-dozen reasons:

- One may open a refrigerator twice as often as another. Each time the door

opens, cold air rushes out causing the refrigerator to replace it. Temperature settings also make a significant difference.

- One family may keep its freezer full while another may have very little food in the freezer. An empty freezer runs more often than a full one.

- Electric ranges use electricity according to the type and number of meals prepared. In addition, one family may cook on “high” heat most of the time while a neighbor conserves electricity by turning the burners down when they’re cooking.

- No two families have or do the same amount of washing or ironing. One may wash once a week while the other may wash daily. Every washing and ironing adds to your bill.

- The amount of hot water used varies from family to family. Cold water

clothes washing and full laundry and dishwasher loads require less hot water. One family may bathe or shower daily – or longer and more often. Another may not. One hot water heater may be turned down to 120 degrees while a neighbor’s may be set at 140 degrees. How far a water heater is from the washing machine or shower can also make a difference.

- The efficiency of heating systems varies. A two or three degree variance in the thermostat setting will make a dramatic difference in the amount of energy used.

Add these six points together and it becomes obvious that no two families live alike and, therefore, no two electric bills will be the same. The bottom line remains the same: You are only billed for what you use.

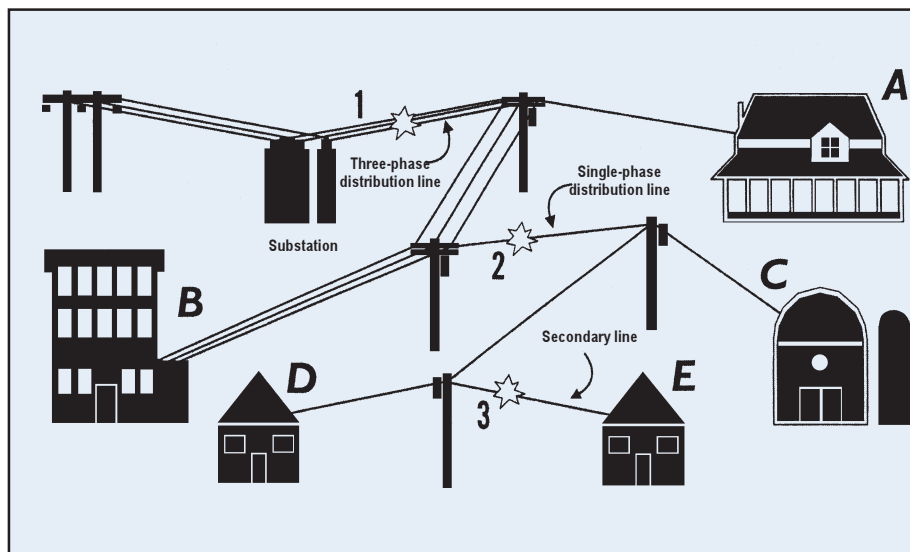
How does a co-op decide which electric lines to fix first?

When an outage occurs, restoring electrical power is often a complicated process. Damage done by wind, ice or other bad weather usually occurs at several points in the distribution system. The idea is to get the power back on for everyone in the most efficient manner.

When a widespread outage occurs, the first location the repair crew checks is the substation.

Linemen then work their way out on the main distribution line, restoring service to the main feeder lines, then lines serving groups of homes and finally individual members.

Fixing the power at an individual home first is useless if the main line is dead. No electricity would flow into the home anyway. By repairing the main line first, many more people would have their power restored.



Share a favorite recipe with your North Country neighbors!

Send to:

North Star Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Attn: The Enlightener

P.O. Box 719

Baudette, MN 56623



The diagram at left shows that Step 1 would be repairing the main distribution line from the substation. Because there is no additional damage leading to buildings A or B, this would automatically restore their power. In Step 2, the problem with the tap line leading off the main line would be cleared up. This would restore power to buildings C and D. After the high-voltage lines are repaired, power to individual members (house E in the diagram) would be restored (Step 3). The entire system would then be in good working order.