

DIRECTOR NEWSLETTER

AMI leads next year's projects



ROBERT GRAF
District 6



As 2017 draws to a close, I'd like to share with you updates on several projects and programs that will make this next year one of the most exciting and transformative for Intermountain Rural Electric Association and our customers.

Advanced Metering Infrastructure

IREA wrote in the October Watts & Volts newsletter about our plan to acquire an Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system that will greatly improve the electric service we provide. These improvements will also provide benefits that will enhance your experience as a consumer.

New meters at all residential and commercial service locations will give you more information, increased flexibility and additional choices in how you manage your energy usage. In addition to more detailed usage data – monthly, daily and even hourly data will be available – the AMI will give you the ability to choose when your meter is read within a three-day window and more easily identify the causes of inconsistently high or low monthly bills. We plan to also offer new programs that are not currently possible without AMI, such as customer pre-payment plans.

The AMI system also will strengthen reliability and provide for new efficiencies that will allow IREA to better serve our customers. The two-way communication provided through the AMI system will allow IREA to read meters remotely, connect and disconnect service without the physical presence of IREA personnel, and receive immediate notices of outages, even before customers contact us. The AMI will also allow us to more quickly restore service, better monitor power quality and delivery, and more easily manage renewable energy generated by customers.

We do not anticipate a rate increase in association with the AMI project. In fact, by providing better data about the health of our distribution system, AMI will allow us to better target future capital spending by more easily identifying facilities and infrastructure in need of improvements.

Though more advanced than our current system, AMI is a proven technology that has been embraced by utilities of all sizes throughout the country. By the end of 2015, nearly 65 million meters – more than 88% of them residential – were running on AMI systems, and the Institute for Electric Innovation projects that number will reach more than 90 million by 2020.

We will provide AMI updates via Watts & Volts, social media and other communication channels. I encourage you to visit www.IREA.coop/ami to learn more about this project. There you will find additional information on AMI's benefits, answers to frequently asked questions, and an overview on how and when IREA plans to implement AMI. This webpage will be updated with new information as the project progresses to keep our customers informed.

Monthly bill redesign

Last month was the first in which all IREA customers received reformatted, redesigned monthly bills. As we refined the new look, we put much thought and effort into meeting customer needs while also creating an aesthetically pleasing, easy-to-read bill. In addition to making the amount and due date easier to find,

Continued on other side

Continued from front

we reduced visual clutter by rearranging usage details and other information into a more intuitive layout.

The new My Billing Snapshot feature is located on the second page of your bill and offers a quick comparison between your current monthly usage and those from the same month the previous year. The redesigned Usage Profile on the first page also is quite useful in monitoring both your daily and month-to-month usage.

Coats for Colorado

Through Nov. 30, IREA will collect gently used and new coats on behalf of Coats for Colorado, whose goal is to keep Coloradans warm this winter. As we have in previous years, IREA is pleased to work with Coats for Colorado's non-profit, volunteer-based partnership with Dependable Cleaners and United Way in one of the biggest such drives in the country. Since 1982, it has provided more than 2 million coats to Colorado residents, many of whom live in communities served by IREA.

Thank you to the many caring IREA customers who have already donated to this very worthy cause. Those who want to help the drive can donate gently used and new coats at any of IREA's four locations during regular business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday) prior to Dec. 1:

- Conifer – 13404 Old U.S. Highway 285
- Sedalia – 5496 N. U.S. Highway 85
- Strasburg – 1497 Main Street
- Woodland Park – 800 N. Highway 67

Coats can also be donated at any Denver- or Boulder-area Dependable Cleaners. All sizes are appreciated, but Coats for Colorado especially needs children's coats and extra-large coats for both men and women. Rain boots, rain coats, snow boots, ski pants, hats, gloves, mittens and scarves are not accepted. You can learn more about Coats for Colorado by visiting www.CoatsForColorado.org.

Outage reporting

On top of temperatures that make coats so necessary, winter brings with it the kind of adverse weather that can cause service interruptions. Wind and snow bring down tree branches, which then touch and sometimes fall on our power lines. Though IREA mitigates potentially hazardous vegetation through tree trimming, not all tree-related outages can be avoided.

Before the winter storms hit, I encourage you to visit our online Outage Center, at www.IREA.coop/outage-center, to sign up for text-based outage alerts. Once enrolled, you will receive timely text notifications regarding interruptions at your service location. You will also have the option of reporting outages via text message. This simple, text-based communication is a practical alternative to using precious battery power on a phone call.

Even if you are not signed up for outage alerts, the online Outage Center can provide you information on service interruptions, including a map that shows outage

locations and estimated times of restoration. If your service is interrupted, you can use your smartphone or tablet to access this valuable customer tool.

Free energy audits

Energy use often goes up during winter months, but not just because your furnace or other heating system is getting more use. Patterns in your energy use, the types of electrical appliances and devices you operate, and the effectiveness of your home's insulation are among the many other factors that can generate an unexpectedly high electric bill.

IREA offers free energy audits to customers interested in potentially reducing their monthly bills. Our energy efficiency expert will gather important data on your home's heating system and use thermal imaging equipment to identify cold spots. We then provide you recommendations for increasing energy efficiency within your home, many of which have little or no cost.

You can schedule your free energy audit by visiting www.IREA.coop/energy-audits, where you will also find energy efficiency tips to follow both before and after your free audit.

Free payment options

For customers looking to streamline their monthly bookkeeping, IREA continues to offer several ways through which payment can be made with no additional processing fees. Nearly 40% of all IREA accounts use our electronic billing, or eBilling, option, which allows you to pay directly – and with no fees – through a monthly bill sent to you via email. Some customers choose to pay their bills through bill pay options offered by their banks. IREA does not charge any fees to accept these types of payments. Customers who sign up for Automatic Bill Payments (Auto-Pay) have their monthly payments automatically deducted from their checking or savings account on the same day each month. This service also is provided at no charge.

I encourage you to eliminate the clutter of paper bills and avoid missing any payments by signing up for both eBilling and Auto-Pay at the same time. Your bill will be emailed to you for recordkeeping, while your amount due is automatically paid each month. No paper, no hassle, no additional charge.

Visit www.IREA.coop/billing-payment for more information on any of these programs, or to sign up online.

Social media

Our Twitter (@IREAColorado) and Facebook (@IntermountainREA) accounts are the most convenient ways to receive timely communications directly from the Association. Please follow us on Twitter and like us on Facebook as we increase our presence on both platforms and use them to share with you important news and information.

In closing, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you a very happy and festive holiday season!