

# Currents

Your Link to Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative



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## High Voltage . . .



### Free supper... is there a catch?

by Tom Tate

In early October, many received a nicely crafted postcard (I say nicely since as a marketing person, I look for how communication pieces are constructed) offering a free supper at the Sussex Inn where attendees would learn how to slash their utility bills. Other caveats such as couples only and no alcohol raised a bit of a red flag.

Infiltrating one of our operatives into the meeting to get the scoop, we discovered that the company was marketing a radiant insulation product for use in attics to help contain heating and cooling costs. At least it wasn't a timeshare scheme where you saved 50% on your heating bill by moving to a condo down South for the winter.

The documents obtained by our undercover agent described a NASA proven technology that is now available for the Earthbound homeowner. Overall, the content of the brochure appeared to be reasonable with two exceptions; the annual forecast increase in energy costs seemed really steep and saving 55% seemed optimistic.



Basically, radiant insulation consists of an insulating core sandwiched with an advanced aluminum film. Installed by attaching to the roof trusses, it functions to reflect  
*continued on page 2*

## Commentary by the President & CEO



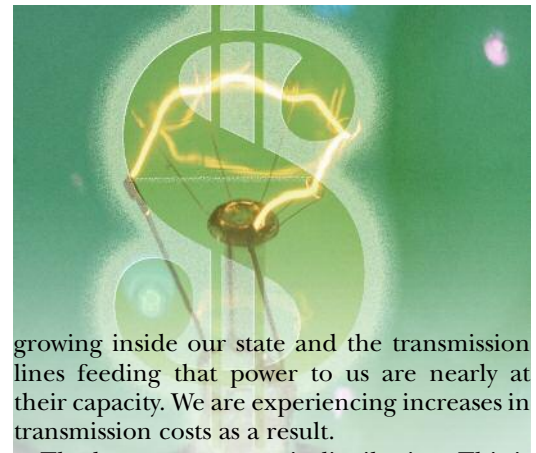
### Cost of Service

by Jim Siglin  
President & CEO

A key difference in how your cooperative operates as compared to an investor-owned utility is our not-for-profit business model. This means that we continually strive to provide the highest possible quality of service at the least possible cost. In fact, that is our mission statement. Without investors and Wall Street pressuring us to post a specific profit and return on their investment, we can focus completely on quality and cost of service.

Like all electric utilities, our costs fall into three categories: generation, transmission and distribution. We have good cost control in the generation area, as we own 70% of our energy supply with the electric cooperatives of Pennsylvania. Since this generation source consists of nuclear and hydro, our costs for power are very stable. The remaining 30% is purchased on the open market through multi-year contracts. Again, pooling our power requirements with the cooperatives of Pennsylvania means we are able to negotiate better prices. In essence, we only have a 30% exposure to the price pressures of the energy market. As a result, increases in the cost of our power are often lower than for the surrounding utilities.

The next cost category is transmission. This is the cost we incur to get the power from the generator to our substations. Given our size, it isn't cost effective for us to own our transmission infrastructure so we buy "space" on the transmission lines of Pennsylvania and New Jersey utilities. Remember the hearings last Summer about PSE&G's proposed transmission line Route A through Sussex County? That is a perfect example of why costs for transmission are increasing. Load and demand for power is



growing inside our state and the transmission lines feeding that power to us are nearly at their capacity. We are experiencing increases in transmission costs as a result.

The last cost category is distribution. This is the part of the cooperative you are most familiar with since it encompasses our people, buildings, equipment, poles and wires. Costs are rising for every bit and piece that goes into our delivery of electricity. From paper clips to bucket trucks, costs have risen across the board. Fortunately, until recently, growth has produced enough revenue to cover cost increases. Now that growth has slowed, costs have caught up.

So, in the face of rising costs, what are we doing to contain and avoid them? We are constantly looking for ways to do things better at a lower cost. Key examples include:

- ▼ our automatic meter reading system,
- ▼ hosting our billing and accounting systems with the provider of the software,
- ▼ buying our construction materials through a regional utility supply cooperative,
- ▼ our load control and electric thermal storage programs,
- ▼ purchasing battery packs for our trucks to allow them to operate in the field without idling (saving on fuel),
- ▼ obtaining financing and capital through a cooperative financial entity, and
- ▼ looking hard at all positions within the cooperative, leaving some open and consolidating responsibilities.

The bottom line is that we will have to increase our rates at some point in the future, probably during 2009. This will be our first rate increase since 2005 (not counting the change in 2005 due to the increase in NJ sales tax). The good news is that we are well positioned to keep increases to an absolute minimum. You can be assured that we will continue to manage costs carefully and will keep you informed of all changes.

# GADGET UPDATE

by Tom Tate

I have neglected my favorite topic for too long! It has been a while since I wrote about a gadget or gadgets that caught my fancy. Therefore, I resolved to rectify the situation.

Ah, gadgets...while he (or she) who dies with the most toys still dies, they have more fun in the process. So where to start? Have you been to [www.uncrate.com](http://www.uncrate.com) yet? Check it out for a veritable cornucopia of really cool gadgets, mostly for the gentlemen. They write reviews on everything from high-end sports cars to t-shirts with a focus on innovative items and gadgets. Sign up for their e-mail post to get a daily fix.

How about [www.woot.com](http://www.woot.com)? The concept driving this site is "the deal of the day". They procure a supply of a particular item and offer it until it sells out. Once it's gone, it's gone. For example, as I write this, the deal is \$34.99 for a DeLonghi ceramic portable heater (see my Caveat Emptor article elsewhere in this newsletter) plus \$5.00 shipping. Their products also cover the gamut but seem to focus mostly on electronics and hard goods like this heater.

All well and good, but what has specifically caught my eye of late? How about the original gadget, the Swiss Army



Knife. There are two camps in this area, the Victorinox and Wenger aficionados. I fall into the former camp. The Victorinox offering is simply more appealing. While I have six of these, I do not possess the Swiss Champ XAVT that packs 80 tools and functions into one knife. Not a pocketknife in the true sense or even that practical but how cool is it anyway? Check it out at Smokey Mountain Knife Works, <http://www.eknifeworks.com/> and look for item number 53509.

And, for the shutterbug, here is a nifty piece of software, Trips & Pics from Pharos. This compact little device is a GPS receiver. Take it with you on your next photojournalist assignment and it records your positions at regular intervals. When you download your pictures (you are all digital, right?), the software matches the time and date information from each picture with its geo coordinates. Now you can plot your trip on Google Earth, Microsoft Virtual Earth or Microsoft Streets and Trips and allow people to follow your journey on the maps and in your pictures. Pharos makes a nice product (speaking from personal experience). Get more here: <http://www.pharosgps.com/>. MSRP is \$99.95. Hmm...maybe another in-depth review is in order. I'll keep you posted on that.



One more and I'll bring this article to a close. CarChip Pro from Davis Instruments is a real boon. Several years ago, I pur-

chased their original model and it has saved me a bundle in that time. What is it? It is a data logger that plugs into the data port of your car (every vehicle sold in the US has these). When that pesky Check Engine light comes on or another warning pops up, simply attach the CarChip to your PC and read the error codes it has captured. You can Google the error code and find ways to correct it yourself or simply be better informed when you take it to your mechanic. You can also use it to reset the Check Engine light if it was a false alarm. You can use it on more than one car and it also records a wealth of additional information about the vehicles' driving history such as top speed, emergency braking and so on. Navigate over to [www.davisnet.com](http://www.davisnet.com) for more information and put a CarChip Pro in your chariot for \$120.00. While at Davis, look at their weather stations...another gadget for another time.



I hope you enjoyed the gadget update for November. Christmas is on its way and you now have several excellent gift suggestions - for giving or receiving.

## Free Supper... *continued from page 1*

the sun's heat away from the home in the Summer and to reflect your heating system's warmth back into the house in Winter.

While I could not find any product information about the Utility Shield product specifically, I found plenty of references and guidelines on what to look for in this type of installation. One key was the ability of the insulation to let water vapor move through the barrier for proper dispersal. As you can imagine, a tightly sealed attic could be prone to moisture buildup and related problems including mold and mildew. The Utility Shield product offered

this feature. A good site for insulation information (and the source of my picture on page 1) is: <http://www.attic-insulation.com/>. You can also check out what the DOE has to say here: [http://www.ornl.gov/sci/roofs+walls/insulation/ins\\_02.html](http://www.ornl.gov/sci/roofs+walls/insulation/ins_02.html). Scroll to the end of the page for the radiant insulation content.

So, is this a legitimate energy saver? I'd say yes but with a qualifier; while there may have been a free supper, there "ain't no free lunch." So do your homework by checking the contractor and all claims before going ahead with any project.

## ADDRESS/TELEPHONE CHANGE?

Has your mailing address or telephone changed recently? If so, please make sure you contact us and provide us with the new information. In the event of an outage, we rely on your phone number to bring up your account information quickly and accurately.

You can contact us by sending an e-mail to [customerservice@sussexrec.com](mailto:customerservice@sussexrec.com), indicate the change on your bill stub, or call us at 973.875.5101 and select the customer service option.



# Avoid Electrical Hazards This Holiday Season

by Barbara Taylor

It seems as if we just finished following safety tips for Halloween, and now we have another list of cautions. The winter holiday season is so festive and everywhere you look, indoors and out, you see the sparkle and glow of special holiday decorations. Unfortunately, the incidence of home fires tends to increase during December, and improperly used and maintained electrical products are often the cause.

To ensure that your season is both shining and safe, there are some simple tips you should follow as you deck the halls. The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) has launched a campaign to help families include safe practices in their holiday decorating plans. ESFI has created a new website, <http://www.holidaysafety.org/>, where you can find information on decorating safety, protecting children from holiday dangers, and recognizing counterfeit electrical products.

## Indoors

- ⚡ Set up your Christmas tree away from fireplaces and heaters. Keep a fresh tree well-watered to avoid over-drying, and keep candles a safe distance from it.
- ⚡ Make sure an artificial tree you are buying is labeled "Fire Resistant."
- ⚡ Don't put electric lights on a metallic tree. A safer choice is a spotlight to illuminate the tree.
- ⚡ Make sure each electrical decoration is approved by a nationally recognized certification organization like "UL" (Underwriters Laboratory). Inspect each decoration for cracked, frayed, or bare wires and loose connections.
- ⚡ To avoid overheating, don't run extension cords under furniture, carpeting, or behind baseboards.
- ⚡ Don't overload extension cords. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the maximum number of light strands you can connect together.

- ⚡ Unplug lights before you replace any bulbs.
- ⚡ Turn off all lights and decorations before you leave your home or go to bed. If you cannot easily reach the plugs, use a timer to turn them on and off.
- ⚡ Have a fire extinguisher available and know how to use it.
- ⚡ Test all smoke alarms and put in fresh batteries if needed.

## Outdoors

- ⚡ Along with the safety tips for decorating indoors, additional precautions need to be taken outdoors. Make sure all lights and decorations are approved for outdoor use.
- ⚡ Fasten all lights and decorations securely, taking care not to use nails or tacks that could puncture the insulation.
- ⚡ Keep all extension cords away from snow and water.
- ⚡ Plug your lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable GFCIs are available where electrical supplies are sold. Timers on outdoor decorations also make sense and save energy.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, nearly 130,000 fires will be reported in December. Keep the holidays safe for yourself and your loved ones by following these simple safety tips.

Source: *Electrical Safety Foundation International* [www.esfi.org](http://www.esfi.org)



by Tom Tate

Let the buyer beware - sound advice at any time but especially pertinent today. With the spike in energy prices, I have a hunch that we will all be treated to a barrage of scams, misrepresentations and fraudulent offers. Such come-ons will promise fantastic cost savings on your energy bills in exchange for your hard-earned money.

As my parents told me repeatedly growing up, if it sounds too good to be true it probably is. This mindset is your first line of defense against these situations. Look at any offer with a healthy skepticism. Ask for references, check with the Better Business Bureau (<http://newjersey.bbb.org/>), or call us. Above all, avoid impulse purchases. If someone is pressuring you for a decision, it's best to decline. Here's another truism from my youth, "act in haste, repent in

leisure." Wish I had followed these two gems 100% of the time. "Live and learn." Okay, last homespun saying for this article, I promise.

Let me cite a couple of examples of misrepresentation. A current promotional campaign touts a new heating technology that can save you 50% on your heating bills. The cost of the unit is over \$400.00. The way you are supposed to save is to turn your furnace way back and then carry the heater with you from room to room. Here is the misrepresentation - you are unlikely to save anywhere near 50%. People simply do not stick with the cold house, warm room scenario very long. And, the heater is nothing special, just a 1500-watt unit that employs heat lamps. For \$50.00 you can buy one that does the same job at WalMart.

Then there is the pitch for the heater that uses less energy than your coffee

maker. These folks offer finely crafted mantles to set off their heater and urge you to turn your furnace back and run their unit 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Again, they promise extraordinary savings. Not so. True, their 1500-watt heater uses less than the 1600 watts common in coffee makers. However, coffee makers only run for a few minutes a day. Run their heater as they recommend and you will see your electric bill jump by \$120 - 150 per month.

One of the things we do for our members is respond to questions about products and services such as these. If you receive something that looks suspicious, give us a call. We have excellent resources at our disposal that can evaluate products and technologies and provide an unbiased assessment. While we have to be careful in how we assess something, you can be sure that we will give you the facts you need to make the best informed decision.

Saving energy is a key consideration for all of us. Avoiding unnecessary expenditures in the process is also important. We can help you in both areas. Call with questions and go to our website, [www.sussextrec.com](http://www.sussextrec.com), where you will find a wide variety of energy saving tips and tools.



This Summer the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) launched the Our Energy Our Future campaign. For those not already familiar with the campaign, let me give you a quick overview. America is facing a critical energy shortage in both generation and transmission capacity. Without resorting to arcane utility jargon it simply boils down to having too few power plants and overtaxed transmission lines to meet the electrical demands of the United States.

There are a number of causes for the

shortages: reluctance to build new power plants, opposition to nuclear power plants, resistance to new or expanded transmission lines and so on. Further muddying the water is the push to replace fossil fuel with renewable sources. The overall result is that construction of our infrastructure has slowed dramatically and capacity is falling behind demand.

The purpose of the Our Energy Our Future campaign is to encourage cooperative members all across the country to engage their legislators in a dialog about their plans

to meet our energy needs in a manner that keeps electricity affordable and protects the environment. The primary vehicle for this is an email campaign where you can send a simple and frank question to your elected officials asking them the following:

- ☛ What are you doing to make sure we will have the electricity we need in the future?
- ☛ What are you doing to fully fund the research needed to make emissions free electric plants an affordable reality?
- ☛ How are you balancing the electricity needs and environmental goals so that the resulting energy is affordable?

The goal of the campaign is simple: let your elected representatives know that you are concerned about having the power you need at a price you can afford while taking care of the environment. These do not need to be mutually exclusive goals. With the proper investment in technology and careful legislation, both objectives can be satisfied.

Join the conversation by going to [www.ourenergy.coop](http://www.ourenergy.coop) and contact your officials today. If you do not have access to the Internet, you can drop by our office and complete a card that will be sent to Washington or use our lobby PC to send an email. We are the only cooperative in NJ so help us make the case for NJ residents today!

In the meantime, we encourage you to conserve, recycle and reuse. For ideas and information on energy savings you can implement today (conserving), check out our web site at [www.sussexrec.com](http://www.sussexrec.com). Together we can make a difference.

## Make the wise choice

When it's time to buy a new water heater, there are a number of choices you can make. You can purchase a heater warranted for six or eight years, one that will be cheap to buy, but expensive to operate. Or you can invest in a Marathon and save money in operating costs...for a lifetime. Marathon - super efficient and warranted not to leak for as long as you own your home.



- **Seamless Polybutylene Tank** will never rust, corrode or leak.
- **Environfoam® Insulation** completely surrounds the tank. Superior efficiency with no Ozone-depleting chemicals.
- **Heating Elements** designed to maintain water temperatures and perform in the harshest water environments (just like ours here in NJ).
- **Bowl-Shaped Tank Bottom** developed to allow more complete tank draining.

Contact us today for model availability, pricing and complete information. 973.875.5101 x117 or go to our website:

<http://www.sussexrec.com/brochures/Marathon.html>

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