



More Power to You

Line Crews Work Nonstop to Restore Power After Storms

By Shane L. Larson, Chief Executive Officer

“Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.”

Those words are inscribed on the main post office in New York City and have been the unofficial motto of the postal service for years. They also could describe the crews at Rock Energy Cooperative, who worked hard during the Dec. 8-9 blizzard and Dec. 23-24 rain, sleet, and ice storm to make sure power was restored to members as quickly as possible. Anyone who works in the great outdoors during a Midwest winter knows that frigid temperatures with blowing snow and sleet are far from ideal working conditions.

We're fortunate that some winters pass without any major outages, so it was unusual to have two big storms knock out power in two weeks. Hopefully, we won't have another two weeks like that anytime soon.

If you shoveled at all after the Dec. 8-9 blizzard, your back will remember just how heavy that snow was. Tree limbs, and sometimes entire trees, snapped under the snow's weight. If power lines were nearby, the falling branches and trees took them down, too. Power outages started right around midnight and continued throughout the day. We had a total of about 1,200 members throughout our entire system without power at some point during the blizzard.

Our team of 15 linemen and tree crews worked around the clock to get power restored. Thanks to four additional linemen from Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative near Lancaster, we were able to restore power to everyone more quickly. Cooperatives have a history of assisting each other during major outages. We don't often need the help, but it's good to know that it's there when we do. In

the past, Rock Energy crews have helped cooperatives in areas around Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and even Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina.

It seems like we were still assessing our work after the first storm when the next major outage occurred.

Outage calls started coming in early Christmas Eve morning and continued into the evening. There's never a good time to be without electricity, but I'm sure you'll agree that Christmas Eve is one of the worst times.

Members were wondering if their electricity would be restored in time to finish last-minute holiday chores, make Christmas Eve dinner, or leave the light on for Santa.

The same Rock Energy crews who worked during the blizzard also were called in to work on the holiday ice storm. Once again, these guys braved the winter weather to make sure electricity was restored as quickly

as possible. Their job is to make sure the power flows. They are out there in the winter during snowstorms, blizzards, and frigid temperatures to make sure our members are inconvenienced as little as possible. I want to thank them along with the inside support staff who answered phones, dispatched crews, and pitched in to make sure everything got done. And thanks again to the Scenic Rivers crews for their assistance during the earlier storm.

But most important, I want to thank the members who lost power during the storms for their patience and understanding. Here at Rock Energy, we work year-round to minimize and prevent outages. Our tree crews work diligently to clear branches away from power lines, and we make sure our equipment is in top-notch shape. We

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South Crew



North Crew



Scenic Rivers Crew



What Happens During a Power Outage?

When a severe storm knocks out power to a large number of members like it did twice during December, decisions need to be made where to send Rock Energy Cooperative workers first.

Generally, crews are dispatched first to areas where repairs can be made to restore power to the greatest number of members in the shortest amount of time. The graphic on this page shows that a substation repair would take priority over a problem with an individual member's service.

A common concern during large outages is: How come my neighbor has power but I don't?

The answer is fairly simple. If there's a problem with a tap line, which runs from a distribution line to a group of houses, a repair would energize all of the houses served by that tap line. But if the problem is isolated to the service line that extends from a transformer to your house, your neighbors will have power but you won't.

Here are some tips to follow if you experience a power outage:

- Check your fuse box or circuit breaker. This will

determine if the problem is on Rock Energy lines or with your own electrical system. It might be as simple as a blown fuse or tripped circuit. You will be charged a fee if crews are dispatched and the problem turns out to be your responsibility.

- Look at the area outside your house near the meter. (See enlarged area on graphic.) Rock Energy maintains the electrical lines leading to your house and the meter itself. But if the weatherhead (usually found on the roof with wires entering the home) or your meter socket (box) is damaged or pulled away from the building, contact an electrician. These items are considered part of the house and are the member's responsibility.
- Call Rock Energy at (608) 752-4550 or (866) 752-4550 to report the outage. If the outage is widespread, the phone lines will be very busy. Give your name and the address that is without power. It's also helpful to provide a cell phone number where you can be reached.

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How Power Is Restored After a Storm

- 1** Transmission towers and lines owned by ATC provide power to Rock Energy substations. These lines serve thousands of people. If one is damaged, it gets attention first.
- 2** Rock Energy has several distribution substations, and each one serves thousands of members. When an outage occurs, the local substation is checked. If the problem can be repaired here, power may be restored to a large number of people.
- 3** If the problem isn't isolated to the substation, main distribution lines are checked. These lines carry electricity from a substation to a group of members in a town or neighborhood. If a problem is repaired at this stage, members served by this supply line could see power restored if there are no other problems on tap lines.
- 4** The tap lines are checked next. When a problem is fixed here, power is restored to members served by that tap line.
- 5** The final supply line where damage can occur is on the service line between your house and the transformer on the nearby pole. This can explain why your neighbor has power but you don't. Rock Energy needs to know if you have an outage here so crews can repair it.

Transmission Substation

Local Substations

Distribution Line

Local Substation

Tap Line

Enlarged Area
Members are responsible for damage to the service installation on a building. If this happens, please contact an electrician.

Danger!
Stay clear of downed lines.

To report an outage, call Rock Energy at (866) 752-4550. A major outage can impact thousands of people so phone lines will be very busy.

Use Tax Credits to Fund Efficiency Upgrades

The idea of living in a more efficient home—and paying lower utility bills—has widespread appeal. But finding ways to fund improvements can be difficult during hard economic times.

Fortunately, the federal government offers two ways to recover some of your expenses when planning upgrades: energy efficiency tax credits and renewable energy tax credits.

Through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—know as the federal stimulus bill—Uncle Sam offers a personal tax credit of up to \$1,500 for energy-efficiency measures made at existing homes in 2009 and 2010. You can recover 30 percent of the cost of adding insulation materials and exterior doors, windows, and roofs designed to help reduce your home's heat loss or gain. The credit also covers efficient central air conditioners, air-source heat pumps, hot water boilers, and biomass stoves.

With a maximum value of \$1,500 for all improvements made in 2009 and 2010, the credit may be applied toward material costs on all projects. You can also use it on installation costs for heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems and biomass stoves.

If you want to start generating your own power, consider taking a renewable energy tax credit covering 30 percent of the cost of materials and installation for solar panels, solar water heaters, and geothermal heat pumps. This credit applies to both existing homes and new construction. Projects must be placed into service between January 1, 2009, and December 31, 2016.

ENERGY STAR, a joint program of the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, provides guidelines on what qualifies



for both tax credits at www.energystar.gov, keyword "Tax credits."

You can file for energy tax credits using IRS Form 5695. Remember to get a Manufacturer Certification Statement (a signed statement from the manufacturer certifying that the product or component qualifies for the tax credit) for your records. Both of the energy

tax credits are non-refundable—they can increase your refund by reducing the taxes you owe, dollar for dollar, and can be carried forward to reduce your taxes in following years. But you don't get a separate check for the credit amount. ■

Youth Programs Build Strong Citizens

Rock Energy Cooperative offers two opportunities for high school students to learn more about the political process and develop leadership skills.

The co-op will sponsor two high school juniors on the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. The June 11-18 trip includes meetings with congressional representatives and tours of historic sites. More than 1,000 students from host cooperatives across the nation participate in the tour every year.

Another program is open to current high school freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The Wisconsin Energy Cooperative Association's 47th Annual Youth Leadership Congress will take place July 7-9 at UW-River Falls. The program introduces students from across the state to cooperative business basics, demonstrates the value of cooperation in everyday life, and offers sessions to help develop leadership skills.

Applicants for both programs must be children of Rock Energy members and reside in the co-op's service territory. Rock Energy will fully sponsor students selected for the trips. For more information, call Barbara Uebelacker, communications specialist, at (608) 752-4550 or (866) 752-4550 or e-mail her at BarbU@rock.coop. ■



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Power Restoration

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- Provide as much information as you can about the outage. What time did the power go out? Did the lights flicker? Did you hear a pop? Do you see any power lines down? These details help crews detect the problem.
- After you report the outage, give Rock Energy enough time to respond and repair the damage. Don't be concerned if you don't see utility trucks near your house. The problem with your power may be far away.
- Callers understandably want to know when they can expect their power to be restored. However, often it's very difficult to estimate restoration times on a per member basis, especially if the outage is widespread.
- Be patient. Rock Energy crews are working quickly and safely to restore your service. ■

More Power to You

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maintain proper engineering and an adequate inventory of parts as well as continually train our employees. We're always looking for ways to improve, so please let us know if you have any ideas.

It always surprises me that members take the time to call or write to thank us for getting their power restored. Some even drop off homemade cookies or bags of candy. I think Duane and Elsie Arnold summed it up best: "We would like to extend our thanks to all the devoted people at Rock Energy Co-op during the last heavy snowstorm. There has been an old saying that says, 'You never miss the water until the well runs dry.' Well, it is true now as we are so dependent on our electric power supplier. Thanks again."

Rockton Lawsuit Update

You may have read news reports about our ongoing dispute with the village of Rockton. Rock Energy filed a lawsuit in May asking the federal court to invalidate an April 2005 referendum that Rockton village officials claim authorizes them to acquire and operate the electric and natural gas distribution systems in the village.

We contend that the referendum was flawed, primarily for two reasons. First, there is a \$13 million difference between the dollar amount shown on the ordinance published before the election and the dollar amount shown on the ballot voters received on Election Day. Second, the referendum specifically authorizes the village to buy the assets of South Beloit, Water, Gas & Electric, not of Rock Energy.

In late December, the federal court granted the village's motion to dismiss the lawsuit. We respectfully disagree with the court's opinion and plan to appeal the decision. The court's opinion correctly noted that the village must pass a valid ordinance in order to acquire the assets from Rock Energy, and the court accepted all facts in our complaint as true. However, the court did not address the substance of our claims about the irregularities in the referendum and did not determine whether or not the election was properly conducted.

Because Rock Energy would be harmed if Rockton is allowed to move forward based on a flawed referendum and invalid ordinance, we continue to believe that we are entitled to bring this lawsuit against Rockton. I promise to keep you updated as this case continues through the judicial system.

As always, we truly appreciate the opportunity to be your energy provider and welcome your ideas about how we can improve our service. ■



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