

Natural Gas Q&A

Rock Energy Cooperative operates about 175 miles of natural gas pipeline in northern Illinois with nearly 9,000 services. Our distribution system is regularly monitored and inspected for corrosion and leaks to ensure safe and reliable service. Please review this safety information so you can help us prevent pipeline damage, learn how to recognize a natural gas emergency, and take the appropriate action if an accident occurs.

What is natural gas?

Natural gas is an economical and reliable source of energy that is completely safe when used properly. It is formed when layers of buried plants and animals are exposed to intense heat and pressure over millions of years. Because natural gas is lighter than air, it rises and dissipates into the atmosphere if it escapes from a pipeline. Underground, however, it may follow the path of least resistance, accumulating in a confined space or traveling to an ignition source. Natural gas is easily ignited by heat, sparks, or flames and can cause explosions.

How is it transported?

Pipelines are the safest and most economical method of transporting natural gas, according to the National Transportation Safety Board. Because pipelines are buried underground, warning signs are used to indicate their presence along the right-of-way. The signs are clearly marked with the operator's name and emergency phone number. The pipeline right-of-way must remain free of structures, vegetation, and any other obstructions.



How can I prevent pipeline damage?

Damage from digging is the most common cause of underground natural gas leaks. Even a small scratch in the pipeline coating may result in corrosion that could lead to a leak. Always call 811 before you dig or excavate to avoid hitting a natural gas pipeline or other buried utility line. Illinois law requires people to call at least two business days before any digging project. Utilities then will send a representative to the site so all underground lines can be marked. The call and service are absolutely free. Remember that Rock Energy Cooperative maintains buried gas pipes up to your meter. All pipes beyond that are the member's responsibility and should be periodically inspected for corrosion and leaks.

How can I recognize a leak?



By smell: Gas providers add a chemical that makes natural gas smell like rotten eggs so any leaks can be easily detected.



By sound: An unusual hissing, roaring, or whistling sound along a natural gas line or coming from an appliance might signify a leak.



By sight: Unexplained dead grass, bubbling water, and blowing dirt near a meter or along the pipeline route are signs of a leak.

What should I do if I suspect a leak?

If you smell a faint odor:

- ✓ Make sure all gas appliances and burners on your stove are turned off completely. If the odor is eliminated when you turn off an appliance, call a repair person because the problem most likely is isolated to that one appliance. Rock Energy provides natural gas to your home or business but does not have a service department that repairs malfunctioning appliances.
- ✓ Open one or more windows and wait a few minutes for the odor to dissipate before investigating further.
- ✓ Check the pilot lights on your gas furnace, water heater, stove, and oven.
- ✓ Don't try to relight a gas appliance while you can still smell gas.
- ✓ If you need assistance relighting the pilot light, call a heating or plumbing contractor.

If you smell a strong odor:

- ✓ Leave the area immediately.
- ✓ Do not use a phone until you're safely away from the suspected leak. Then call Rock Energy Cooperative at 866-752-4550 or contact your gas provider.
- ✓ Do not light a match or turn on or off any switches, flashlights, garage door openers, or other appliances because an electric arc might ignite the gas.

How can I get more information?

If you have any questions about natural gas safety, we would be happy to provide you with further information. Just call us at 866-752-4550. We also encourage you to visit these websites to get more information about pipeline safety.

Rock Energy: www.rock.coop

Call 811: www.call811.com

Diggers Hotline: www.diggershotline.com

JULIE (Joint Utility Locating Information for Excavators): www.illinois1call.com



Rock Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative





More Power to You

PLANNING TO DRIVE ELECTRIC? CALL US BEFORE PLUGGING IN

Shane L. Larson,
Chief Executive Officer



Are you thinking about purchasing an electric vehicle in the near future? If so, let's visit about the possible impact to your electrical service.

Purchases of electric vehicles are growing at an astronomical rate—an 81 percent increase from 2017 to 2018, according to the Edison Electric Institute, which tracks electricity use. As of September, 1.3 million electric vehicles are traveling on United States roads. That number is expected to soar to 7 million by 2025.

With the increase in the number of electric vehicles comes the need for more electricity to power them. That's why it's so important for you to let Rock Energy know if an electric vehicle is in your future.

The service to your home or business is sized to meet the demands as they existed when service was connected. Adding the EV charger creates a risk of overloading the wires and transformers powering your home. Overloaded services can fail and leave you in the dark with an uncharged EV.

It won't be just your home in the dark. One transformer can power up to 10 homes. If the transformer fails, your neighbors also will be without power. A failed transformer also could cause problems down the line and result in thousands of power outages.

Our equipment often can handle an overload for a while, but its life span will decrease significantly when the rated capacity is exceeded over an extended period. That means additional costs for the co-op. And since we are a cost-of-service provider, those additional expenses ultimately are passed on to members.

So if you're planning to buy an electric vehicle, give us a call. We will need to know whether a rapid, fast, or slow charging unit will be installed. These three main types of EV chargers represent the power outputs, and therefore charging speeds, available to charge an EV. A rapid charger, which requires at least 50 kW, can bring the majority of EVs to 80 percent charge in less than an hour. On the other end of the spectrum is a slow unit, which uses about 3kW and is best for overnight charging. For reference, a typical home will have a 5 to 7 kW load. So you can see, chargers can dramatically increase the loading requirements for a home.



After we gather the information we need, our engineering team will determine if the capacity of the present equipment is adequate. In situations where a significant amount of new load will be added, we might need to install larger service equipment or make other changes.

In addition to EV chargers, we also need to know if you plan to make any other changes that might significantly increase the amount of electricity you consume. Some examples include instantaneous water heaters, home additions, and farm equipment.

One simple call can save you from an unplanned outage and paying for costly damage to your equipment or the co-op's. Please make sure you notify us as far in advance as possible to ensure that the required service upgrade will be available when you need it.

On another topic, we realize that power outages are inconvenient for everyone. But a

certain group of people literally can't live without electricity. I'm referring to members who have someone in their household who is dependent on life-support equipment, such as respirators, oxygen concentrators, ventilators, and home dialysis.

Rock Energy prides itself on providing reliable electric service, but some outages are beyond our control. Severe storms, vehicle accident damage, tree limbs, animal contact, equipment failure, or other

problems can interfere with your electric service and disrupt the flow of power.

Experts agree that people using electric-powered medical equipment need to be proactive in their own care. They need to be prepared in case of emergency situations. In fact, their lives depend on it.

Anyone who requires the use of life-support medical equipment should have an alternate source of electric power on hand, such as a backup generator or battery unit. Alternatively, families can devise a plan so the person who relies on critical-care medical devices will have somewhere to stay until power is restored. You can find more information on the topic in a story on page 20C.

It is truly a privilege to serve your energy needs. Please let us know if we can do anything to improve our service to you.

84th ANNUAL MEETING

Monday, March 30
Eclipse Center, Beloit

Be sure to mark your calendar and join us for the meeting and dinner.

Look for complete details in next month's magazine.



ELECTRICITY THEFT: NOT WORTH THE RISK

Every year, energy cooperatives across the country cope with thieves—folks who deliberately tamper with their meter to steal power.

Not only is this practice extremely dangerous, it's a serious crime that could result in hefty fines and jail time.

Power surging through a compromised meter can cause an electrical catastrophe, according to the Cooperative Research Network, a division of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

A short circuit could produce an arc flash bright enough to cause blindness and powerful enough to launch fragments of shrapnel-like, red-hot debris. Serious injury or death from electrocution, explosion, or fire often results from meter tampering.

Electricity theft is not a victimless crime. Rock Energy Cooperative loses revenue and expends resources to investigate

meter tampering. These costs are then passed on to the entire membership.

National estimates vary, but *The Washington Post* has reported that between \$1 billion and \$10 billion worth of electricity is stolen from utilities annually.

Since everyone pays for lost power, please let us know if you suspect meter tampering. Call 866-752-4550 to report possible theft of service. All information can be given anonymously.

PREPARE A BACKUP PLAN IF YOUR HEALTH RELIES ON ELECTRICITY

Power outages can turn deadly for people who use life-sustaining medical equipment that requires a consistent source of electricity.

Rock Energy Cooperative is committed to providing members with reliable energy service, but it's impossible for us to guarantee uninterrupted power at all times. Outages caused by severe storms, vehicle accidents, tree limbs, animals, equipment failure, or other problems could leave you without power for hours or, in very rare cases, days.

If someone in your household depends on a respirator, oxygen concentrator, ventilator, or other life-support equipment, make sure you have an emergency backup plan.

Before an emergency arise, Rock Energy suggests the following:

- Obtain a backup source of power recommended by the manufacturer of any critical care equipment you have in your home. For example, battery backups or portable generators can provide you with the electricity you need until power can be restored.
- Keep a full charge on battery-operated devices or have extra batteries available. Check your backup batteries periodically. Unused rechargeable batteries may need charging.
- Consider buying a portable battery pack that can supply hours of backup power.
- Keep your cell phone charged so you can call for help and be reached by family and friends concerned about your well-being.
- Have a plan. Talk to relatives or friends about places you can go in the event of a long-term outage.

DO NOT TAMPER WITH YOUR ELECTRIC METER

Meter tampering can result in electric shock, is illegal and increases electricity rates for other co-op members.



WATT HOURS METER

- ⊘ Never break a meter seal.
- ⊘ Never open a meter base.
- ⊘ Never remove a meter or alter an entrance cable in any manner.

If you know or suspect that someone has tampered with their meter, please contact us immediately.

ROCK ENERGY COOPERATIVE
Empowering Members Since 1936



YOUTH PROGRAMS BUILD STRONG CITIZENS

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

The co-op will sponsor up to four high school juniors on the 2020 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. The June 19–26 trip includes meetings with congressional representatives and tours of historic sites. More than 1,800 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 Youth Leadership Congress will take place July 14–16 at UW-River Falls. The program introduces students 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. The deadline to apply for the Washington trip is April 1, and applications for the UW-River Falls event must be received by April 22.

Rock Energy now is accepting

online applications. Just go to www.rock.coop and click on the Community & Youth tab. For more information, call Barbara Uebelacker, communications director, at 866-752-4550 or email her at BarbU@rock.coop.



Students participating in the 2019 Youth Leadership Congress at UW-River Falls learned about the value of cooperation.

DON'T PAY YOUR BILL TWICE

Believe it or not, some Rock Energy Cooperative members are accidentally paying their bill twice.

Occasionally, some members on our Auto Pay program submit a payment to Rock Energy and the bank they use also pays us through EFT (electronic funds transfer). If this happens, a credit will be reflected on their next billing statement.

Here's a simplified explanation of how Auto Pay works: Rock Energy sends an electronic file to your bank requesting payment on your account for the amount on your statement. Your bank then electronically submits a payment on your behalf.

With Auto Pay, once you sign up, your work is done.

There's no need to pay your bill because your bank automatically does it for you. Your payment will be deducted from your checking or savings account on the due date shown on your bill. If your due date falls on a weekend or holiday, your bank might transfer funds on the next business day. In that case, you won't see the payment withdrawn from your account on the due date, but rest assured that your payment is still on time.

Each month you'll receive a statement showing your energy usage, and your payment will appear on your bank statement. If you need to update your banking information, make sure to do so at least four days before the due date printed on your bill.

Details about signing up for Auto Pay are available at www.rock.coop/autopay, or you can call us at 866-752-4550 or stop by one of our offices.

Shane Larson, CEO

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