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## The 'why' of rate adjustments

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

**I**t's a trend biting consumer pocketbooks across the United States in recent years – rising costs of virtually everything necessary in our day-to-day lives due to inflation, product availability and supply chain challenges in almost every purchasing sector.

While the situation appears to be leveling, the electric cooperative industry across the country continues to face the same challenges as American consumers – keeping up with inflation and getting what they need when they need it.

That accounts for rate adjustments McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) member-owners will see on their billing statement beginning in February for their January usage.

### **Deep dive into energy issues and electricity rates**

Just as many consumers stock products if and when they become available, MEC orders materials, such as transformers, cable and poles in advance. The industry is experiencing up to a three-year delivery delay for many products. Even keeping enough rubber goods for underground cable and meters has been challenging.

While cooperatives always try to have materials available to meet emergency situations, such as major storms causing extensive damage, MEC also has a philosophy of striving to meet member-owner needs as soon as possible.

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Expanding a grain-drying operation? Three-phase material has to be available.

Creating a new rural housing development? Multiple residential transformers and miles of underground cable need to be available.

If someone needs a new service, MEC tries to ensure it can meet the request.

“McLean Electric has a longstanding philosophy that we do not want to have to say, ‘No, we cannot accommodate that,’ when a service request comes in,” MEC General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle explains.

MEC’s annual system load growth rate remains stable at about 4%, Doyle describes. Material currently in stock is based on that load growth trend, along with local and regional economic and electric demand projections. In addition, the White Shield community continues to expand and develop its amenities and economic opportunities, Doyle says.

When supplies have been difficult to obtain, MEC purchased material in advance based on its annual growth rate trends, just like other cooperatives.

That means some electric cooperatives are dealing with cash flow issues, including MEC.

“We’re not cash flowing very well,” Doyle says, since

material expenditures have been made, but they’re not in service yet to generate revenue.

A residential transformer purchased in 2024 costs \$4,000 to \$7,000, depending on its size, due to inflation and supply issues, Doyle describes. Even with an improved supply chain in recent months, transformers ordered in late 2024 are expected to take about a year to receive.

### **Wholesale costs a factor**

Another factor in MEC’s rate adjustments is the increasing cost of wholesale electricity.

MEC purchases all the electric power it provides to its member-owners from Central Power Electric Cooperative (CPEP), headquartered in Minot.

CPEP purchases electricity it provides to six electric cooperatives in North Dakota from the regional generation and transmission provider, Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC). Based in Bismarck, BEPC is one of the largest providers of electricity to rural America in the country, serving all or part of nine states.

As load growth and electric energy demands increase across North Dakota and the United States, generation and transmission providers face the challenge of meeting

## **Rates still remain low**

**I**t’s just one more bite American consumers don’t want to see – increasing electric rates.

McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) member-owners weren’t immune to the situation at the beginning of 2025, with an increased base rate charge and an approximately one-quarter cent kilowatt-hour (kWh) increase. MEC member-owner residential accounts now pay 11.489 cents per kWh.

That’s the disappointing news.

Despite the increase, MEC member-owners now pay less than the average North Dakota residential account paid per kWh in 2024 prior to MEC’s January increase, whether the electricity was provided by an electric cooperative or investor-owned utility.

The Energy Information Administration (EIA), the federal government’s source for all things energy-related, reports the average residential kWh rate for North Dakotans was 11.67 cents in October 2024, the latest figures available.

The EIA website, [www.eia.gov](http://www.eia.gov), lists North Dakota as

having the third lowest average residential kWh rate in the lower 48 states, behind Utah’s 11.44 cents per kWh and Louisiana’s 11.58 cents per kWh.

Those rates compare to California, where residents paid an average of 31.86 cents per kWh in October 2024.

A comparison of the highest and lowest average residential kWh rates within the EIA’s regional breakdown:

### **Northeast Region:**

Highest – Massachusetts, 28.99 cents

Lowest – Vermont, 21.78 cents

### **Mid-Atlantic Region:**

Highest – New York, 24.41 cents

Lowest – Pennsylvania, 17.78 cents

### **East North-Central Region:**

Highest – Michigan, 19.31 cents

Lowest – Indiana, 14.79 cents

### **West North-Central Region:**

Highest – Minnesota, 15.48 cents

existing needs and planning for future needs.

And it takes time to build any type of electric generation facility, whether it's coal-based, natural gas or renewable. And then there is the challenge of transmitting it from the generation source to those who need it in their homes, farms, ranches, businesses and industrial facilities.

It takes time and money, and when supplies are tough to obtain, the situation becomes even more complex.

BEPC's board of directors approved a wholesale power rate increase for all of its member-owners, including CPEC, effective in January, Doyle says.

CPEC's board of directors and staff analyzed BEPC's wholesale rate increase, Doyle describes, with the goal of determining how much of the rate increase it could absorb without impacting its cash flow and margins even more.

"All of the Central Power family is seeing the same rate increase. (Central Power) determined they could absorb a significant amount. Therefore, they were able to keep the increase (to its member distribution cooperatives) as minimal as possible, which we greatly appreciate. ... They would not have had to do that," Doyle says.

While its cash-flow constraint issues prevented the cooperative from being able to absorb increased wholesale power costs, MEC's board of directors felt it would only pass along the additional cost CPEC now

charges its members.

That accounts for the slight increase in the kilowatt-hour (kWh) rate MEC member-owners will see on their billing statement.

"It's strictly a passthrough. It's the amount Central Power increased (its wholesale rate) and it's not anything relating to cash flow issues," Doyle stresses.

The residential kWh increase is approximately one-quarter of a cent per kWh, he explains. MEC previously charged 11.24 cents per kWh, with a new residential rate of 11.489 cents per kWh. For example, MEC residential member-owners using 1,200 kWh per month will notice an increase of about \$2.98.

Rate adjustments to accommodate and ease cash flow issues were made on the single- and three-phase monthly base charge at \$5 per month.

MEC continues to absorb basic operating expense increases, including office and employee expenditures.

Doyle is hopeful the recent trend of an improved supply chain and material availability continues.

One aspect of availability helping the situation is almost all materials MEC uses – everything from transformers to hardware and meters – are manufactured in the United States. Poles are about the only core component imported, which come from Canada, he adds. ■

Lowest – North Dakota, 11.67 cents

Other states in the region include Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and South Dakota.

### **South-Atlantic Region:**

Highest – Maryland, 17.8 cents

Lowest – Florida, 14.16 cents

### **East South-Central Region:**

Highest – Alabama, 15.08 cents

Lowest – Tennessee, 12.51 cents

### **West South-Central Region:**

Highest – Texas, 14.78 cents

Lowest – Louisiana, 11.58 cents

### **Mountain Region:**

Highest – Colorado, 15.09 cents

Lowest – Utah, 11.44 cents

### **Pacific Contiguous Region (West Coast):**

Highest – California, 31.86 cents

Lowest – Washington, 11.88 cents

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics tracks more than United States workforce data. Its website, [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov), also looks at consumer goods costs and much more.

The agency divides the country into statistical regions

to provide data both nationwide and regionally. North Dakota is in the Midwest Region, along with Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

The November 2024 Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers showed food prices (groceries and dining out) rose 0.1% in November 2024. Meat, fish, poultry and eggs drove virtually all of the increase, with those commodities increasing an average of 1.2% across the region for the month.

From November 2023 through November 2024, overall food prices increased an average of 2.4% in the Midwest Region.

Average energy prices decreased 3.1% across the Midwest Region in November 2024, with gasoline contributing to the majority of the price decline – a 5% decrease in gas prices for the month.

From November 2023 through November 2024, natural gas prices increased an average of 2.8% in the region, compared to a 0.7% average increase in electricity. ■



# Spreading community caring through Operation Round Up

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

**F**ebruary is the month of hearts and love, showing how much a person cares about others, whether it's one person or many people.

Yet, silent caring and giving can happen throughout the year, as a vast majority of McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) member-owners give through Operation Round Up.

Each month, participating member-owners' electric bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar. That "pocket change," which can't exceed \$11.88 a year, is placed in an Operation Round Up trust account. A seven-person volunteer board of directors administers the trust, which consists of permanent residents who are member-owners of the MEC service area. They award grants twice a year to nonprofit organizations or individuals in need within MEC's broad service area.

It doesn't matter if organizations or individual recipients are MEC member-owners or not, as long as the organization supports charitable, educational, scientific, health or safety-oriented community projects within McLean County or portions of neighboring counties MEC serves.

In 2024, Operation Round Up's board awarded \$17,000 in grants, assisting food pantries, volunteer ambulance districts, backpack programs, community walking trails, senior exercise programs, children's bike events, mental health awareness for teenagers and major medical emergencies in McLean County.

MEC General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle views the cooperative as Operation Round Up's sponsor.

"I think it's MEC's duty to participate in community

projects. ... It's especially hands-on. What makes Operation Round Up special is that it's an opportunity for member-owners to participate in charitable giving, plus its board – also member-owners – decides who receives grants. It's local people helping local community projects," he says.

While Operation Round Up grants benefit multiple people through an organization's project or program, individuals or families could also benefit, such as those who have suffered a significant medical situation or emergency during a fire or tornado.

Tragedy and emergencies have no boundaries; they occur daily throughout McLean County.

Operation Round Up can help a person or family overcome an unexpected, devastating financial hurdle, says Sonja Moe, MEC's communications manager.

Operation Round Up applicants must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (exempt from federal income tax). However, that isn't a barrier for individuals or families in emergencies. Ask a local church or any nonprofit organization in the area, such as a community service group or chamber of commerce, for potential application sponsorship, Moe suggests.

The spring Operation Round Up grant application deadline is April 30. More information about the program, contact information for its seven board of directors or a downloadable application is available by calling Moe at MEC at 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922 or on MEC's website, <https://mcleanelectric.com/operation-roundup-program>. ■



**Your change... ...creates change!**

**Help support your community by donating to Operation Round Up.**

# Snuggle safely with electric blankets!

Snuggling under a warm blanket on a cold winter day is a cozy feeling. But if you use an electric blanket, be sure to use it safely.

- **Check it first.** Before plugging in the electric blanket, check for any damage and inspect the cord for frays, cracks or cuts. Don't use an older blanket you have had for more than 10 years, since the internal elements may be deteriorating.
- **Upgrade to one with an automatic shutoff.** If your blanket doesn't have a timer, turn it off before going to sleep. Electric blankets are not safe to leave on all night while sleeping.
- **Do not tuck electric blankets under the mattress or run cords under the mattress.**
- **Don't place anything on top of the blanket while it's in use, including comforters and bedspreads.**
- **Don't allow pets to sleep on the electric blanket.**
- **Check the product label and make sure your electric blanket is certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories.**
- **Keep the heating blanket flat while using it.** Folds or bunched areas can create and trap too much heat.
- **Follow instructions for cleaning your electric blanket.** Never dry clean an electric blanket and do not use the spin cycle in the washer. ■





# 5 ways to use smart plugs

Whether you're a smart device expert or a home automation newbie, smart plugs are a great addition to make your home more efficient.

A smart plug connects the plug to an app on your phone via Wi-Fi. The smart plug can then turn an appliance into a fully automated device you can control from your phone or with your voice.

Smart plugs don't cost much and they're easy to install. Just plug them into an outlet and you're ready to go. Regardless of how you intend to use your smart plug, investing in this helpful technology is a wise move.

Check out these creative ways you can use smart plugs around the house to save money and make your life easier.

## 1. Charge multiple types of devices

Whether you have a two-prong, three-prong or USB plug at the end of a cord, smart plugs can handle them all. Smart plugs come in a variety of shapes and sizes, some ideal for space-saving situations and others fully equipped to handle a variety of appliances and devices.

## 2. Pinpoint energy-wasting appliances

Want to know exactly how much it costs to run your

appliances and devices? Smart plugs can track how much electricity your appliances use, helping you determine if it's time to upgrade to a more efficient model.

## 3. Connect with other smart devices

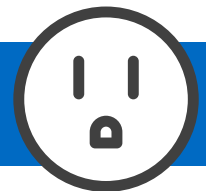
You can get the most out of your smart plug and control your devices from anywhere by connecting it with a smartphone app or a voice assistant like Amazon's Alexa, Apple HomeKit or Google Assistant.

## 4. Keep your home safe

Smart plugs can reduce the chance of electrical fires by automatically switching off appliances like space heaters and electric blankets. To ward off burglars, you can set timers for lights near windows to make it seem like your home is occupied when you're away.

## 5. Make holidays more jolly

Plug your festive light displays into a smart plug, so you can create a schedule and have them turn on and off at set times. Or, make Halloween a little spookier by turning lamps on and off through a connected smartphone app. ■







Dirt and neglect are the top causes of heating and cooling system failure and inefficiency. Maintaining your equipment will keep your system operating at peak performance and prevent future problems and unwanted costs.

These tips will keep your system operating smoothly.

### **CHANGE AIR FILTERS**

A dirty air filter will cause your heating and cooling system to work harder to distribute air throughout your home. This can increase energy costs and damage your equipment, leading to early failure. Therefore, it's important to check your air filter once a month in your central air conditioner, furnace and/or heat pump. If it's dirty, take action! Either clean it if your system has a reusable filter or change it if your system requires a replacement.

### **GET ANNUAL CHECKUPS**

Hire a professional contractor to perform routine maintenance of your equipment. Schedule a checkup of the cooling system in the spring and the heating system in the fall.

A typical maintenance checkup should include:

- Check thermostat settings to ensure the cooling and heating system keeps you comfortable when you are home and saves energy while you are away.
- Tighten all electrical connections and measure voltage

and current on motors. Faulty electrical connections can cause unsafe operation of your system and reduce the life of major components.

- Lubricate all moving parts. Parts that lack lubrication cause friction in motors and increase the amount of electricity you use.
- Check and inspect the condensate drain in your central air conditioner, furnace and/or heat pump (when in cooling mode). A plugged drain can cause water damage in the house and affect indoor humidity levels.
- Check controls of the system to ensure proper and safe operation. Check the starting cycle of the equipment to assure the system starts, operates and shuts off properly.
- Clean evaporator and condenser air conditioning coils. Dirty coils reduce the system's ability to cool your home and cause the system to run longer, increasing energy costs and reducing the life of the equipment.
- Check your central air conditioner's refrigerant level and adjust if necessary. Too much or too little refrigerant will make your system less efficient, increasing energy costs and reducing the life of the equipment.
- Clean and adjust blower components to provide proper system airflow for greater comfort levels. Airflow problems can reduce your system's efficiency by up to 15%. ■

## McLean County community calendar: Events and activities to see and do

### McLean County area food pantry February distribution and donation thrift store dates, times and locations:

- **Garrison: Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Feb. 27.
- **Community Food Pantry serving Makoti, Parshall, Plaza, Roseglen, Ryder, White Shield and others in need:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Feb. 22, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Community Thrift Store serving Ryder, Makoti, Roseglen, Plaza, White Shield, Parshall and the region:** 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Max: Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Feb. 17, city hall, 215 Main St.
- **Turtle Lake: The Lord's Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. Feb. 13 and 10 a.m.-noon Feb. 22, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Turtle Lake: Free Community Clothing Share & Exchange Store,** every Thursday, noon-6 p.m., 221 Main St.
- **Underwood: Community Cupboard of Underwood food distribution:** 10 a.m.-noon Feb. 8 and 4 p.m.-6 p.m. Feb. 20, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook (Community Cupboard of Underwood) for distribution dates, thrift store and other information.
- **Washburn: McLean Family Resource Center:** McLean County residents can contact the center, 701-462-8643, for an appointment to pick up baskets along with more information or assistance through the center's services, 205 Seventh St.
- **Washburn: McLean Family Resource Center Clothing Outlet:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 205 Seventh St.

- **Wilton: Wilton Food Pantry "mini" distributions** every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone. Full food distribution, 4-6 p.m. Feb. 20, Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.
- **Wilton: The (free) Clothes Closet,** 3-5 p.m. Feb. 20, First Presbyterian Church, 401 Dakota Ave.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, vegetables, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, macaroni and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, spaghetti, Alfredo and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups and chili, and household items, such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off locations, information or a list of additional needs in your community.

### February events:

- **Feb. 5:** McLean Ag Show, Garrison High School, sponsored by the Garrison FFA and FFA Alumni Association.
- **Feb. 15:** 45th annual Garrison Volunteer Fire Department Buffalo Feed, serving 4:30-8 p.m., followed by dance at 8:30 p.m. with music by The Thicketts. Tickets available from local firefighters and several Garrison businesses.
- **Feb. 15:** Evening Hike Series, Full Snow Moon Candlelight Hike, 6:30 p.m., Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison.
- **Feb. 24:** Preschool Story Hour, 10:30 a.m., Max Community Library.
- **Feb. 25:** Book Club, 7 p.m., Max Community Library.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County can contact Patricia Stockdill at [stockdill.patricia@gmail.com](mailto:stockdill.patricia@gmail.com) or 701-337-5462 to submit community events. ■

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

**Larry Gessele**, president  
701-447-2461  
District 7, Mercer

**Darcy Klain**, vice president  
701-448-2408  
District 4, Ruso

**Rod Stockdill**, secretary-treasurer  
701-337-5462  
District 3, Garrison

**Clarence Behles**, asst. secretary-treasurer  
701-337-5362  
District 2, Garrison

**Troy Presser**, director  
701-447-2855  
District 5, Turtle Lake

**Karen Hanson**, director  
701-448-2636  
District 6, Washburn

**James Odermann**, director  
701-743-4415  
District 1, Parshall

### STAFF:

**Mark Doyle**, General Manager/CEO  
**Keith Thelen**, Operations Manager  
**Lucas Schaaf**, Engineering Manager  
**Wendy Kinn**, Finance Manager

Office: 701-463-6700  
Toll-Free: 800-263-4922  
Fax: 701-337-5303  
Email: [mclean1@mcleanelectric.com](mailto:mclean1@mcleanelectric.com)  
Website address:  
[www.mcleanelectric.com](http://www.mcleanelectric.com)

