



GM'S REPORT

A SPECIAL KIND OF COMMITMENT

One of my favorite things about living in an electric cooperative's service territory — and working for one — is the unwavering commitment to community.

In 1936, a community came together and formed Firelands to bring electricity to area homes and farms for the first time. It is this very same community, just a couple of generations later, that still owns, operates, and governs the cooperative.

Today, that spirit of community is still demonstrated in a host of ways. Firelands Electric members support their neighbors through programs like Operation Round Up. The co-op contributes to organizations like 4-H and FFA and sponsors its own youth programs to develop tomorrow's leaders. We have spearheaded book collections for the local library, drives for food banks, and much more.

While the majority of Firelands Electric's programs benefit our members and the communities we serve, the co-op also participates in those that assist the larger community — including our national and global communities. Project Ohio, which helps bring electricity to remote areas of South America, is the one that comes to mind. However, it is Firelands Electric's annual USO Ohio Step Up for Soldiers drive that makes a particularly powerful impression on our members.

For 16 years, the co-op has partnered with local radio stations 95.3 WLKR and K96 WKFM to collect hygiene products, nonperishable food, and other items for care packages, which are sent to America's armed forces. With the help and generosity of our co-op community, this program expands just a little bit more each year.

From Veterans Day through mid-December, Firelands serves as a USO donation drop-off location in Huron County. Items like toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, nuts, crackers, and other snacks are brought into the cooperative's office by Firelands' members and employees, as well as the community at large. At the conclusion of the drive, donations are sent to USO Ohio, which sorts and packages them for military personnel stationed overseas and those returning from deployment.

In 2023, Firelands Electric's USO Ohio drive received an added boost from several organizations. Aimee Lloyd of South Central Schools has collected care package items for the co-op since 2018 by organizing a drive at the school. She started participating because her son was a member of the Ohio National Guard. This year, Teen Leadership Corps members Kaylee Oehrli and Devon Muirhead designed a "Passion Project" to also benefit



Dan McNaull
GENERAL MANAGER



With the help of Firelands Electric's members, the community, New London and South Central schools, and Polaris Fashion Place, the co-op's 2023 USO Ohio Step Up for Soldiers drive had one of the largest donations in its 16-year history. WLKR/WKFM Executive Marketing Specialist Lexi Sarrica is pictured loading the stations' van with items collected during the drive.

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FIRELANDS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LOCAL PAGES

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the school's efforts. The fifth-grade classes at New London Schools also collected items for USO Ohio as a service project. Collection boxes were set up throughout the school, and all students and staff were encouraged to help support their cause.

The management team at Polaris Fashion Place also made a generous contribution. Polaris General Manager Tamra Bower also happens to be a Firelands Electric member. After seeing the USO article in *Ohio Cooperative Living*, she and the Polaris team contacted the co-op to participate in the 2023 drive.

Whether donating packets of instant soup, contributing to the purchase of first-responder equipment through Operation Round Up, or supporting electrification efforts in Guatemala, Firelands Electric Cooperative members look out for one another.

This commitment to communities large and small is pretty special, and I'm proud to be a part of it — both as a member and as an employee.

To read more about Firelands Electric's annual USO Ohio collection, visit www.firelandsec.com/uso-ohio. Additional photos from this year's drive are also available at www.flickr.com/photos/firelandsec/albums.

POLARIS FASHION PLACE



General Manager Tamra Bower (above center), Ben Harrison (above left), and Annie Yoder (above right) are just a few of the mall's management team that participated in the co-op's 2023 USO Ohio drive.

The fifth-grade classes at New London Local Schools (at right) collected donations for Firelands Electric Cooperative's USO Ohio drive as part of a service project.

SOUTH CENTRAL SCHOOLS



South Central Schools' Office Clerk Aimee Lloyd (above right) and Teen Leadership Corps members Kaylee Oehrli and Devon Muirhead spearheaded a USO drive at the school district as part of the co-op's 2023 event. Also pictured is Firelands Electric's Communications and Member Relations Specialist Tracy Gibb (above left).



NEW LONDON SCHOOLS

FYI

86TH ANNUAL MEETING

*Save
the
date*

APRIL 6, 2024

at the Ashland University
Myers Convocation Center



Complete details will be included in the March issue of *Ohio Cooperative Living*.



**UPGRADE
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Visit www.firelandsec.com/smarthub-101 to see all that SmartHub can do for you.

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REMINDER:

A rate adjustment went into effect on Jan. 23, 2024. The first bill to reflect this change will be the statement due on March 14.

For a detailed breakdown of the new rate schedule, visit www.firelandsec.com/rate-schedules.





RIGHT-OF-WAY MAINTENANCE

MAKING THE CUT FOR RELIABILITY

Right-of-way maintenance is an important part of Firelands Electric Cooperative's annual work plan. Also referred to as tree trimming or vegetation management, this task is vital for delivering reliable power and for the safety of our members and line crews.

What is a right-of-way?

A right-of-way is the strip of land underneath and around power lines and transformers that Firelands Electric has the right and responsibility to maintain and clear. We must keep trees and other vegetation a proper distance from equipment to prevent harm to people or disruptions in electric service. Specifications vary, but a general rule of thumb for maintaining a safe right-of-way is 20 feet of clearance on either side of primary lines. The area above and below poles and wires should be kept completely clear of all vegetation. Shrubs and other plants should be kept a minimum of 10 feet away from pad-mounted, or ground, transformers.

Why is this important?

Downed trees cause a substantial number of power outages, and each year our crews take steps to reduce the impact. Clearing the right-of-way is crucial for keeping our members' power on. Branches that come into contact with power lines can cause voltage fluctuations, blinking lights, or even outages.

Right-of-way clearing also keeps your family safer by ensuring that tree branches and vegetation do not become energized due to close contact with a power line or other electrical equipment. With the ability to carry up to 34,500 volts, a power line touching a tree branch can be incredibly dangerous — even deadly. Be mindful when around trees that are close to power lines, and make sure your family knows that climbing trees near power lines or going near pad-mounted transformers is extremely dangerous.

Our responsibility

Firelands Electric maintains 996 miles of line that bring power to more than 9,600 homes and businesses, making right-of-way maintenance a big job. Each year, we schedule contractors to work in specific areas of the cooperative's service territory to try to keep ahead of any potential issues.

If a tree invades the right-of-way, the cooperative's vegetation management team will trim back branches and brush using a combination of large and small equipment. We also occasionally use chemical control methods to stop low-growing plant species that can climb poles and trees and interfere with power lines.



James Miller
SYSTEM RIGHT-OF-WAY
COORDINATOR

Keeping power lines clear of tree limbs and brush helps the co-op:

- Reduce power interruptions
- Improve service reliability
- Restore outages more quickly
- Avoid unexpected and costly repairs
- Create a safer environment for crews and the community

If you have existing trees on your property that are in danger of making contact with the cooperative's power lines, we encourage you to notify us. For more information on the cooperative's vegetation management program, questions about tree trimming, or assistance in selecting the right tree to plant, visit our website

at www.firelandsec.com/right-way-clearance or contact Firelands Electric's System Right-of-Way Coordinator James Miller at 1-800-533-8658.

Plant the Right Tree in the Right Place

Trees beautify our neighborhoods, and when planted in the right spot, can even help lower energy bills. But the wrong tree in the wrong place can be a hazard ... especially to power lines.

LARGE TREES

Height/spread of more than 40 feet, such as:

- Maple
- Birch
- Oak
- Sweetgum
- Spruce
- Linden
- Pine

MEDIUM TREES

Height/spread of 25 to 40 feet, such as:

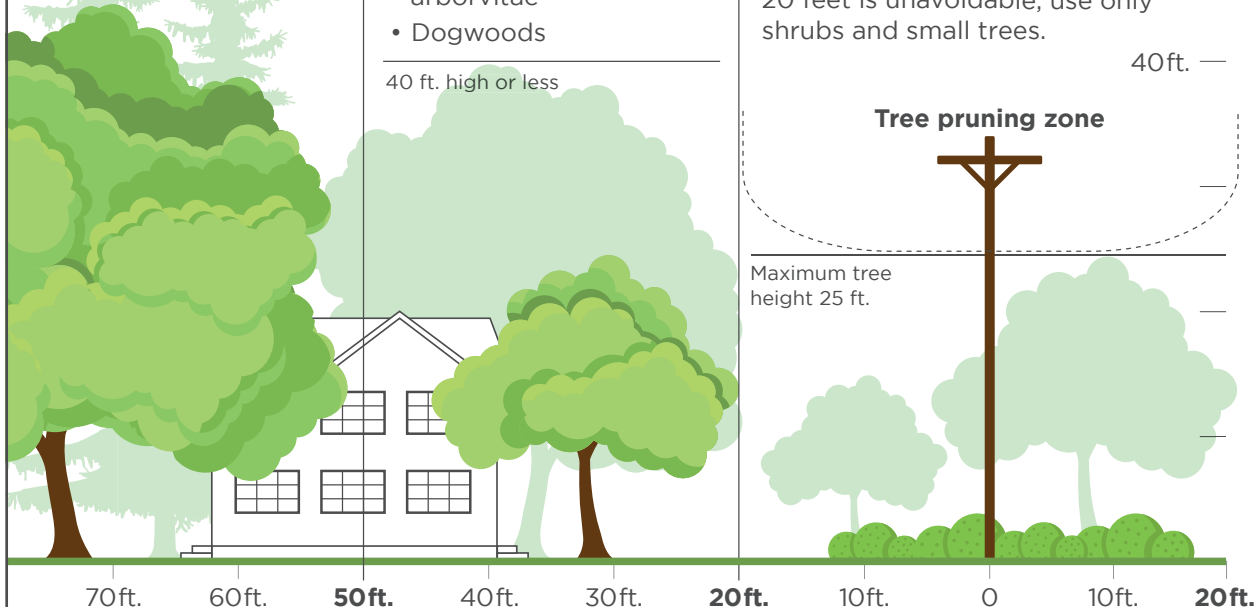
- Washington hawthorn
- Golden rain tree
- Eastern redbud
- American arborvitae
- Dogwoods

SMALL TREES

Height/spread of no more than 25 feet, such as:

- Star magnolia
- Crabapple
- Lilac

Avoid planting within 20 feet of power lines. When planting within 20 feet is unavoidable, use only shrubs and small trees.



Source: The Arbor Day Foundation and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

2024 RIGHT-OF-WAY MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

Vegetation management and right-of-way tree maintenance is tentatively scheduled in 2024 for the following areas and will include brush hogging, cutting, trimming, and any necessary tree removals:

- Ashland County — Montgomery, Orange, and Vermillion townships
- Huron County — Fitchville, Greenwich, New Haven, Richmond, and Ripley townships
- Lorain County — Rochester Township
- Richland County — Blooming Grove, Butler, Cass, and Weller townships



YOUTH PROGRAMS

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:

Want to see firsthand how electricity is generated?

CARDINAL POWER PLANT YOUTH DAY

April 25, 2024



Firelands Electric will be selecting up to 40 high school students to join us for a free, all-day trip to the Cardinal Power Plant on April 25.

Located in Brilliant, Ohio, Cardinal is one of the cleanest coal-fired power plants in the world and provides electricity to 1 million Ohioans, including the members of Firelands Electric Cooperative.

Youth Day applicants **DO NOT** need to be members of the co-op. Any students who attend one of the 16 high schools in our service territory are eligible to apply. And filling out the short online application takes just a few minutes!

Want to join us for a day of touring Cardinal's state-of-the-art facility, food, and fun? Applications are available now and are due by 4 p.m. on Wednesday, March 1.



**Firelands
Electric**
COOPERATIVE
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

ELIGIBLE HIGH SCHOOLS:

- ASHLAND
- CRESTVIEW
- HILLSDALE
- LOUDONVILLE
- LUCAS
- MADISON
- MAPLETON
- MONROEVILLE
- NEW LONDON
- WILLARD
- SOUTH CENTRAL
- PLYMOUTH
- SENECA EAST
- NORWALK
- ST. PAUL
- WESTERN RESERVE

**FOR COMPLETE TRIP DETAILS AND THE LINK TO THE ONLINE APPLICATION,
VISIT WWW.FIRELANDSEC.COM/COMMUNITY.**

YOUTH PROGRAMS



Education helps shape the leaders of tomorrow. That's why Firelands Electric includes it as one of our seven core principles. The A Team is a cooperative program designed to encourage students in their pursuit of academic excellence. Students in grades 6 to 8 are invited to participate and be recognized for their hard work and dedication to education.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Winners of December drawing receive Amazon gift cards



Brookelyn Cox
New London Middle School
Daughter of Raymond and Crystal Cox



Max McKee
South Central Middle School
Son of Jim and Alicia McKee

Send us your grade card and win!
The next drawing will be held on Feb. 10.

How you can win

Students in grades 6 to 8 who have a minimum of three A's on their most recent report card and whose parents or guardians are members of Firelands Electric Cooperative are eligible to apply. A copy of the report card should be submitted by mail to Attn: The A Team, Firelands Electric Cooperative, P.O. Box 32, New London, OH 44851. Report cards may also be emailed to members@firelandsec.com.

Be sure to include the student's name, school, grade, address, phone number, parents' or guardians' name(s), and an email address on your entry.

Complete program details are also available at www.firelandsec.com/team.



Garrett Tracy
C.E. Budd School (Loudonville)
Son of Perry and Gretchen Tracy



HOW EXTREME WINTER WEATHER AFFECTS RELIABILITY



When outdoor temperatures drop, electricity use increases. That's because we're doing more activities inside, and our heating systems are running longer and more often to offset colder outdoor temperatures. Factor in that we all tend to use electricity at the same times — in the morning and early evenings — and that equals a lot of strain on our electric grid.

At Firelands Electric Cooperative, we work closely with our generation and transmission (G&T) cooperative, Buckeye Power, for resource and infrastructure planning to ensure you have the power you need whenever you flip a switch. However, the electric grid is much larger than just your local co-op and G&T.

In winter months, when even more electricity is being used simultaneously across the country, it is possible for electricity demand to exceed supply, especially if an unexpected event occurs, such as a sudden snow or ice storm or equipment malfunction. If this happens, which is rare, the grid operator for our region of the country, PJM, may call for rolling power outages (also called rolling blackouts) to relieve pressure on the grid. If this should ever happen, Firelands Electric will inform you about the situation through SmartHub text and email messages, as well as post information on the co-op's website and social media channels. Check your SmartHub account and the lower left-hand corner of your most recent electric bill to make sure we have your current contact information.

Even though Buckeye Power has sufficient generating capacity to meet our needs during extreme weather events, the regional grid may not. Like all of Ohio's electric co-ops, we rely on this larger grid to transmit power from our G&T to the cooperative-owned distribution system, which then delivers it to your home or business. If there is not enough electricity on the regional grid to send from the transmission substation to Firelands' distribution substations, you could experience a blackout. (The graphic on the next page illustrates how Firelands is interconnected to the grid.)

To reduce the likelihood of rolling power outages, it will take everyone working together during extreme weather events. Keeping the heat on for you, your family, and

your neighbors will require your help. See the list on this page for a few things you can do to relieve pressure on the grid (and save a little money along the way).

As we face the challenges posed by winter weather, understanding its impact on energy demand is crucial for maintaining a reliable power supply. By adopting energy conservation practices during periods of extreme cold, not only can you save money on your electric bills, but you can also each contribute to the resilience of the power grid, keeping our local community warm and connected.



WAYS YOU CAN HELP RELIEVE PRESSURE ON THE ELECTRIC GRID

- **Select the lowest comfortable thermostat setting and turn it down several degrees whenever possible.**

PRO TIP: Seal air leaks around windows and exterior doors with caulk and weatherstripping. Air leaks and drafts force your heating system to work harder than necessary.

- **Refrain from using major appliances such as dishwashers, ovens, and clothes dryers, especially from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.**

PRO TIP: To reduce energy consumption during the hours listed above, use smaller appliances like microwaves, slow cookers, and air fryers and delay starting the dishwasher until right before you go to bed.

- **Ensure that your heating system is optimized for efficiency with regular maintenance and proper insulation.**

PRO TIP: Make sure your vents and registers are not blocked by furniture. Also check that your furnace filter isn't clogged or dirty.

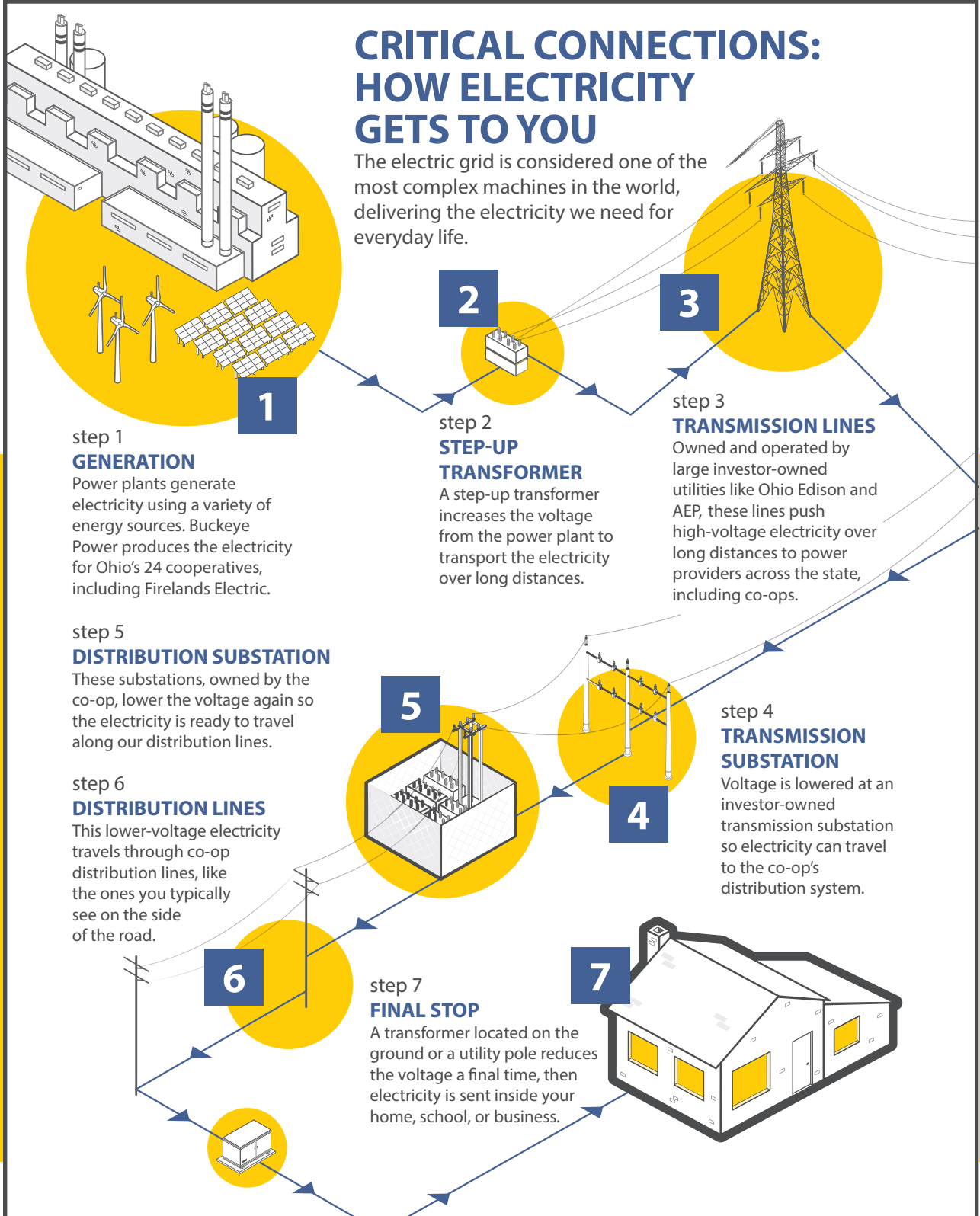
- **When possible, use cold water to reduce water heating costs.**

PRO TIP: Setting your water heater thermostat to 120 degrees can help you save energy and reduce mineral buildup and corrosion in your water heater and pipes.



CRITICAL CONNECTIONS: HOW ELECTRICITY GETS TO YOU

The electric grid is considered one of the most complex machines in the world, delivering the electricity we need for everyday life.





REBATE PROGRAMS

SAVE WITH MEMBER REBATES

Check out the chart below for a quick peek at some of Firelands Electric Cooperative's most popular rebates. A complete listing of current programs, as well as their specific eligibility requirements, is available on the co-op's website at www.firelandsec.com/member-programs.

PROGRAM TYPE	AMOUNT	GENERAL REQUIREMENTS
HVAC SYSTEM & LOAD MANAGEMENT REBATES		
All-electric geothermal systems	\$800* rebate	Installation of a new or replacement all-electric geothermal or heat pump system with a Cool Returns load management device installed . Communicating systems that are incompatible with the load management device will receive the rebate, less \$100.*
All-electric heat pump systems	\$500* rebate	
Dual-fuel geothermal & air-source heat pump systems	\$300* rebate	New or replacement geothermal or air-source heat pump unit added to any fossil-fuel furnace. Communicating systems that are incompatible with the load management device will receive a \$200* rebate.
All-electric ductless or mini-split heat pumps	\$300* rebate	New or replacement all-electric ductless or mini-split heat pump system. Limit of 3 outdoor unit installs/program year.
SMART THERMOSTAT REBATES		
Smart thermostat	\$150* rebate	Installation of any new, ENERGY STAR®-certified smart thermostat with a Wi-Fi connection. Residential installations only and limit of 2 rebates per home/program year. Limited number of rebates available.
LOAD MANAGEMENT INCENTIVES		
Central air-conditioning systems	\$100* bill credit	Installation of a Cool Returns load management device on a new or existing central cooling unit that does <u>not</u> qualify for other member program incentives.
ELECTRIC WATER HEATER INCENTIVES		
New standard electric water heaters (no existing switch)	\$300* bill credit	Installation of a new or replacement electric water heater that has a 50-gallon or larger tank capacity, with an EF of 0.91 or higher that <u>does not already have a load switch</u> .
Replacement electric water heaters (existing switch)	\$150* bill credit	Same as above, except tank has an existing load management switch installed.
Electric heat pump or communicating water heaters	\$150* bill credit	Installation of a new or replacement electric heat pump or communicating water heater that meets the energy efficiency standards above that is incompatible with an RCS switch.
Electric water heater other than those listed above	\$50* bill credit	Installation of load management device on an electric water heater that doesn't meet the cooperative's energy efficiency standards. Solar and on-demand/tankless water heaters do not qualify for this incentive.
ENERGY STAR APPLIANCE REBATES		
Refrigerator & freezer	\$100* bill credit	Purchase of an ENERGY STAR®-certified electric appliance to replace an existing appliance. Purchase receipt, proof of removal of old appliance, and proof of ENERGY STAR certification required.
Clothes washer, dishwasher, stove, & dryer	\$50* bill credit	
Dehumidifier	\$25* bill credit	Installation of an ENERGY STAR®-certified dehumidifier with a minimum capacity of 50 pints/day. Purchase receipt for the new appliance and proof of ENERGY STAR certification required.

*A complete listing of specific eligibility requirements for all incentives is available on Firelands Electric Cooperative's website at www.firelandsec.com.

EMPLOYEE NEWS

Holiday HAPPENINGS

Firelands Electric employees showed off their Christmas spirit during the month of December



On Dec. 9, Operations Technician Josh Kirk and his family represented the cooperative in the "Who" London Hometown Holidays parade in New London. Josh drove a Firelands Electric bucket truck while his wife, Annie, and daughters, Evelyn, 7, and Joanna, 5, passed out candy to parade spectators. The girls even had the chance to meet Mr. and Mrs. Claus and some of the citizens of Whoville.



Several cooperative employees celebrated Ugly Sweater Day in grand style on Dec. 15! Dressed in their most outlandish holiday attire, their coworkers voted for their favorite "Ugliest" sweater. Journeyman Lineman Robert Shepherd earned the most votes with his "More Lights" sweater, which was adorned with blinking Christmas lights. Robert now gets to keep the coveted Golden Willie Wiredhand statue until the next employee event.





COOPERATIVE UPDATE

BOARD MEETING *highlights*

Firelands Electric Cooperative's Board of Trustees met Dec. 1 and covered the following items:

- Board President Dan Schloemer reported that the cooperative received 39 membership applications for approval by the board.
- General Manager Dan McNaull reviewed the proposed 2024 capital budget. Following discussion, the board requested some changes, and a decision was postponed until the next meeting.
- The board reviewed the report from a safety and training meeting held on Nov. 14.
- McNaull summarized the tree-trimming and outage reports for the past month.
- Director of Finance and Accounting Tabi Shepherd reviewed the October financial reports and provided an update on recent accounting and billing department activities.
- The board made the final decision to hold the cooperative's annual meeting at the Ashland University Convocation Center on April 6, 2024.
- McNaull reported on the EV charger being installed in New London.
- Following discussion and a review of recommendations, the board voted to approve a rate adjustment, effective Jan. 23, 2024.
- The board appointed the following members to fill empty seats on the People Fund Board: Renee Hicks for District 2, Steve Aron for District 7, and Cheri Raphael for District 9.
- Director of Communications and Technology Andrea Gravenhorst reported on recent activities involving the member services and IT departments.
- McNaull reviewed the OEC Statistical Report, the upcoming PowerXchange conference, and the members who had taken out petitions for board candidacy thus far.
- Director of Operations Don Englet reported on activities in the operations department and advised that First Energy had finalized the ring bus station.

The cooperative's next board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 27. If you would like to attend the next scheduled meeting, please contact the Firelands Electric office at 1-800-533-8658.

FIRELANDS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

OUTAGE HOTLINE

1-800-533-8658

OFFICE

103 Industrial Drive
P.O. Box 32
New London, OH 44851
1-800-533-8658

OFFICE HOURS

Mon.-Fri. 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m.
www.firelandsec.com



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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District 7

Elaine Oswald
District 8

John Martin
District 9

GENERAL MANAGER

Dan McNaull

HAVE A STORY SUGGESTION?

Email your ideas to:
members@firelandsec.com

