



GM'S REPORT

AVOIDING SOLAR ENERGY SCAMS

Solar energy is booming, and its future is brighter than ever. Through the use of rooftop solar panels, many homeowners can now harness the sun's rays to produce their own electricity that's environmentally friendly and more cost effective than ever before.

Unfortunately, with the increasing popularity of solar, some businesses are taking advantage of consumers who are interested in generating their own energy. While many solar companies are genuine and truly want to help consumers with a successful solar installation, there are the occasional bad apples.

You've likely heard a story or two about solar vendors that promised rooftop panels that would generate enough electricity to power the entire home. Then, after the homeowner has signed a contract and paid thousands of dollars for the installation, the solar panels aren't producing energy as expected, and the vendor is nowhere to be found. Sadly, this story has been the reality for many.

If you're interested in solar panels for your home, consider these tips before installation:

- Talk to the energy advisors at Firelands Electric Cooperative first. We want you to feel confident about any decisions you make about your home's energy use, so that you can get the best return on your investment.
- Collect at least three quotes from different solar companies to ensure you're getting a competitive

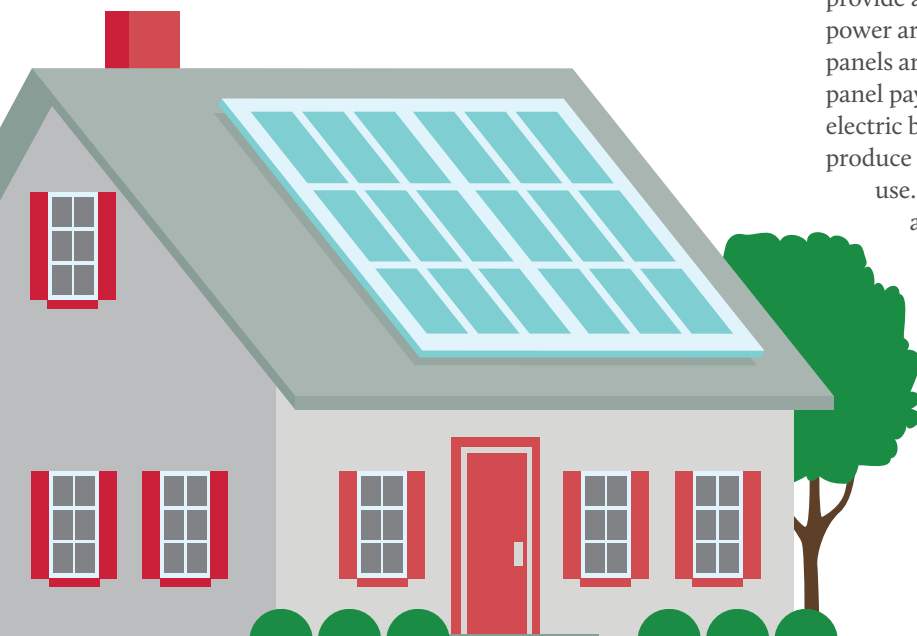
deal. As with any major purchase, research is key, so thoroughly read customer reviews for each of the solar vendors.

- If you speak to a vendor and they use high-pressure tactics, like an offer that's only good for 24 hours, run! Any reputable solar company will recognize that you need time to review a proposal and thoroughly weigh your decision.
- You know if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. So, if a solar company is making promises that sound unachievable and outlandish, they probably are. Remember, if you have any questions, you can always count on Firelands Electric Co-op for advice.
- When it's time to review and sign a solar contract, make sure the language is clear and easy to understand. Ensure any prior verbal (or emailed) promises are included in the contract.
- Finally, keep in mind that solar won't be able to provide all of your electric needs. Your home uses power around the clock, including when your solar panels aren't generating. In addition to a monthly solar panel payment, you will continue to have a monthly electric bill to cover the difference between what you produce and the amount of electricity you actually use. Remember to combine these two costs to get a clearer picture of the impact solar will have on your monthly household budget.



Dan McNaull
GENERAL MANAGER

Going solar is a major decision, so you'll want to conduct a good bit of research first. If you're looking for a general starting point, check out the Department of Energy's Homeowner's Guide to Going Solar at www.energy.gov.





RIGHT-OF-WAY MAINTENANCE

MAKING RELIABILITY A TOP PRIORITY

One of Firelands Electric Cooperative's most important annual projects is right-of-way clearing, or vegetation management. 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

What is a right-of-way?

A right-of-way is the strip of land underneath or around power lines and transformers that Firelands Electric Cooperative has the right and responsibility to maintain and clear. We must keep trees and other vegetation a proper distance from equipment in order 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 poles and wires should be kept completely clear of all vegetation. For pad-mounted transformers (those installed on the ground), shrubs and other plants should be kept a minimum of 10 feet away.

Why is it important?

Trees and small animals cause a substantial number of power outages every year. While the co-op has little control over the animals, our crews can take steps to reduce the impact of downed trees. Clearing the right-of-way is vital to keeping our members' power on. Branches and limbs that come into contact with power lines can cause voltage fluctuations, blinking lights, or even an outage for cooperative members.

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 downed

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 children know that climbing trees near power lines or playing near pad-mounted transformers is extremely dangerous.

Our responsibility

Firelands Electric maintains 995 miles of line that bring power to over 9,100 homes and businesses. This gives Firelands Electric's right-of-way maintenance crews a big job to do. Each year, we make a plan for tree 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 any combination of chainsaws, bucket trucks, tree climbers, brush chippers, or mowers. We occasionally use chemical control methods to stop low-growing plant species, which can climb and outgrow trees near power lines.

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.



James Miller
SYSTEM RIGHT-OF-WAY
COORDINATOR

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:

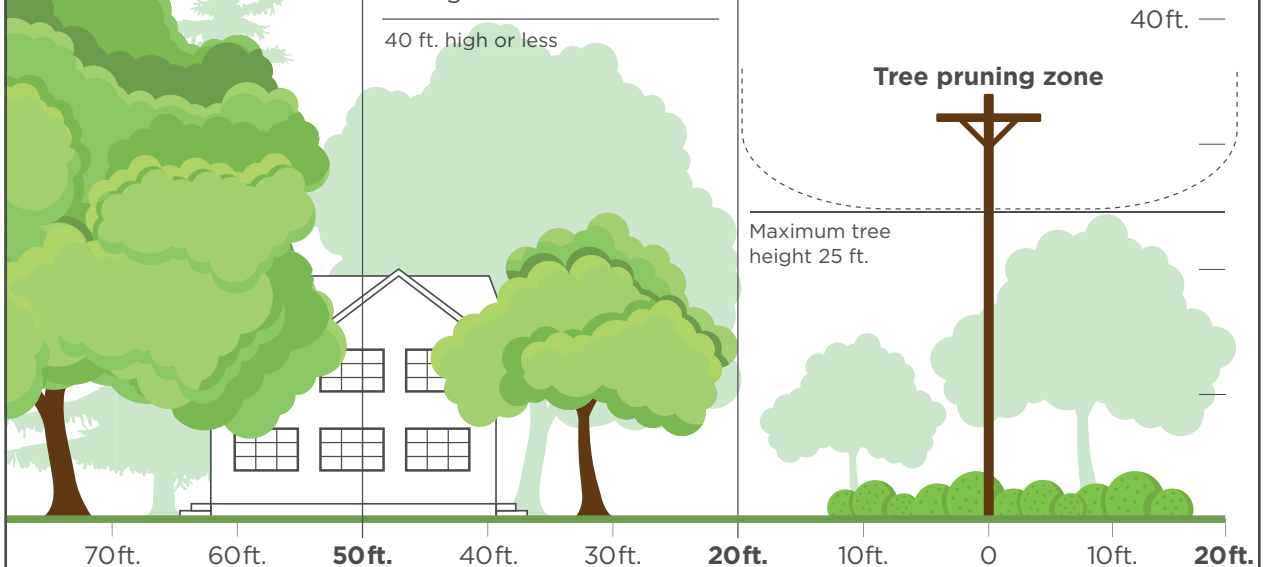
- Washington hawthorn
- Golden rain tree
- Eastern redbud
- American arborvitae
- Dogwoods

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

2021 RIGHT-OF-WAY MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

Vegetation management and right-of-way tree maintenance is tentatively scheduled in 2021 for the following areas and will include brush hogging, cutting, trimming, and any necessary tree removals:

Ashland County — Green, Mifflin, Milton, and Perry townships

Huron County — Fitchville, New Haven, New London, and Richmond townships

Richland County — Mifflin, Monroe, and Weller Township



CO-OP NEWS

DIFFERENT IS BETTER

As a member-owned cooperative, Firelands Electric is different from investor-owned and municipal power suppliers. Our purpose is not to make profits for distant shareholders, but to provide our members with the best possible service. While this obviously means delivering reliable, affordable electric power, it also represents a strong commitment to the little things that add value to being a member.

Rebates

One of the best ways to reduce energy bills is to make your home more energy efficient. Firelands Electric offers rebates to our residential and commercial members on a dozen different efficiency upgrades, including electric water heaters, heat pumps, geothermal units, appliances, and insulation.

Energy consultations

Our member services department is always willing to help with efficiency questions. While these can often be answered over the phone, sometimes a more in-depth look may be necessary. In these cases, a FREE in-home consultation with Firelands' energy advisor may be in order.

SmartHub

With Firelands' SmartHub app, members can pay their electric bill easily and securely, but the app does so much more. You can view your electric use, report outages, update account information, sign up for or update Auto Pay, and enroll in email or text alerts. Visit www.firelandsec.com/smarthub-101 to find instructions on how to register.

Advanced metering

In addition to standard readings, our state-of-the-art metering system provides daily and hourly readings, as well as voltage and "blink" readings. Integrated with our mapping system, it also helps pinpoint outage areas and speeds up restoration efforts.

Alerts

Thanks to SmartHub and our advanced metering technology, members can sign up to receive notices via email or text message regarding their electric account. Notifications are available for power outages and

restorations, peak alerts, usage thresholds, and payment confirmations.

Payment options

Whether you pay via mail, Auto Pay, SmartHub, over the phone with a check or card, or use our night drop box, convenience is key. No matter which option you choose, Firelands never charges a fee based on the type of payment method used.

Capital credits

Members have financial equity in Firelands Electric based on their electricity purchases. This capital is used to maintain and improve our distribution system. As a member-owned organization, this investment in your co-op is returned over time. Since the first capital credits refund in 1948, Firelands has paid back more than \$16 million to our members.

Democratic control

Your board of trustees is made up of nine Firelands Electric members just like you. Elected by you — our members — this board is the governing body that sets policies and guides the direction of the co-op when it comes to electric rates, capital credits, and reliability investments.

Youth programs

Firelands awards over \$10,000 in scholarships each year to high school seniors who live in a home served by the co-op. We also sponsor an annual electrical safety contest, provide informational materials to youth groups, and conduct frequent giveaways to encourage electric and energy education.

Want more info?

If you would like more information about any of the services available to Firelands Electric members, visit www.firelandsec.com or call our office at 1-800-533-8658. We'd be happy to explain the cooperative difference and what makes your membership special!

SAFETY

PLEASE MOVE OVER FOR ROADSIDE CREWS

Every year, workers along the side of the road are injured or killed by vehicles crashing into a crew's site, even though it's marked with bright cones and warning signs.

To reduce incidents that harm police officers and other first responders, Ohio's Move Over law was passed in 1999. The law was expanded in 2013 to include any stationary vehicle with flashing lights, such as tow trucks, construction equipment, and utility vehicles.

Each state's Move Over laws are slightly different, but the basic concepts are the same:

- When you approach a work zone, change lanes if there's more than one on your side of the road, to put an empty lane between your vehicle and the roadside crew.
- If it's not possible or safe to change lanes, slow down.
- Drivers must obey all traffic instructions posted as part of the worksite.
- Keep control of your car, which means paying attention and responding to weather conditions — heavy rain or a slick road might mean you need to slow down even more. And no texting, fiddling with the radio, or other distractions.

- Penalties for violating these requirements in Ohio range from \$300 to \$1,000 or even loss of your driver's license.

If you plan to travel and want to know the specifics of Move Over laws outside of Ohio, a list summarizing each state's law can be found on the AAA website at drivinglaws.aaa.com/tag/move-over-law.

Electric utility crews are special cases to watch out for. A study of utility worksite accidents found that the relatively temporary nature of power line repairs can catch motorists off guard. A roadside construction operation might close a lane for days or weeks, giving time for people familiar with the area to anticipate a change in traffic pattern. Utility work, however, can start and finish in a few hours, possibly raising risks with drivers who might think they know the road ahead.

Another risk to watch for is when worksites are being put up or taken down. Roadside accidents can happen as crews are setting up signs and traffic cones.

Don't drive distracted. Drive according to the conditions of the road. Be courteous to roadside work crews. Watch the signs and obey them. And certainly, follow laws like Move Over. It's good advice that could save a life.



TRUSTEE ELECTIONS

LOOKING FOR LEADERS LIKE YOU

Firelands Electric Cooperative is guided by a board of trustees who are also members of the co-op. It is this board's responsibility to represent members' best interests when making significant decisions, which can affect issues such as service rates, work plans, reliability, and rights-of-way.

Seats on the cooperative's board are incredibly important positions in our community. It's essential to elect strong leaders who understand the community's needs, selected from a diverse pool of candidates. Fresh perspectives help the co-op enact policies that keep our community competitive, so members are always encouraged to run in our board elections.

Firelands Electric's board is a democratically elected body nominated by members of the cooperative's service territory and voted into position by members who choose to participate in the co-op's open election. Any co-op member who is in good standing and resides in a district with an open spot on the board is invited to run for that position.

In 2021, Firelands Electric will again hold elections via mail and online ballot, rather than at the annual meeting. More details regarding this voting process are outlined on the following page.

Board members for districts 2, 7, and 9 will be elected this year. Interested candidates are required to collect 20 member signatures from within their district and submit an election application by Friday, March 19. Petitions will be available starting Feb. 5 at the Firelands Electric Cooperative office, located at 103 Industrial Drive, New London.

Trustees matter and can make a difference. Call 1-800-533-8658 or visit www.firelandsec.com for additional information on how to run for our board of trustees and to find out more about the election process.

BOARD DISTRICTS

District 1: Richmond, Norwich, and Greenfield townships

District 2: New Haven, Ripley, Greenwich, Ruggles, Cass, and Blooming Grove townships

District 3: Peru, Bronson, Fairfield, and Hartland townships and Fitchville Township west of State Route 250

District 4: Clarksfield and Rochester townships, Fitchville Township east of State Route 250, and north of CSX rail in New London municipality and New London Township

District 5: Monroe, Green, and Lake townships

District 6: Butler, Clear Creek, Orange, Weller, Milton, and Mifflin and Madison townships north of State Route 42

District 7: Vermilion, Mohican, Montgomery, and Perry townships

District 8: Mifflin Township south of State Route 42 in Ashland and Richland counties

District 9: South of CSX rail in New London municipality and New London Township

Firelands Electric Cooperative is governed by a board of trustees, nominated and elected by our members in accordance with our Code of Regulations. Our service area is divided into nine districts, which are based on equitable representation of the geographic areas served by Firelands. Trustees from three districts are elected each year, and those selected by the membership to represent each district serve a term of three years.

Nomination petitions to become a candidate for the 2021 trustee elections will be available at the Firelands Electric Cooperative office starting Feb. 5.

Voting procedures

Trustee elections will take place this spring via mail and online ballot

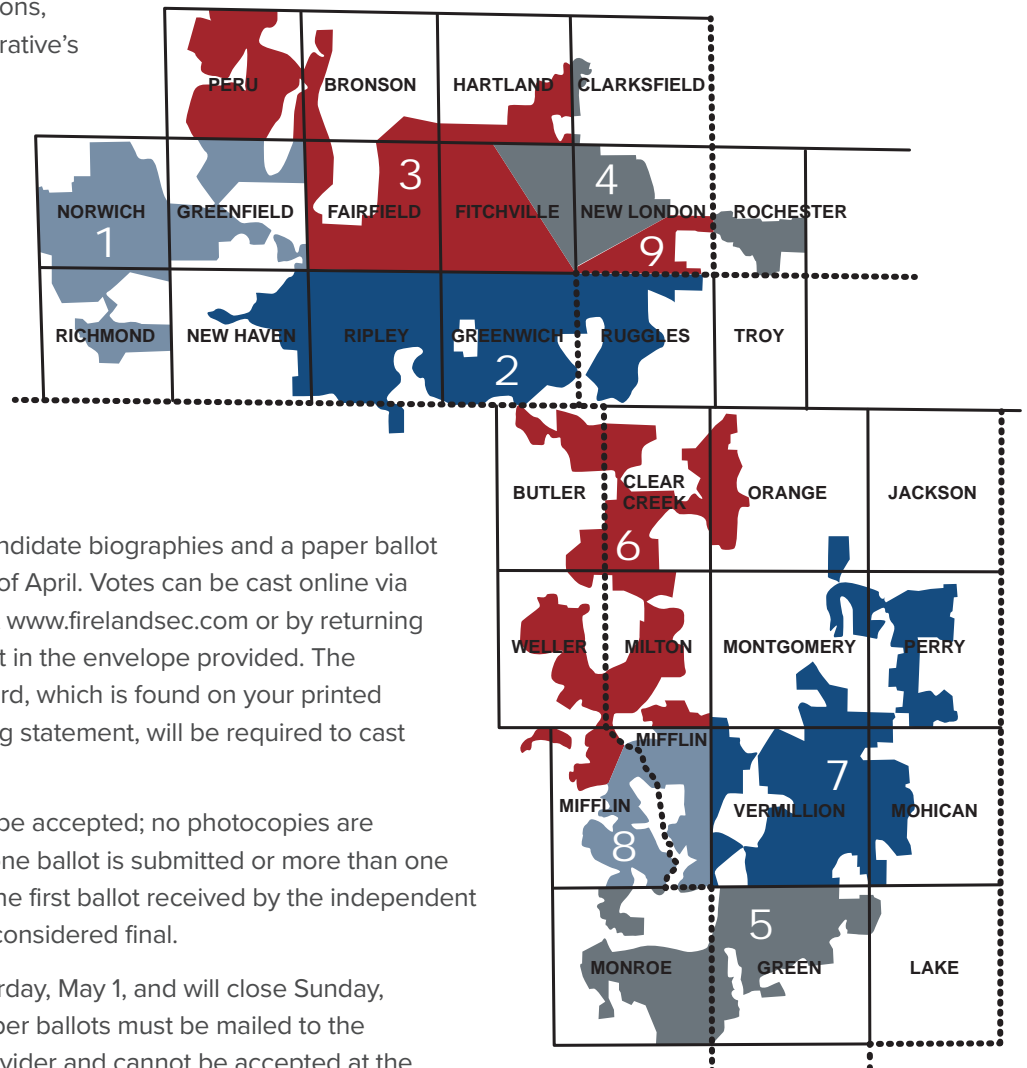
Per the Code of Regulations, Firelands Electric Cooperative's election of trustees will be conducted by mail and online ballot again this year. A third-party, independent service provider will manage the election, overseeing the online voting portal, the printing and mailing of ballots, and receiving and tallying all votes.

Members will receive candidate biographies and a paper ballot in the mail near the end of April. Votes can be cast online via a secure link available at www.firelandsec.com or by returning a completed paper ballot in the envelope provided. The account number on record, which is found on your printed or emailed monthly billing statement, will be required to cast your vote online.

Only original ballots will be accepted; no photocopies are permitted. If more than one ballot is submitted or more than one voting method is used, the first ballot received by the independent service provider will be considered final.

Voting will open on Saturday, May 1, and will close Sunday, June 13, at 11:59 p.m. Paper ballots must be mailed to the independent service provider and cannot be accepted at the co-op office. Any ballots received by the independent service provider after the close of voting will not be counted, so please allow ample time for delivery if sending by mail.

Winners of the election will be announced at Firelands Electric Cooperative's annual meeting on Saturday, June 19, at the Firelands Electric Co-op facility in New London. Results will also be posted on the co-op's website and published in *Ohio Cooperative Living* magazine.



Firelands
Electric
COOPERATIVE
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

CAN YOU **CLOSE THE DOOR** ON ENERGY WASTE?

Heating and cooling costs take up a good chunk of your energy budget. During extreme weather conditions, many homeowners look for quick and easy ways to save energy. One commonly used method is to close doors and vents in unused rooms, reducing the amount of space that needs to be heated or cooled. It sounds like a good idea, but will it really help trim back your energy bills?

What's really going on behind closed doors

It's a common misconception that closing off some rooms in your home will reduce the amount of space you need to heat or cool, thus lowering your energy costs. In reality, closing doors and vents in unused rooms can actually increase your energy use.

Heating and cooling systems are designed for balance, so that the amount of air returned to the air handling unit is roughly equal to the volume delivered through the supply vents in each room. When doors are closed, room air pressure increases. The extra pressure pushes air out through any openings in walls or windows. Rooms with closed doors can leak air in increased amounts.

The air that escapes from the room must be replaced, increasing the amount of air being drawn and the load on your heating and cooling system. Also, the increased duct pressure results in lower air flow with fixed-speed blowers and increased energy use with variable-speed blowers. So, although shutting doors may sometimes be necessary for privacy or a little quiet time, it's not a good way to reduce your energy bills.

Making room for energy savings

There are still plenty of other good options when it comes to improving home energy efficiency and comfort:

- Hire a qualified professional to inspect and clean your heating and cooling system at least once a year.
- Make sure that all supply and return air vents are open and free of obstructions, such as rugs or furniture.
- Check exterior doors and windows for gaps or air leaks and seal with weatherstripping or caulk.
- Ensure that your walls and attic are properly insulated for your local climate. A qualified insulation contractor or energy auditor can inspect your home and tell you whether you need to add insulation.

If your heating or cooling system is older or in need of repair, consider replacing it with a new ENERGY STAR system. ENERGY STAR-certified units use less energy than standard models while still providing the same level of comfort and performance.

For help with your energy efficiency questions, contact Firelands Electric Cooperative's energy advisor at 1-800-533-8658 or visit www.firelandsec.com/energy-efficiency.

OUR ENERGY PORTFOLIO

Where your **POWER** comes from



BASE-LOAD & PEAKING FACILITIES

- Cardinal Power Plant — Brilliant, OH
1,230 MW from coal-fired power plant
- Clifty Creek and Kyger Creek Plants
434 MW from coal-fired generation via
Ohio Valley Electric Corporation
- Robert P. Mone — Convoy, OH and
Greenville — Greenville, OH
710 MW from natural gas
peaking plants

RENEWABLE ENERGY

- OurSolar community solar farms & EnviroWatts
2.1 MW at 23 Ohio locations
- Anaerobic digesters — livestock farms
4.5 MW from four biogas animal waste systems
- Gas generation — Hancock and Perry
county landfills
9.6 MW from methane-produced power
- Entitlement from New York
55 MW from hydropower at Niagara and
St. Lawrence rivers

*Buckeye Power and its 24 member co-ops, including Firelands Electric,
take a balanced, all-of-the-above approach to energy.*

**We are committed to safe, reliable, affordable, sustainable,
and environmentally friendly electricity.**



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 6–8 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



Preston Smeltzer
*Loudonville Middle School
Son of Jason and Jennifer Smeltzer*



Kade Detterman
*New London Middle School
Son of Kurt and Maria Detterman*

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

How you can win

Students in grades 6–8 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, age, school, grade, address, phone number, parents' name(s), and email address on your entry.

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



Wesley Wilson
*Western Reserve Middle School
Son of John and Jenny Wilson*

CO-OP NEWS

Thank you!



Northern Ohio

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the USO annual drive looked a bit different in 2020.

For the 13th year in a row, Firelands Electric

Cooperative served as a donation location for the USO of Northern Ohio's Step Up for Soldiers.

From Nov. 11 through Dec. 11, Firelands joined forces with local radio stations WLKR-FM and K96-FM to collect health and wellness items, snacks, and games for the Bob Hope USO Lounge at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. Available to U.S. military servicemen and women and their families, the lounge provides a place to grab a snack, send email, read, or just find a quiet spot on a busy day of travel.



Co-op members, employees, and the community helped make this year's drive a success. A special thank you to the staff at South Central Local Schools and Pepperidge Farm of Willard for their generous contributions again this year!

FIRELANDS BROADBAND UPDATE

Recognizing that many members' homes do not have access to reliable high-speed internet, in 2019 Firelands' management team and trustees began exploring the possibility of launching a broadband cooperative. Over the past year, we've had two different broadband feasibility studies conducted by industry experts. These studies were initiated knowing that the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) would be injecting billions of dollars into the construction and operation of rural broadband networks. Various options from fixed wireless to fiber to the home were analyzed. Partnerships with other electric cooperatives were also considered, which could provide necessary economies of scale.

Each study revealed that major additional funding, beyond what Firelands could safely provide without negatively impacting the cooperative's finances, would be required from RDOF for a successful broadband launch.

When first released this past spring, RDOF preliminary information showed that up to \$18M would be available through a reverse-bid auction process for Ashland, Huron, and Richland counties. Unfortunately, these three counties and their available funds were removed from RDOF's eligibility list. Although the dates have not yet been released, there will be an RDOF II program, likely in late 2021 or 2022, that may offer additional rural broadband funding.

Without significant grant funding from a program such as RDOF, or perhaps through the State of Ohio, Firelands Electric's management and trustees are unable to chart a course for broadband that would not put undue financial strain on the cooperative. In the meantime, we will continue to examine all options that would help extend high-speed internet throughout the Firelands Electric Cooperative area.

Dan McNaull
General Manager

Dan Schloemer
President
Board of Trustees



COOPERATIVE UPDATE

BOARD MEETING *highlights*

Firelands Electric Cooperative's board of trustees met Nov. 24 and covered the following items:

- Board President Dan Schloemer reported that the cooperative received 63 membership applications for approval by the board.
- Director of Operations Don Englet reviewed recent activities and projects in the operations department, including a line extension project and outages due to a windstorm on Nov. 15.
- The board reviewed and approved a report from a safety meeting held Oct. 30.
- General Manager Dan McNaul reviewed trustee election procedures for the coming year. Following discussion, the board voted to conduct the 2021 trustee elections by mail and online ballot.
- Director of Finance and Accounting Tabi Shepherd reviewed the October financials and reported on recent accounting and billing department activities.
- McNaul reviewed the outage report for October and the status of the current tree trimming program.
- Director of Communications and Technology Andrea Gravenhorst reviewed a report on recent activities involving the member services and IT departments and reminded the board that the USO Step Up for Soldiers annual drive would run through Dec. 11.
- District 6 Trustee Kevin Reidy reported on an NRECA course he recently attended on board operations.
- District 3 Trustee Tom Lucha reviewed a recent NRECA course he participated in regarding board decision-making.

Firelands Electric Co-op is democratically controlled and governed by local people committed to policies that result in a safe and reliable electric system, fair rates, financial responsibility, and superior member service.

The cooperative's next board meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 23. 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
419-929-1571

OFFICE HOURS

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



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Dan Schloemer
President, District 1

Bruce Leimbach
Vice President, District 4

Carl Ayers
Secretary/Treasurer, District 5

W.E. Anderson
District 8

Tom Lucha
District 3

Gene Lamoreaux
District 2

John Martin
District 9

Kevin Reidy
District 6

Rob Turk
District 7

GENERAL MANAGER

Dan McNaul

HAVE A STORY SUGGESTION?

Email your ideas to:
members@firelandsec.com

Firelands
Electric
COOPERATIVE
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 