

along the lines

VOLUME 4

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www.mjmec.coop

Fourth graders learn how to stay safe around electricity

What is the one thing electricity is always looking for? Kyle Finley asked that very question to a group of fourth grade students at Carlinville Elementary on Friday, January 14. He gave them a hint: a path to... "Ground!" the students yelled.

Electricity, Finley had explained earlier, always seeks the path of least resistance to reach the ground. The danger is when the least resistive path is through a human body.

During the half hour presentation, students learned how electricity travels, how it can be dangerous, and how to stay safe. Finley, who owns and operates Live Line Demo, Inc., makes use of a large display that simulates high voltage lines. Finley uses an energetic and engaging style to get the attention of students and makes use of the display to show them the dangers of power lines. The display carries 7,200 volts of electricity.

Around 500 fourth grade students from Macoupin and Montgomery counties attended the informative demonstrations. Presentations were also given on Thursday, January 13, at Lincoln Land Community College in Litchfield.

The demonstrations were sponsored by MJM Electric Cooperative, Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative, Shelby Electric Cooperative, the University of Illinois Extension, and Lincoln Land Community College.



Virden Elementary School teacher Corinna Edge smiles as she lifts her feet in the air to simulate sitting in a vehicle that is making contact with an electric line. Finley explained that the safest course of action in such a case is to remain inside the vehicle.



Girard Elementary School fourth grader Mia Lewis watches Kyle Finley demonstrate the dangers of mylar balloons during a safety demonstration on Friday, January 14. Mylar balloons are metallic and an excellent conductor for electricity.

M.J.M Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative



264 North East Street
 Carlinville, Illinois 62626
 Phone: 800-648-4729

Office Hours
 Monday - Friday: 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
 Saturday: 8:00 a.m. - Noon

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Holidays observed

New Year's Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, day following Thanksgiving and Christmas Day.

How to report an outage

Call 800-648-4729. Do not call the local lineman. Collect calls will be accepted to report outages. When you report an outage, give your name and location number. Before calling, check your fuses or circuit breakers. Check with your neighbors. Call to report hazardous conditions.

M.J.M. Along The Lines

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A comforting thought

No, it can't be. It can't possibly be time to write a column for a new year. It seems like I just wrote one for 2010 a few weeks ago. Unless you are a teenager, you know exactly what I am talking about. Well, time really flies when you are having fun. Of course, the frog says that time is really fun when you are having flies. Please smile.



Doug Rye

As I think of a new year, I also think of the past. I just love it when you tell me that you were helped by something that you read in this column. I just got a call a while ago from a fellow who told me that he had just finished reading the December column and wanted to order the attic radiant barrier so that he could install it before his attic gets hot. He is a smart fellow. I hope to continue helping you for a long time, so write my phone number down – 501-653-7931 – and just file it under energy nut and continue reading these columns.

I have received a lot of calls lately from folks with comfort problems in their homes. Some have older houses, and others have fairly new ones. It really doesn't matter, because if you are not comfortable, you are not happy. I can tell you that the subject of comfort has changed over the years. My first bedroom as a youngster was six feet by nine feet. I had my own bunk bed, a place for my electric train, and I didn't have to share it with three older sisters. The problem was that I had to go through their room to get to my room. And my room had no source of heat whatsoever, except what seeped into my room through the curtain (door) from the big non-vented gas heater in the girls' room, and they didn't have to share the heat with me. On many cold mornings, I would draw pictures in the frost on the window before I would jump out of bed and run through their

bedroom to get to the non-vented gas heater in the living room. Think of it. My room was freezing; their room was smothering hot; the temperatures of the other rooms were anybody's guess, and basically we were all thankful and happy just to have a house with heat.

What a difference a few years can make. Now we expect every room in our house to be the same comfortable temperature. I know of a case this past year where the homeowner threatened to file suit against the builder of his new house because upstairs was always a few degrees hotter than downstairs in the summer. We have proven many thousands of times that there is no excuse for a new house not to have affordable comfort. It is not always possible that every room will have the exact same temperature 24/7, but it can be very close. All you have to do is build it like I have been teaching you to do for the last 20 years. It is easy and affordable, and it works every single time.

I recently received a call from a lady in Illinois who said that she and her family had been in their new house for seven months and the house was cold. I said, "I assume that you meant cold in the winter." She said, "Yes, it was just

► *Continued on page 5*

Column reprinted with permission of the Association of Arkansas Electric Cooperatives. Doug Rye is a licensed architect living in Saline County and the popular host of the "Home Remedies" radio show. He works as a consultant for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas to promote energy efficiency to cooperative members statewide. To ask energy efficiency-related questions, call Doug at 1-501-653-7931. More energy-efficiency tips, as well as Doug's columns, can also be found at www.ecark.org.

Efficiency tax credits drop, but don't disappear

Energy efficiency improvements are great for lowering electric bills. But sometimes the up-front cost can be a drawback.

Since 2005, Congress has enacted a series of tax breaks for consumers who take steps to make their homes more energy efficient. In December, the outgoing 111th Congress approved extending some popular efficiency tax credits through Dec. 31, 2011, although at greatly reduced levels.

The federal Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010 reduces the total lifetime credit that can be claimed on energy efficiency improvements made between 2006 and 2011 (excluding 2008, when no credit was available) from \$1,500 to \$500. It also lowers the percentage of efficiency upgrade costs consumers can recover, from 30 percent

in 2009-2010 to 10 percent in 2011.

There are also maximum allowances for different upgrades. For installing more efficient windows, the tax credit is limited to \$200, and there's a \$300 cap for "any item of energy-efficient building property." Other restrictions include:

- **Furnaces (\$150):** Must have at least 95 percent (up from 90 percent) annual fuel utilization efficiency (AFUE). Oil furnaces and boilers were returned to the single furnace category at 95 percent AFUE.
- **Advanced main air circulating fan (\$50):** Must utilize less than 2 percent of a furnace's total energy consumption.
- **Central air conditioner (\$300):** Must have a seasonal energy efficiency ratio (SEER) of at least 16 and an

energy efficiency rating (EER) of at least 13.

- **Air-source heat pump (\$300):** Must have at least a heating seasonal performance factor (HSPF) of 9, SEER of 16, and EER of 13.
- **Biomass fuel stove (\$300):** Must have a thermal efficiency rating of at least 75 percent.

Renewable energy tax credits created by the federal stimulus bill don't expire until Dec. 31, 2016. These credits cover 30 percent of the cost of materials and installation for residential solar panels, solar water heaters, small wind turbines, and geothermal heat pumps. Details are available at energystar.gov/taxcredits.



Your fridge needs a retirement plan.

Get \$35 when you recycle your old fridge. Plus, save up to \$150 a year in energy costs.

It doesn't make financial sense to keep an old fridge or freezer in your garage or basement – not when it uses up to four times the energy of newer models. And throwing it away isn't a good long-term plan for the environment. Why not let us recycle it? We'll haul it away free of charge, you'll get \$35 and you can save up to \$150 a year in energy costs. Talk about a good return on investment.

Call 877-395-5535 or visit www.mjmec.coop for pickup.

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Refrigerators and freezers must be in working condition, and must be between 10 and 30 cubic feet in size, using inside measurements. Wabash Valley Power Association (WVPA) contracts with JACO Environmental, an appliance recycler, to pick up and recycle refrigerators and freezers that are in working condition. This program is funded by WVPA and is available to residential electric customers in MJM Electric Cooperative's territory on a first-come, first-served basis until funding is expended. Customers must own the unit(s) being recycled. Limit two units per residential address. A check will be mailed to participants within 4-6 weeks after the appliance collection. Some restrictions apply.

GET
\$35
SAVE UP TO
\$150/YR
IN ENERGY COSTS

The Value of Automated Meter Reading (AMR)

At the 2010 MJM Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting, it was announced that the Cooperative would be installing an Automated Meter Reading (AMR) system. As a member owned, at cost electric provider, it makes sense to utilize technology to improve reliability and eliminate costly billing issues, while at the same time making it possible to better utilize existing power plants and transmission systems. It makes even more sense when the Cooperative and its members can realize a payback on the investment.

AMR systems have been around since 1978. Over time AMR systems have evolved and because of the many advantages available today to the Cooperative and its Members, these systems are more frequently referred to as Advanced Metering Infrastructure or AMI. Automated Meter Reading systems offer two way communication between the Cooperative headquarters and meters, as well as monitoring and control devices on the distribution system. The communication available with an AMR system allows the Cooperative the ability to monitor the entire system with near real time data, which enables much closer oversight of system operations. Improved operating efficiencies and billing efficiencies are other benefits of an AMR system, which translate into a cost savings to the member. An AMR system will read the meter, but there is so much more to consider.

Benefits of AMR include the following:

OUTAGE DETECTION AND RESTORATION: An AMR system will make it possible for the Cooperative to know right away when an outage occurs and how many members are affected as well as the area affected. Such information will be helpful in determining exactly where the problem is and what needs to be done, which will result in quicker restoration times. It is likely, for example, if an outage takes place at a member's home during the day, when they are gone, the Cooperative will find out about it and be able to restore the power before the member even returns. Furthermore, the power can be restored during normal working hours, which will avoid the expense associated with overtime.

VOLTAGE MONITORING: For a number of different

reasons, a member can experience a change in voltage. It could be related to trees, a storm or an equipment malfunction.

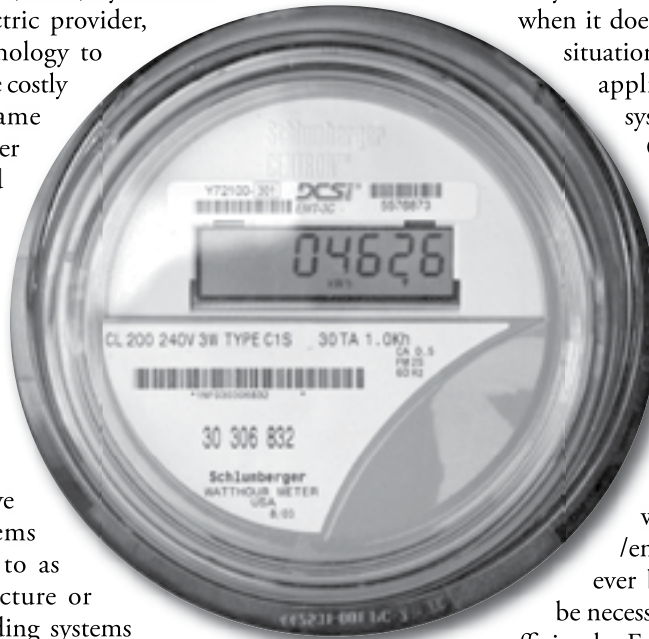
Thankfully this does not happen frequently. However, when it does, excessively high or low voltage situations can be damaging to a member's appliances or electronics. An AMR system has the capability to warn the Cooperative of excessively high or low voltage situations.

ENERGY MANAGEMENT:

In the past, MJM controlled a number of water heaters and some air conditioning load in the summer during periods of peak demand. More recently, this practice has been limited. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that within 3 to 5 years, MJM will be offering more load control /energy management programs than ever before and an AMR system will be necessary to manage energy usage more efficiently. For example, it is entirely possible that the defrost option on a refrigerator would not be allowed to come on at the same time the water heater is calling for the elements to operate. Once the water heater has finished heating water, then the defrost option could operate. Members who participate in voluntary energy management programs will be able to save money on their electric bill.

TIME OF USE (TOU) PRICING: Within the next 5 years, it is anticipated that a voluntary "Time of Use" rate will be available to members of the Cooperative. Under a TOU rate, members will have an opportunity to shift some of their electric consumption to times of the day when electricity is less expensive. For example, it may be less expensive to operate a washing machine, clothes dryer or a dishwasher after 7:00 p.m. instead of earlier in the day. For members that are able to make such an adjustment, they can save money on their electric bill. An AMR system will greatly enhance the ability of the Cooperative to offer such a program.

PRE-PAID ELECTRIC SERVICE: The two way communication available with an AMR system will allow the Cooperative to offer a Pre-paid electric service whereby a member can purchase, in advance, a certain number of kilowatt hours. When the member is close to using up the number of kilowatt hours purchased, the Cooperative can easily notify them in advance that they need to recharge the meter. A pre-paid service would further reduce the need to



require a deposit, which may be very attractive to members for different reasons. While pre-paid services are new to the electric industry, they are not new to other industries. People who buy LP gas have to pay for it when the tank is filled up. Gasoline stations require consumers to pay up front when they fill up a gas tank in their vehicle and Cell phone companies also offer prepaid services.

REMOTE DISCONNECT AND RECONNECT: An AMR system will allow the Cooperative to disconnect and reconnect electric services from the office. There will no longer be a need to send a truck and a lineman to physically disconnect or reconnect an electric service. This will save on fuel, vehicle, and labor expenses.

ELECTRICITY THEFT DETECTION: The majority of MJM members are extremely honest and would never intentionally steal power. However, there is a growing number of consumers who steal power. When someone steals electricity, all of the other members of the Cooperative end up paying for it since the power was used, an expense was incurred, and bills must be paid. Sometimes the cost can be recovered and sometimes it cannot. Theft of electricity results in higher rates for the rest of the MJM membership. An AMR system will notify the Cooperative immediately if anyone tampers with a meter.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE HONOR SYSTEM ARE ELIMINATED: A self read system makes it very easy for members to report incorrect meter readings intentionally, which adds to the cost of operating the Cooperative. Early in 2009, MJM employees read the 9,200 meters on its system and found that approximately 750,000 kWh's had not been reported, resulting in more than \$80,000 in revenue that had not been paid for even though it had been used. Most people today would not trust an honor system if they owned and operated a self serve gasoline station. Unfortunately it is becoming more difficult to accept an honor system when it comes to the consumption of electricity and that is why the majority of electric providers utilize meter readers or some type of AMR system. An AMR system will make it much more difficult to cheat on an electric bill.

BILLING ACCURACY: A frequent problem associated with a self read meter is that meter readings provided are not accurate. It isn't always intentional and often involves a simple mistake. Unfortunately, this happens more often than anyone can imagine and it is costly to correct. Meters also fail sometimes and if they do, and no one notices for a month or more, an estimate has to be made. In any one of these situations, billing accuracy is affected and so is the amount of revenue that should be collected.

METER READING: For some members, reading the meter has never been a problem. Nonetheless, a growing number of members find meter reading an inconvenience or another burden. Part of this is related to changing lifestyles of American families whereby both parties of the household work outside

the home. The result is an ever increasing number of members who unintentionally forget to submit a meter reading.

The Cooperative will be installing substation equipment for the AMR/AMI system throughout 2011 and H.D. Supply will be changing out meters for the next 12 to 14 months. Hopefully by March of 2012, the Automated Meter Reading system will be completely installed and operational. Please note that members should continue to read their own meter until notified by the Cooperative that it is no longer necessary to read the meter.

MJM Electric Cooperative is committed to providing safe, reliable and affordable electric service in an environmentally responsible manner. Installing an AMR system will save members money and be beneficial in assisting the Cooperative to provide better service while managing energy more efficiently. An AMR system is an investment that adds value and a number of benefits while paying for itself in eight years or less. If the cost of the system was financed over a 10 year period and none of the cost saving benefits were taken into account, the cost to the member works out to be approximately \$2.00 per month. However, when one takes into account the direct and indirect savings associated with the system, which may add up to \$100,000 or more per year, the cost becomes almost insignificant. When one considers all of the benefits associated with an AMR/AMI system, it is easy to understand why most electric cooperatives across the nation have taken advantage of the technology available and invested in AMR systems. After conducting a thorough investigation of AMR systems and the associated benefits, the Cooperative is convinced that an AMR system will add value to the service being provided and is just one more way MJM Electric Cooperative is meeting the needs and desires of its members.

A comforting thought ▶ *Continued from page 2*
great in the summer." I said, "You should have built the house to my standards." She replied, "We did." My heart skipped a beat and I asked her every question I could think of. Did you caulk, did you use cellulose, did you use good windows, etc.?

And, yes, they even installed geothermal. I couldn't imagine what the problem might be, so I asked the age-old question. "What is the thermostat setting right now?" Her answer was 60 degrees. I told her to turn it up to 75 degrees. She said that if she did, her husband would come through and turn it back down to 60 degrees. I told her to go whack her husband upside the head and tell him who was boss, and if that didn't work, stop cooking his meals. She laughed and said that might work. This is a true story, and it has what appears to be an easy solution. Some problems don't have such easy solutions, but I am confident I can help all of you. See you next month when I will give you more ways to make your house more comfortable.



Connections Corner

Jerseyville cleaners offer discounts

Two dry cleaning operations in Jerseyville offer discounts to Co-op Connections® card holders. To receive the discounts, simply present your card at the participating business prior to making a purchase.

Plaza Cleaners and Laundry is located at 810 South State Street and can be reached at 618-498-6121. They are open Monday-Friday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. They offer a 10 percent discount off of any dry cleaning order of \$20 or more.



Plaza Cleaners and Laundry

Town and Country Cleaners is located at 115 West Arch and can be reached at 618-498-7743. The store is open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Connections cardholders who bring in a pair of pants for cleaning can get a second pair cleaned at half the price. This offer is limited to one per customer.



Town and Country Cleaners

New energy efficiency grants available for qualifying co-op members

The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICECF) is pleased to provide a new energy efficiency incentive grant program for qualifying members of an Illinois electric cooperative. This new program is just one of many funding opportunities and new programs available through ICECF. For complete program details and eligibility standards, please visit www.IllinoisCleanEnergy.org.

The new program provides an incentive for lighting upgrade projects of ICECF qualifying entities served with electricity by a cooperative. Facilities such as schools, local government buildings and other 501c3 not-for-profit entities qualify for ICECF incentives. Through this program, up to \$20,000

is provided to applicants not covered by ICECF's current lighting programs or the investor-owned utilities' Energy Efficiency Portfolio Standard (EEPS) programs.

The program basically mimics the EEPS benefits of the investor-owned utility serving in the cooperative's service area. There are, however, some minor differences between the EEPS programs and the new ICECF program.

For more information, visit the "EEPS Ineligible Lighting Upgrade Program" section found under the energy efficiency tab at www.IllinoisCleanEnergy.org.

In addition to the lighting incentive, funding opportunities are

available for qualifying facilities for geothermal heat pump installations, design of new "green" Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) certified buildings and renewable energy systems using solar photovoltaic arrays, solar thermal installations, and wind turbine projects. Applications for 2011 can be downloaded from the ICECF website. For more information contact Bob Romo at ICECF at (312) 372-5191 or by email at bromo@illinoiscleanenergy.org. You can also contact John Freitag at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives at (217) 241-7973 or jfreitag@aiec.coop.

Member Trading Post

For Sale: 2008 Jayco Eagle 32 ft. Travel Trailer, electric awning, 2 large slide-outs, king bed, walk-in shower, excellent condition, lots of storage/cabinets, kept under roof storage, original price \$40,000. Call 618-372-4547.

For Sale: Assorted tack. Heated water bucket (paid \$32, asking \$20), saddle pad (paid \$35, asking \$25), bridle (paid \$32, asking \$20), purple saddle cover (paid \$8, asking \$6), black saddle bag (paid \$12, asking \$5), neoprene girth (paid \$18, asking \$10), rainmaker hoof conditioner (paid \$22, asking \$10), lunge line (paid \$8, asking \$5), curry comb (paid \$5, asking \$2.50), brush (paid \$6.50, asking \$3), extra bit (paid \$12, asking \$6). Almost all of this tack has never been used or only used once or twice. Sell each piece or make offer for all. Call 217-827-7690 or 618-836-7117 before 1:30 p.m.

For Sale: Kimbell Moonglow organ. 10 yrs old. Mint condition. Short in the speakers (fixed easily). Cost \$900, asking \$150. Call 217-827-7690 or 618-836-7117 before 1:30 p.m.

For Sale: 2002 Chevy Suburban. All leather, all power. 6.0 litre, 2 wd w/ towing package. White w/biege interior. Must see! 1972 Yamaha 125 Endure, no title - \$500 or best offer. Call 618-836-7412 or 618-292-3035.

For Sale: White Otterbox Defender. Fits iPhone 3 or 3G. Never been used. Paid \$48, asking \$20. Call 217-827-7690 or 618-836-7117 before 1:30 p.m.

For Sale: Small square bales of grass hay- \$3. Call 618-836-7333.

Wanted to Buy: 3 pt field sprayer, 50-75 gal tank, 20-25 ft boom, cat I. Call 217-473-1824.

For Sale: 1989 Chrysler Fifth Avenue, 4-door, automatic, A/C, leather, 96,000 plus. Call 217-710-4966.

For Sale: Race car bed, twin, red - \$100. Call 217-851-1581.

For Sale: Case International 35 hp, diesel utility tractor, 2010 Woods front-end loader w/bucket & hydraulic blade, like new condition, 288 hrs. Call 618-376-6861.

For Sale: Large oak entertainment center. Holds 36" TV - \$2,000 new, asking \$750 or best offer. Call 618-885-2211 or 618-946-0962.

For Sale: John Deere riding mower with 12 horsepower kohler motor and 42" deck.

For Sale: Stromberg Carlson antique hand cranked wall phone. Perfect condition - asking \$700. Call 618-635-2782 or cell phone 217-710-1754.

For Sale: 2005 Armstrong high efficiency 92 percent 90,000 BTU gas furnace with sealed combustion burner operation. Can be converted to natural gas - \$600 obo. Call 217-854-3717.

For Sale: Willett Buffet cabinet-Wildwood cherry;dining table, six chairs. \$1750. For details contact mgowner79@yahoo.com or 217-710-5614.

For Sale: 3000 Ford tractor, wide front end, hydraulic loader, runs good, good tires - \$5,500 obo. John Deere 301 tractor, wide front - \$3,900. Call 618-372-8400.

Wanted: Farmall 140 Tractor. Call 618-567-7696 or 618-372-3078.

For Sale: Great billboard/sign location available between Hillsboro-Litchfield, Route 16. Call 217-324-3869.

For Sale: homemade heavy duty steel welded car ramps. \$95. Call 217-324-3869 .

For Sale: 1930s era Four poster bedroom set, dresser/mirror, chest of drawers. Very nice. excellent condition. \$2500. For details contact mgowner79@yahoo.com or call 217-710-5614.

For Sale: 2.78 ct. Platinum engagement ring. Tobin's appraisal, \$17,850. Taking reasonable offers. For details contact mgowner79@yahoo.com or 217-710-5614.

December Outage Summary

12/1 – 8:48 a.m.

Western Mound, tree on line, off 3 hours.

12/13 – 3:49 a.m.

Bird, tree fell through line, off 3 hours.

12/16 – 3:15 p.m.

Polk, underground primary out, off 4 hours.

12/24 – 9:12 a.m.

Mississippi and Piasa, OCR opened, off 3 hours.

12/27 – 12:51 p.m.

Mississippi and Piasa, tree on line, off 1 hour.

12/31 – 5:34 a.m.

Bird, OCR opened, off 2 hours.

12/31 – 10:02 a.m.

Bird, bad insulator, off 1 hour.

The logo features the word "Apeoming" in a large, bold, black script font. The letter "A" is particularly large and stylized, with a thick, brush-like texture. The word is set against a light grey oval background.

Apeoming

**Annual meeting
March 19**

MJM's annual meeting will take place March 19 at the gymnasium of Carlinville High School in Carlinville. A free meal will be provided, along with attendance prizes, and music from Southern Gospel duo Mark and Pam Fisher. Members in attendance will also receive a \$5 credit on their account.