

WEEKLY DIGEST

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

Hands-Free Phones OK, Drivers Told

Federal regulators have clarified the equipment covered by their recent ban on the use of hand-held mobile telephones by the drivers of vehicles owned by electric cooperatives and other utilities.

These drivers—in fact, all commercial motor vehicle operators—can use push-to-talk mobile phones while behind the wheel, provided they do not “reach for, dial, or hold the actual mobile telephone...while driving,” according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

The driver must be able to touch the button needed to operate the push-to-talk feature from the normal seated position with their safety belt fastened, the agency added.

According to Martha Duggan, NRECA senior principal, regulatory affairs, the safety agency has advised its field personnel, and enforcement agencies, that use of push-to-talk mobile phones is allowed under these circumstances.

“We applaud the FMCSA administrator and staff for their responsiveness in providing long-term clarity on this issue,” she added.

The agency had turned down a request by NRECA to exempt electric co-ops from its mobile phone rule through an emergency services exemption.

The cell phone ban, which became effective Jan. 3, aims at improving highway safety by reducing distracted driving-related accidents involving drivers of commercial motor vehicles, the motor safety unit noted. [▶ Complete Article](#)

Ex-Verizon CEO Tells Co-op Leaders to Avoid Pitfalls

INDIAN WELLS, Calif.—Leadership starts at the top, but there’s a right way and a wrong way to go about it.

That was the message a veteran executive of one of the nation’s top wireless firms offered electric cooperative leaders gathered here for the 2012 CEO Close-Up.

Denny Strigl, former CEO of Verizon Wireless, and later the president and chief operating officer of Verizon Communications, spoke to nearly 300 co-op managers and industry partners on Jan 23.

Strigl started by looking at some of the reasons managers struggle, beginning with a tendency to “focus on the wrong things.” Strigl urged co-op managers to develop a set of fundamental issues—member service, or safety, for example—and then make sure that everything they do during the day focuses on at least one of those.

“Those who fail usually focus on so many other things,” Strigl said, citing email as one of a manager’s “biggest distractions.”

Strigl said a second reason that managers struggle is their desire to keep people happy. “Good results don’t come from happy people,” he said, “but when good results are obtained, your people are happy.” Whether at a cell phone giant or a co-op, Strigl told the audience that being a successful manager “must start with what is one of your key core values, and that is integrity.” [▶ Complete Article](#)

NRECA Backs Iowa Co-op in Wind Flap

NRECA is asking the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to reconsider a recent order requiring an Iowa electric cooperative to obtain its authorization

Continued on next page

Researchers Explore Storing Wind Power Underground

Can volcanic rock be a lockbox for wind energy?

That’s the idea behind a project in the Pacific Northwest, where researchers are trying to determine whether they can shunt excess wind energy underground, and retrieve it when it’s needed.

The technology is considered a long shot. But scientists say it’s worth a look as a way of dealing with situations when a surplus of both wind and hydro generation exceed load requirements and threaten grid reliability.

“Cost-effective large-scale energy storage could transform the regional electric industry,” said Steve Knudsen, project manager for Bonneville Power Administration.

BPA and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory are sponsoring the \$800,000 project, which is also backed by Washington State University and several utilities.

The target of the investigation is the Columbia River Basalt Extent, a rock formation under Washington, Idaho and Oregon that volcanic lava flows produced millions of years ago.

The model calls for using excess wind power to compress air to as much as 2,000 pounds per square inch and inject it into seams between the basalt, which is considered impermeable. The air would displace water in the basalt, though the water would stay underground and serve as a pressure check.

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POPULAR STORIES ON ECT.COOP...

Shippers request federal regulators revamp oversight of freight railroads

High winds, tornadoes cause power outages across the mid-South

President Obama to nominate North Dakota regulator to FERC post

USDA to fund energy efficiency, renewable energy projects

Ohio co-op leader wins CEO communication leadership award

Iowa Co-op *Continued*

before disconnecting retail service to a couple operating a small wind turbine in its territory.

Jefferson-based Midland Power Cooperative initiated the disconnection when Gregory and Beverly Swecker, with whom it is involved in a long-running dispute, refused to pay their bill for back-up power.

The couple premised their refusal on a claim they are entitled to credits for power sold back to the co-op under the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act. However, the Sweckers are seeking payment based on a rate far in excess of Midland's avoided cost rate.

The controversy involves whether Midland can discontinue providing back-up power in light of this refusal. While state regulators—the Iowa Utilities Board—ruled in Midland's favor, FERC's Dec. 15 order held that the co-op needed the federal agency's authorization prior to shutting off power. NRECA contends in its Jan. 17 filing that FERC "simply does not have jurisdiction under PURPA over retail disconnection."

The association claims that federal regulators are using the "obscure" Swecker proceeding to dramatically increase their role in retail matters traditionally reserved to the states.

[▶ Complete Article](#)

TVA Leases Plant to Raise \$1 Billion

The Tennessee Valley Authority has come up with a different way to raise \$1 billion—lease a power plant.

As a way of limiting the money it needs to borrow for future projects, TVA will lease the John Sevier Combined Cycle Plant to a group of investors for 30 years.

The 880-megawatt plant in Rogersville, Tenn., is powered by natural gas and comes with a price tag of \$820 million. Scheduled to start commercial operations this summer, it is located adjacent to the coal-based John Sevier Fossil Plant, where TVA plans to retire two units.

TVA will continue to operate the plant and take it over when the 30-year pact expires. "From an operational standpoint, it is pretty seamless. TVA will maintain the facility, purchase fuel for it and take all the power it generates," said John Thomas, TVA's chief financial officer.

TVA rental payments to John Sevier Combined Cycle Generation, the investment group, will secure a \$100 million equity investment and a \$900 million bond issue from the investors. The move will keep additional debt from accumulating on TVA's ledger; the authority has a debt ceiling set by Congress.

[▶ Complete Article](#)

Street Light App Lets Members Report Outages

An electric cooperative in Georgia has made it easier to report a problem street light.

Sawnee EMC, Cumming, recently launched an application for users of mobile devices to report outages among its approximately 35,000 street lights.

Reporting a broken street light is tricky because "some don't have addresses or easily readable numbers," said Blake House, vice president of member services at Sawnee EMC.

The app, requested by local government officials, eliminates some of that confusion. Now, users of iPhones, iPads, Blackberries or Androids can take a photo of the troubled light and email the image to the co-op.

Even better, the light's location is often automatically included in the photo, because GPS coordinates are embedded in many smart phone photos, House explained.

"We then email them and let them know it's been reported and we'll take care of it. We also let them know when the problem has been taken care of. There's no dialing in and no need to speak to a customer care representative to report street light issues."

Developed in-house, the app also enables members to view detailed energy data and access other account information on another platform, in addition to the co-op's website.

[▶ Complete Article](#)

Winter Storm Slams Pacific Coast

A massive winter storm that pummeled parts of the Pacific Coast is keeping electric cooperative lineworkers in parts of two states busy restoring power.

The storm system began causing problems across parts of Oregon and Washington Jan. 14, and was still bringing high winds, heavy snow and freezing rain to some areas seven days later.

"We've had scattered outages on both of our peninsulas," Jonathan White, director of member services and marketing for Peninsula Light Company, said Jan. 19. The Gig Harbor, Wash.-based co-op serves more than 30,000 consumer-members north of Seattle.

Marc Farmer, general manager of West Oregon Electric Cooperative, said his co-op had three-fourths of its system dark for a couple of days. Crews from the Veronia-based co-op have been working with 10 contract crews to restore service to about 3,200 members.

In Oregon, hurricane force winds, as high as 110 mph, raked the coastline in the service territory of Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative.

[▶ Complete Article](#)



WEEKLY DIGEST

JANUARY 27, 2012

VOL. 3, NO. 4

ECT.COOP's Weekly Digest summarizes some of the top stories featuring news and information about electric co-ops. The articles in this publication are condensed from stories that appeared in NRECA's Web-based ECT.COOP. The complete articles, along with many other stories on co-op happenings, archives, links to sites of interest and a host of interactive features, are available at ECT.coop. The Digest is published by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, 4301 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22203-1860. Editorial questions may be directed to 703-907-5727.