



POWER-GRAM

May
2022



A Monthly Newsletter for Members of

**OTERO COUNTY ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE, INC.**

Left: Photo by Mario Romero

Cludcroft
575-682-2521
Alto
575-336-4550
Carrizozo
575-648-2352

www.ocec-inc.com

LOBBY HOURS
8 AM - 4 PM
Monday - Friday

**TO REPORT AN
OUTAGE, CALL**
1-800-548-4660

**FOR BALANCE
INFORMATION
OR TO PAY YOUR
BILL, CALL**
1-844-846-2695

Shutting Off Your Power—Is It Really an Option?

Recent questions from members regarding the feasibility of Otero County Electric Cooperative (OCEC) shutting the power off in high fire danger circumstances has prompted a discussion worth having.

OCEC is very sensitive to the dangers posed by wildfires. We want to do everything we can to prevent putting our members and the communities we serve at risk. However, we also have a legal responsibility to provide electric service to our members, some of whom are elderly and have medical conditions that could be exacerbated by the loss of electricity for any significant period of time.

Medical situations would not be the only consideration in making such a drastic decision as one to turn off service to our members. Another consideration is determining in what circumstances should we turn power off—when the winds reach a certain level; only during red-flag warnings? Still another, would be determining what areas need to be shut off. Do we turn off service for all 21,677 meters on our system even if the potential fire danger only exists in one portion of our service territory? Red flag warnings often apply to our entire system for several consecutive days. Taking this approach would require power to be shut off for multiple days throughout our system. Given that the reason for the interruption is to prevent a fire, we could potentially be reenergizing into a downed power line or a line with a fallen tree on it. Therefore, reenergizing lines would require inspections of all affected lines. With approximately 2,800 miles of line at OCEC, this is an impossible task.

Electric energy is also critical for healthcare facilities, emergency medical services and fire crews to perform their work. Modern systems rely on electric power including communications systems, pumping water, and traffic lights, to name a few. One recent example of critical services impacted by loss of electric

service was during the McBride Fire in Ruidoso when emergency personnel contacted OCEC with concerns about outages affecting water wells that were providing the water necessary to fight the fire. Fortunately, our line crews successfully restored power to aid in suppression efforts.

To exercise the discretion to shut off power during circumstances such as when red flag warnings have been issued would require consent and guidance from the PRC and/or other government entities. If in the future, these entities require OCEC to turn off electric service in these circumstances, we will of course comply.

OCEC also has a policy in effect for mitigating the risk of wildfires caused by power lines, which has been practiced for many years. When warm temperatures arrive coupled with dry, windy conditions and red-flag warnings, protective devices are placed on non-reclose so breakers operate at the first sign of a fault to insure that power lines are less likely to be the cause of a fire. When the breakers open, our members experience a power outage. During these outages, our line crews perform extended line patrols in the affected area to make sure there are no trees or limbs touching electrical equipment and that there is no downed conductor before reenergizing the line. This often causes more frequent and longer outages, but the benefits of the extra patrol time far outweigh the risk of a catastrophic wildfire.

In addition, OCEC has an extensive vegetation management program, expending almost \$1 million annually. In 2021, we also performed a satellite-based scan of vegetation near powerline rights-of-way to identify potential problem areas and prioritize our tree-cutting efforts. Annual meetings are also held with local US Forest Service to discuss our efforts on Federal lands for each upcoming year.

So while shutting the power off in high fire danger circumstances sounds like an easy solution, as with many complex issues, there is much more to consider and it isn't as simple as it seems.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP

Even in summer months, adding insulation to your attic can keep your home more comfortable and save energy used by your cooling system. If your attic insulation is level with or below your floor joists (meaning you can easily see your joists), you should add more. If you can't see any of the floor joists because the insulation is well above them, you likely have enough insulation. Attic insulation should be evenly distributed with no low spots. Make sure the areas along the eaves are adequately covered.

Source: energystar.gov

**For account balance or
to pay by phone, call toll free,
1-844-846-2695**

Go Paperless!

Save the hassle of unwanted paper statements. Sign up for paperless billing today by calling one of our friendly member service representatives at 1-800-548-4660.

You can also sign up through SmartHub or your online account. See options below for turning on this feature.

SmartHub—Settings > Paperless Billing

Online Account—My Profile > My Information > Update My Paperless Setting



OCEC OFFICES CLOSED
MEMORIAL DAY
MONDAY, MAY 30, 2022

WE WILL NEVER FORGET.

*We salute you.
We thank you.*

Let us remember those who
courageously gave their lives.

Vegetation Management Update

Crews working to trim trees and vegetation in rights-of-way are currently in the following areas and are expected to remain there for the next few weeks

- Mayhill to Twin Forks
- Apache Summit to Mescalero
- Eagle Creek Canyon
- Nogal Canyon—Nogal

OCEC reminds members that you may see vehicles, ATVs and crew members from Rogers Tree Service cutting trees near existing power lines. Vehicles will be marked with their company name and an OCEC contractor placard.

May Employment Anniversary

Mario Romero—General Manager—20 years

Mark Martin—Dist. Operations Supervisor—33 years

Delbert Lucero—System Engineer—7 years

Powering Up After an Outage

When the power goes out, we expect it to be restored within a few hours. But when a major storm or natural disaster causes widespread damage, extended outages may result. Our line crews work long, hard hours to restore service safely to the greatest number of consumers in the shortest time possible. Here's what's going on if you find yourself in the dark:

1. High-Voltage Transmission Lines:

Transmission towers and cables that supply power to transmission substations (and thousands of members) rarely fail. But when damaged, these facilities must be repaired before other parts of the system can operate.

2. Distribution Substation:

A substation can serve hundreds or thousands of consumers. When a major outage occurs, line crews inspect substations to determine if problems stem from transmission lines feeding into the substation, the substation itself or if problems exist further down the line.

3. Main Distribution Lines:

If the problem cannot be isolated at a distribution substation, distribution lines are checked. These lines carry power to large groups of consumers in communities or housing developments.

4. Tap Lines:

If local outages persist, supply lines (also known as tap lines) are inspected. These lines deliver power to transformers, either mounted on poles or placed on pads for underground service, outside businesses, schools and homes.

5. Individual Homes:

If your home remains without power, the service line between a transformer and your residence may need to be repaired. Always call to report an outage to help line crews isolate local issue.