



POWERGRAM

A monthly newsletter for OCEC Members

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, as an electric service provider, is acutely aware of the risks of wildfire. We are dedicated to taking all necessary measures to safeguard our members and the communities we serve. However, we also bear a legal obligation to ensure electric service to our members, some of whom are elderly and have medical conditions that could worsen with a prolonged power outage.

Medical situations would not be the only consideration in making such a drastic decision as one to turn off service to our members. Another concern is determining in what circumstances we should turn the power off—when the winds reach a certain level or only during red-flag warnings. Another task would be to determine what areas need to be shut off. Do we turn off service for all 21,735 meters on our system? Red flag warnings often apply to our entire system for several consecutive days. 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 task is impossible in any acceptable timeframe. This approach would require power to be shut off for multiple days throughout our system. Considering the unintended consequences, we must ask ourselves if this is a reasonable or prudent practice.

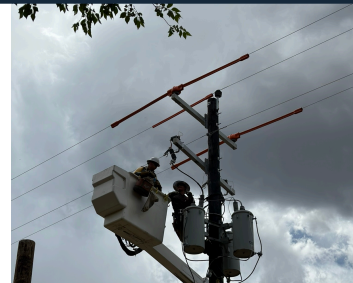
Not only do our members rely on electricity for almost everything in their daily lives, including necessary medical items like oxygen machines, but electric energy is also critical for healthcare facilities, emergency medical services, and fire crews to perform their work. Modern systems rely on electric power, including communications systems, pumping water, and traffic lights, to name a few. For example, during the McBride Fire, 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 New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (NMPRC) 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. However, legislators and regulators must consider the impacts on households, businesses, and communities before allowing or requiring such drastic measures.

OCEC has a long-standing policy in place to mitigate the risk of wildfires caused by power lines. When temperatures warm up, 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, reducing the likelihood of power lines causing a fire. When the breakers open, our members experience a power outage. During these outages, our line crews conduct extended line patrols in the affected area to ensure there are no trees or limbs touching electrical equipment and no downed conductor before re-energizing 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, spending almost \$1 million annually. We have applied for federal funds under the Community Wildfire Defense Grant to do even more. We also hold annual meetings with the local US Forest Service to discuss our efforts in the Lincoln National Forest 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.



MAY CALENDAR PHOTO
submitted by Jake Chesney

**MAY
2024**

CLOUDCROFT
575-682-2521

ALTO
575-336-4550

CARRIZOZO
575-648-2352

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

WWW.OCEC-INC.COM

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP

Looking for an easy way to manage home energy use? Smart plugs are inexpensive and offer convenient solutions for scheduling and controlling your favorite electronic devices.

With smart plugs, you can easily manage your coffee maker, lighting, home office equipment, video game consoles, and more. Smart plugs can help you manage devices through a smart phone app, your home assistant or voice control. By conveniently powering off or scheduling devices, you can save energy (and money!)

Source: energy.gov

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.

- Enchanted Forest - Alto
- Ski Run Road - Alto
- Cloud Country

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.

POWER UP YOUR LAWN CARE WITH ELECTRIC EQUIPMENT

The landscape of lawn and garden care is evolving, and electric equipment is at the forefront of this change. While electric lawn tools aren't new, advancements in technology and more options mean prices have become more competitive, making electric equipment an accessible option for many consumers.

Benefits of Electric Equipment

Electric lawnmowers have come a long way since the days of extension cords tethering you to an outlet. Battery-powered mowers offer the same freedom of movement as gas-powered models but with reduced noise and maintenance.

Battery life was once a major drawback to making the switch to electric lawn tools. But today's growing demand for electric equipment has resulted in major advancements for lithium-ion batteries, making them more reliable, cost-effective and efficient. For most consumers, electric lawn tools can get the job done just as well as gas-powered models.

Many electric mowers offer push-button starts, and because they are lighter, they are easier to maneuver around tight turns. Improved batteries provide longer run times to tackle larger spaces. Like their gas-powered counterparts, electric mowers are available in push, self-propelled/walk-behind and riding models. And there's no need to refill gas cans or change oil and air filters, resulting in less hassle and maintenance.

Like mowers, electric blowers, string trimmers and chainsaws have fewer moving parts, require minimal maintenance and are quieter. Because electric tools are generally lighter in weight, they're also more ergonomic and easier to maneuver. This feature is especially handy for projects that require tools like chainsaws for precise work.

Choose Electric Equipment to Meet Your Needs

Electric lawn tools have some limitations, so the size and terrain of your outdoor space are important considerations when purchasing new equipment. When comparing gas-powered and electric mowers, consider the torque rating—this is the driving force behind a blade's rotation. On average, electric lawnmowers generate less torque than gas mowers. If you have a challenging outdoor space that includes overgrown brush, tall grass, or hills and dips, torque is a key factor.

Choosing the right type and size mower is particularly important for spaces larger than half an acre. If you have a large property, consider purchasing an extra battery to ensure uninterrupted workflow.

Many manufacturers offer interchangeable batteries and chargers, providing flexibility and convenience. Choosing a single brand can ensure charging compatibility across your lawn tools and streamline charging.

While both gas and electric lawn tools can get the job done, electric equipment generally requires less maintenance, is less expensive to operate and is kinder to the environment.

Get Green for Going Green

Electric tools are quietly redefining the way we approach lawn care. If you're planning to make the switch to electric lawn equipment, visit OCEC's website at www.ocec-inc.com to explore available rebates. Our energy advisors are available to share energy-saving advice to help you save money and clear the path to a greener, more energy-efficient future.

Making the Switch to ELECTRIC LAWN EQUIPMENT

Considering electric equipment to maintain your outdoor space? Check out the benefits of electric and considerations before making the switch.

Benefits of Electric Equipment

- Battery-powered equipment produces zero emissions
- No hassle and mess from gasoline and oil
- Quieter and more reliable than gas-powered equipment
- Require less energy to do the same amount of work as gas-powered tools

Considerations Before Going Electric

- Purchasing from a single brand can streamline charging
- Consider the size of your property and battery run time
- Backup batteries may be needed for larger properties
- Electric equipment is pricier up front