

## COPPER VALLEY ELECTRIC



In an effort to more clearly understand current member satisfaction, CVEA launched its first Member Satisfaction Survey in 2021. The goal of the survey was to find out what topics or programs might be important to members and how well they feel the Cooperative is serving their needs. Topics included rates, reliability, renewables, customer service, and member and community engagement, to name a few. Information gathered from the survey will help CVEA evaluate programs, make plans for the future, and ensure the co-op is fulfilling their commitment to the Membership.

With a goal of maximum member participation in mind, CVEA made the survey accessible through a variety of easy options and offered a chance to win one of two \$250 energy credits per district for submitting their survey. The plan was successful, with 573 responses received by the advertised deadline.

There was a good cross section of responses with 45.7 percent of members from the Copper Basin and 54.3 percent from Valdez. While responses came in from all age demographics, 73.7 percent were over 41 years of age, and an overwhelming majority, 69.3 percent, have lived on the system for over 10 years.

Overall, responses indicate that members think CVEA is doing a good-to-excellent (4-5) job on most things. Although, as expected, there are areas where improvements or changes could be considered.

CVEA's mission is to provide 'exceptional service through safe,

reliable, cost-effective service and programs', so we thought it would be interesting to highlight a few statistics from the survey that are related to the mission of the Cooperative.

When asked how well the Co-op is providing reliable electric service, 77.3 percent scored either a 4 or 5, with 34.9 percent selecting 5, or excellent. Reasonable cost of electricity scored a bit lower with 65.2 percent falling pretty equally between average and good (3-4), and only 17.5 percent scored as excellent. Additionally, 79 percent scored communications to the members as good or excellent. Other top scores came from CVEA's customer service, expertise, environmental stewardship, community leadership and participation, community activities, and scholarships and support for nonprofits.

There were some surprises as well. When asked how CVEA was doing providing renewable energy, only 26.2 percent chose excellent, and while scholarships and participation in schools scored overwhelmingly as important or very important, roughly only 50 percent or less felt that food, giveaways, and fun at the annual meeting, member tours, contributions to nonprofit organizations, or event sponsorships and donations were important or very important.

Finally, through the survey, members provided a significant amount of feedback on topics they would like communicated and the best way to reach them. This data will be used to fine tune opportunities for providing the best and most useful information

to members.

Throughout survey comments, consistent topics were identified where further education might be beneficial. This article was created in a question-and-answer format to address several common concerns noted throughout the survey. Several topics of greater significance will be covered as feature articles in future editions of *Ruralite Magazine*.



## Member Satisfaction Survey Q&A

**Q: Does Copper Valley Electric Association offer internet or any utility service other than electricity?**

**A:** No, CVEA doesn't provide internet, or any other utility services. Copper Valley Telecom is the region's local internet and telecom provider. We understand the confusion because the names are so similar. As a bit of trivia, CVEA and CVT were once one cooperative until both grew too large for a single business, separating into two separate cooperatives in the 1960s.

**Q: Has CVEA ever looked into tidal power as an option for power generation in CVEA's service territory?**

**A:** CVEA looked into tidal power with a focused effort just over five years ago when there was a push for tidal power experimentation in Alaska. At the time CVEA was informed that tidal speeds in Prince William Sound were too fast for the existing technology. Shortly after that time most, if not all, of the manufacturers abandoned tidal demonstrations in Alaska, with some focusing on hydrokinetic in river systems. There has recently been an increase in discussions again. Our team will continue to monitor this technology and evaluate to determine if it could be a fit for the CVEA area and system.

**Q: Why are CVEA rates so high and why might they need to increase from where they are today?**

**A:** Overall electric rates in Alaska are high, however, CVEA is

not as high as many believe when compared to other Alaska utilities. Access to hydropower in the summer provides CVEA members lower rates than many of the Railbelt utilities. In the winter, CVEA's rate is still comparable to Golden Valley Electric in Fairbanks, but increases based on the need to generate utilizing fossil fuels.

Rates may need to increase in the future to properly maintain the Cooperative's generation, transmission, and distribution facilities. Much of the CVEA system is reaching 40-60 years in service and will need to be replaced or refurbished.

**Q: What kind of measures does CVEA take to keep rates flat or even reduce rates?**

**A:** CVEA has increased the amount of hydropower generated from the addition of the Allison Creek Hydroelectric Project. Additional hydropower production reduces the amount of higher priced fossil fuel generation that is needed during the winter. By performing preventative maintenance on the power plants, poles and wires, and other equipment, this ensures fewer more expensive repair costs and maximizes equipment life, keeping costs lower in the long term.

**Q: What types of renewable generation, like wind, solar, biomass, or geothermal has CVEA studied as a potential alternative to fuel?**

**A:** CVEA has studied all of the renewable generation resources above, and others. For various different reasons, including the cost of generation with that resource, time of year the resource is available (solar), or the incorrect and inconsistent availability of the resource (wind), the Co-op has determined the resource would not provide the needed benefit to CVEA members. Studies conducted can be found on CVEA's website under the project reports page.

**Q: Has CVEA considered flattening or leveling the bill to be more consistent throughout the year?**

**A:** On July 21, 2016, the CVEA Board of Directors extensively reviewed the pros and cons of a leveled billing option during a work session with senior staff. After reviewing factual, financial data provided by staff, the Board unanimously voted against moving forward with this option, determining it is not in the best interest of the Cooperative as a whole.

**Q: Where is CVEA with the Roadbelt Intertie, or are there options to partner with other utilities?**

**A:** CVEA supports projects that could stabilize or reduce the cost of electricity for our members, including efforts to expand transmission infrastructure throughout the State.

*Continues on page 8*

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## Survey Q&A

*Continues from page 5*

The Roadbelt Intertie Transmission Project is a statewide project not lead by CVEA.

### **Q: Why does CVEA spend money on local youth and community programs or host community events throughout the year?**

**A:** One of the core guiding principles of electric cooperatives is cooperative principle #7, Concern for Community. CVEA funds scholarships and supports local nonprofits through the CVEA Community Foundation which is funded by unclaimed capital credits that have escheated to the Cooperative, fund-raisers, and private donations.

CVEA hosts or participates in many community events throughout the year, such as Co-op Month events, kid's activity contests, community parades, and a variety of educational events at the local schools.

### **Q: Knowing what is going on when my power is out is important to me. What is the best way to get updates during power outages?**

**A:** If your power goes out, first check the breakers in your house and outside near your meter base. If that isn't the problem, call CVEA's office (during business hours), or CVEA dispatch (1-866-835-2832) after hours. For extended outages estimated to last longer than two hours, or outages that affect a large number of CVEA members, the Cooperative will provide updates on CVEA's Facebook page, the homepage at [cvea.org](http://cvea.org), and the emergency voicemail system at the number listed above.

### **Q: Does CVEA have a Net Metering or 'buy-back' program, or a way for members to have small scale renewable projects, like wind or solar, to reduce their consumption and sell power back to the Cooperative?**

**A:** Yes, CVEA does have a net metering program which allows for a member to install a renewable energy source at their home or business to offset their electrical usage. As the cooperative generates nearly 100 percent of energy needs with hydropower in the summer, there isn't a buy back option during that time. For the months where CVEA isn't generating fully on hydro, excess energy provided by the member is purchased by the cooperative and included as a credit on the member's bill. Additional information is available at [cvea.org](http://cvea.org), or by contacting the local office.

### **Q: How can I get information about the Cooperative if I don't have Facebook?**

**A:** CVEA's award winning website provides a vast amount of information about the Cooperative. Live Facebook updates are also displayed on the website for those who don't use Facebook.

### **Q: Why do we get brownouts and why are they happening more often?**

**A:** Brownouts are events where the voltage in your house drops well below the normal level causing lights to dim. These occurrences don't happen very often. More often members see flickers or short interruptions. These flicker events are caused when a protection device on the CVEA system operates to clear or isolate a fault on the line. This can be caused by numerous things, such as trees, animals, snow unloading from the lines, wind, or failed equipment. These devices are designed to try and keep as many members as possible in power and only remove power from those near the problem. Flicker events are happening more often as CVEA has been replacing aging and adding additional protective devices throughout the system in order to improve reliability. Prior to this work, many more members experienced power outages for problems farther down the line. Next time your lights blink, know that the equipment is working properly to keep your lights on.

### **Q: What should I do if I think a power outage ruined my appliance or piece of equipment?**

**A:** Contact the CVEA office during business hours and a customer service representative will walk you through the process to file a damaged equipment claim.

### **Q: Are all students eligible for scholarships?**

**A:** Students must meet minimal CVEA scholarship guidelines, complete an application, and be willing to interview with the Scholarship Selection Committee. CVEA has made it easier for students to apply over the years to be more inclusive. Details can be found at [cvea.org](http://cvea.org) under the community support section.

### **Q: How does CVEA manage Rights-of-Way? How does the Co-op determine what they can and cannot cut down?**

**A:** CVEA manages the Rights-of-Way (ROW) utilizing in-house equipment and labor, in addition to hiring local contractors. All CVEA ROW are cleared utilizing mechanical clearing methods, such as chain saws, brush hogs, and sky trim machines; chemicals are not sprayed on the ROW. The easements granted to obtain electric service determines the width of the ROW. Typically, the widths are 10-feet for underground distribution, 30-feet for overhead distribution, and 100-feet for transmission.

### **Q: What is CVEA doing to get away from using fuel to generate power and lower rates for the members?**

**A:** CVEA is always looking for opportunities to reduce the amount of fuel that is used to generate power. CVEA has studied many other forms of generation, increased hydro production, and increased efficiencies of the diesel power plants.

For additional information, email [sscheidt@cvea.org](mailto:sscheidt@cvea.org). ■

# Working Together to Restore Power

By Michael Rovito

Mother Nature's gift to the Interior this past Christmas came in the form of heavy snow, freezing rain and then more heavy snow.

How electric cooperatives responded to storms during the last week of 2021 and first weekend of 2022 was a testament to the principle of cooperation among cooperatives. Amid the chaos, the electric utility industry in Alaska came together to bring power back during a crucial time of year.

Throughout the storm, Golden Valley Electric Association employees were in the field and at the helm addressing power outages and working in harsh conditions.

Even after more than a week of storm-related outages, GVEA in Fairbanks, still offered assistance to Matanuska Electric Association in Palmer after a record windstorm wreaked havoc in its service territory.

There were three separate storms that impacted GVEA's service territory from December 25 to January 1. Snow began falling in the Interior on Christmas. That snow turned into freezing rain the next day, then transitioned back into snow, resulting in more than 17 inches in some areas.

All that weight on trees can cause significant issues. Electric utilities work to keep rights-of-way clear of vegetation, but have no control over trees on private property. This means tall trees loaded with snow can bend and contact or fall on power lines.

This was the primary cause of outages for GVEA members during the weather event.

Outages kept GVEA crews—and Railbelt utility and state contract crews that came to help—busy that week. GVEA had 476 outages from Christmas to New Year's Day.

At its peak, more than 15,000 members were without power on December 26.



Trees and vegetation outside of an electric utility's legal right-of-way can still impact power lines during bad weather. PHOTO COURTESY OF GOLDEN VALLEY ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

Throughout the week, almost 20,000 members lost power.

Like so many utility operations, GVEA prepares for major storms largely outside the view of the public. In a recent letter to the editor, GVEA Board Chairman Tom DeLong detailed how GVEA prepares for weather that could cause major outages.

"Once aware of a pending storm, GVEA preemptively prepares by notifying line crews and staff to be ready, coordinating backup support, as needed, and mobilizing equipment and materials," Tom says. "As a storm materializes and electric outages increase, many things happen at GVEA, seemingly all at once."

GVEA and many utilities nationwide use advanced meter infrastructure—a system of smart meters, communication networks and data systems that enables two-way communication between utilities and customers.

With AMI, utility operators can tell in real time which members are out of power. This can reduce response times and allow for targeted outage management.

However, all that new technology doesn't replace the need for highly trained and dedicated utility personnel. During the Interior storm, GVEA crews worked around the clock repairing lines, staffing the outage communications center, providing warehouse support and mechanic services to keep equipment running in top shape, and

deploying right-of-way crews to support field staff.

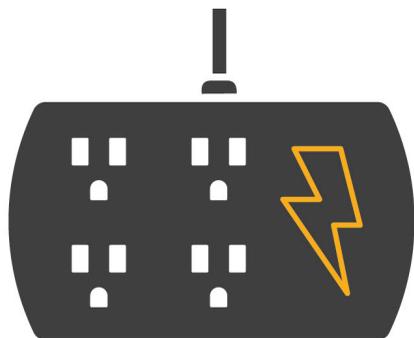
At the end of the storm, a winter event resembling an Arctic hurricane was barreling toward the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. With winds gusting to nearly 100 miles per hour, the massive windstorm damaged homes and businesses, causing days of power outages.

Despite what his own cooperative had just been through, GVEA CEO John Burns says helping MEA was an easy decision.

"When GVEA faced record-breaking storms over the holiday, crews from the other Railbelt utilities immediately offered assistance," John says. "If it were not for the support of the other Railbelt linemen and contract crews, GVEA members would have faced much lengthier outages in extreme conditions."

"Ironically, a week later, Mat-Su endured punishing weather that left many MEA members without electricity and GVEA line crews headed south to assist MEA in restoring power to its members. We wouldn't expect anything less. Cooperatives serve their members by working together. Cooperation among cooperatives is one of the principles we follow."

The drive that carried GVEA through the storm and to help a neighboring co-op facing challenges is one example of Alaska's electric utilities powering the Last Frontier. ■



## SURGE PROTECTION

Keep your electronic equipment safe.

A power surge is typically caused by lightning, changes in electrical loads, faulty wiring or damaged power lines.

Install power strips with surge protection to protect sensitive equipment.

- Easy to use (just plug them in)
- Protect electronics plugged into the device
- Must be replaced over time or after a major surge event



### REMEMBER:

Not all power strips offer surge protection. Carefully read the packaging labels when purchasing.

# Surge Protection 101

By Abby Berry

A power surge is an unexpected increase in voltage, and it can occur from a variety of sources. Regardless of the cause, power surges can majorly damage electronic devices and equipment in your home.

Let's take a look at common causes of power surges and how you can protect your sensitive electronics.

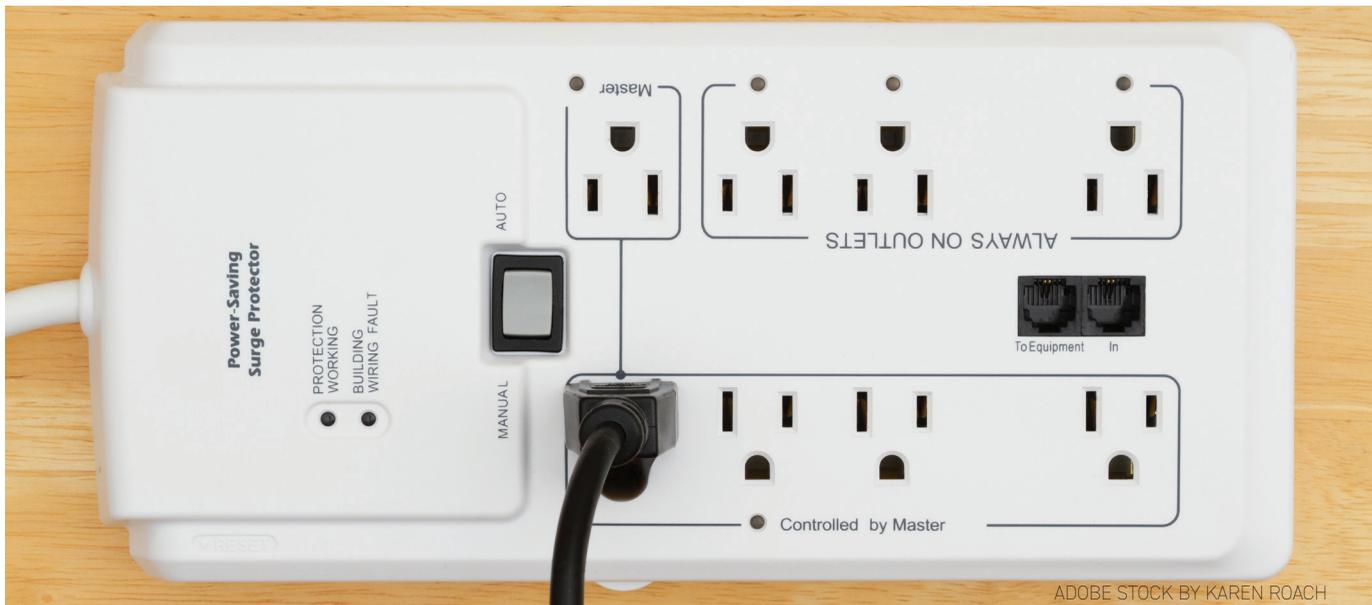
Although not as common in our area, a common cause of a power surge is lightning. Many have experienced this during a severe thunderstorm. When lightning strikes an electrical system, the excess current must be channeled somewhere--unfortunately in many cases, it's sent through a home. Your best bet is to unplug all unused devices and electronics during severe thunderstorms.

Another common cause of power surges is electrical overload. This happens when devices or appliances are plugged into an outlet that can't handle the required amount of voltage, or if

multiple devices are plugged into one outlet through an extension cord. If you're experiencing power surges due to electrical overload, it's time to call a qualified electrician to evaluate your home's circuits and electrical needs.

Faulty wiring in a home can also cause power surges. Damaged or exposed wires can cause spikes in voltage, creating a potentially dangerous situation. If you notice signs of faulty wiring, like visible burns on outlets, buzzing sounds from outlets or frequently tripped circuit breakers, your home may be due for electrical wiring repairs and updates.

Surges can also occur after a power outage. When electricity is being restored and reconnected, it's common to experience a quick surge in current. Similar to advice for a surge caused by lightning, it's best to unplug sensitive electronics during the outage--then wait to plug them back in after power is fully restored.



ADOBE STOCK BY KAREN ROACH



ADOBE STOCK BY CHARNSITR



ADOBE STOCK BY REIMAR

Aside from unplugging devices when you suspect a power surge, there are two ways you can take additional precautions to protect electronics in your home.

Point-of-use surge protection devices, like power strips, can protect electronics during most surges. But remember, not all power strips include surge protection, so read the packaging label carefully before you buy, and don't overload the power strip with too many devices. You can also install specialized electrical outlets that offer additional surge protection. Talk to a trusted electrician to learn more.

Another option is a whole-home surge protector, which can help protect your home from larger, more powerful surges. In most cases, whole-home suppressors are connected to your home's service panel and include features like thermal fuses and notification capabilities that indicate when a device has been

impacted by a surge. Whole-home surge protection prices vary based on the size of the home and suppressor. Whole-home suppressors should always be connected by a licensed electrician, so consider the cost of installation as well.

Occasional power surges are inevitable, but by unplugging devices when you think a surge may occur and using additional levels of protection like power strips or whole-home suppressors, you can better safeguard your sensitive electronics and devices.

Contact CVEA if you have additional questions about ways to protect your home from power surges. ■

*Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape..*



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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Glennallen, AK 99588  
[www.cvea.org](http://www.cvea.org)

**Copper Basin District**  
907-822-3211

Mile 187 Glenn Hwy.

#### Valdez District

907-835-4301

367 Fairbanks Dr.

#### After hours outage line

866-835-2832

### Important Dates

#### February

**Director Nomination Deadline:** 5 p.m.  
Thursday, February 10, 2022

**Scholarship Application Deadline:** 6  
p.m. Thursday, February 17, 2022

**CVEA Board Meeting:** The February  
meeting of the Board of Directors is 1  
p.m. Thursday, February 17, 2022, in  
Glennallen

#### CVEA Offices Closed:

The CVEA offices will be closed  
Monday, February 21, 2022, for  
President's Day

#### March

**CVEA Board Meeting:** The March  
meeting of the Board of Directors is  
1 p.m. Thursday, March 17, 2022, in  
Valdez

AK-34

# Save the Date

## 2022 CVEA Annual Meeting

### Valdez: Tuesday, May 3 Copper Basin: Thursday, May 5

## Committee Volunteer Opportunities: Credentials & Election Committees

Credentials & Election (C&E) Committees are responsible for validating signatures on the back of director election ballot envelopes and counting the ballots for Director elections and Bylaws amendments.

The committees, one for each district, are comprised of interested members who are not employees, directors, candidates, or close relatives of these persons.

Service on the C&E Committees will take place during April, with most of the work performed the week prior to the annual meeting.

## Community Foundation Scholarship Selection Committees

CVEACF Scholarship Selection Committees review scholarship application packets, determine which students to interview, conduct the interviews and select who will receive the scholarships being offered this year.

Participation on the committees requires attending three or four meetings as well as time for reviewing and scoring applications, and is estimated to take up to 10 hours.

If you would like more information, or would like to volunteer for either of these opportunities to serve, please contact Sharon Scheidt at 822-5506, 835-7005, or email [sscheidt@cvea.org](mailto:sscheidt@cvea.org). The committee volunteer deadline is Tuesday, February 15, 2022.