

Guest Column: The Importance of Planning Ahead



Chuck Billings,
VP of Customer
and Energy
Services

Frequently, I remind my older son, Braxton, about the importance of planning ahead, especially prior to a known upcoming event. This advice paid off for him on April 27, when an approaching tornado's path was projected near the campus of The University of Alabama. He and I talked on the phone and around 1 o'clock in the afternoon; he was out running

errands but promised he would be back at the dorm within two hours. At 5 o'clock the deadly storm struck Tuscaloosa. We were very fortunate that Braxton's dorm and the campus were spared devastation, although there were many others affected, losing loved ones and property.

At CAEC we understand the value of a proven plan when it comes to disaster response. In the April issue of *Alabama Living*, we discussed our Disaster Preparedness Plan, and we now want to share some implementation details.

Implementation begins before approaching weather arrives, by monitoring a storm's path and conducting a 72-hour pre-storm meeting to discuss assigned tasks including: contacting a list of local caterers and restaurants that can provide up to 1,125 meals each day, across our 10-county service territory for employees and other co-op workers assisting from across the region; and securing lodging for visiting crews (as many as 125 rooms).

The relationships we've established with our associations and vendors are also extremely impor-

tant. Alabama Rural Electric Association (AREA) assists in locating outside crews. Many times these crews will be in route before the weather system has passed us. Our material vendors also help by having large quantities of replacement materials in stock when damage is considerable.

When a storm is classified as a FEMA weather event, restoration activities are reimbursed. Therefore, keeping track of all expenses, by county, associated with such classified events is also crucial.

Internally, the face of Customer Service changes during these events. Established shifts are put into effect for Dispatch and Customer and Field Service. Dispatch is staffed 24-hours for as long as outages exist and Customer Service Representatives, who continue to perform their daily duties, focus on taking calls associated with the outages. Our Field Service Representatives are recruited by Operations to assist with inspections of damages ahead of the construction crews to ensure they have the materials needed to make repairs; they also assist in delivering meals and materials to the crews. Keeping you informed of our progress with restoration efforts is also incorporated in our plan. We utilize our website, recorded phone messages, social media, as well as television to keep you updated.

We are thankful weather disasters are few and far between. By learning more about the intricacies of CAEC's disaster plan we hope you will gain a level of comfort during extreme outage conditions - knowing your cooperative takes a proactive approach with power restoration. ☞

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Standing up for You on the Hill

Each year, cooperative board members and employees from across the country attend a national legislative conference in Washington D.C. These co-op representatives make visits to the offices of their elected officials to voice opinions and concerns about providing reliable power at reasonable prices.

This year more than 3,000 cooperative representatives, including more than 80 from Alabama, delivered key messages about:

- **Funding Level for the Rural Utilities Service Infrastructure Financing:** More than 75 years of partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) makes it possible for cooperatives to construct and maintain their generation and distributions systems, which cover 75 percent of the country's landmass and serve 12 percent (approximately 42 million) of American electric consumers.

The proposed 2012 budget allocates a \$6 billion loan level (which is paid back with interest, netting \$100 million this year for the Federal Government). However, the proposal would restrict lending on \$4 billion to renewable-related projects. While some electric co-ops are in need of financing for this specific purpose, locally driven business decisions, not politics, should determine the type of projects funded.



From left: CAEC President and CEO Tom Stackhouse, Congressman Mike Rogers (District 3) and CAEC Trustees Terry Mitchell and Jimmie Harrison, Jr.

- **FEMA Aid:** Storm restoration work electric cooperatives perform after widespread damage normally qualifies for FEMA reimbursement. This coverage is vital so co-ops are not charged for unexpected expenditures.



CAEC Trustee C. Milton Johnson meets with Congresswoman Terri Sewell, District 7.

- **Benefits of Coal Combustion Residual Materials (CCRs):** CCRs are materials produced when coal is used to generate electricity. When properly managed, CCRs offer environmental and economic benefits without harm to public health. Materials produced from CCRs include roof shingles, wallboard, asphalt and bricks. By supporting the Recycling CCR Accessibility Act, CCRs would be treated as non-hazardous materials as proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). If CCRs were deemed hazardous, then costs associated with new treatment methods would raise the cost of the electricity you purchase.

The annual contact that Alabama cooperatives have with our national delegation is important. Our elected officials on Capitol Hill understand that co-ops represent the end-users of electricity. And so the Senators and Congressmen/women listen because, after all, it's not every day that a large group of 80 people stop by to visit. [QR](#)

CAEC Spotlight: Energy Services and Communications

Have you ever wondered where your power comes from, if there is a way you can buy renewable energy or how many ways you can pay your electric bill? Answering these questions requires information, and when it comes to bringing you the answers regarding wise energy choices or knowing the basics of how your co-op functions, CAEC's Energy Services and Communications Department work to accomplish this task.

In today's world, everyone is becoming more concerned about their energy use and how they can be more efficient, and in turn, lower their utility bills. As your power provider, CAEC wants to help you do just that. This process begins before a home is even built, with CAEC's Energy Advisor, who works closely with contractors and members to select energy efficient upgrades for their homes and strives to help them meet Touchstone Energy Home standards.

"Being deemed a Touchstone Energy Home means that the builder put efficiency at the top of the list, something very important to today's home-buyer," said Energy Advisor Alice Bradshaw.

"By making wise energy choices now, members can save countless dollars down the road, and that's what we attempt to do—help them save."

Bradshaw also serves members by coordinating the water heater and Dual Fuel rebate programs and marketing products and services in regard to helping keep our wholesale rates stable, such as the Peak Shaving Device (PSD), which defers energy use to non-peak times. Working with contractors, the Energy Advisor oversees the installation process of PSDs on electric water heaters.



Bradshaw works with contractors on a variety of levels, from new construction to existing homes and new products.

"Whether we discuss energy savings with a member about an existing home or a contractor building new homes, we can offer suggestions to defer

the load of energy usage to non-peaking times," said Bradshaw. "By doing this, we can help control our wholesale power costs - benefitting every member."



Blankenship conducts an energy efficiency audit on a home, with equipment such as an infrared camera and a blower door.

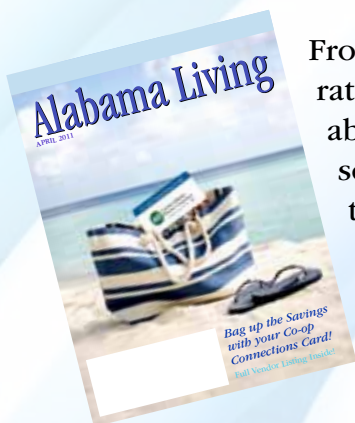
When it comes to helping you find do-it-yourself energy-efficient options for your home, CAEC has an Energy Services Representative (ESR) and Certified Residential Energy Auditor who conducts home energy audits with those who are looking to reduce their energy usage. With equipment such as an infrared camera and

blower-door test (which displays the amount of air leakage in a home) the ESR pinpoints where a home may be losing energy dollars and demonstrates and researches ways to make home improvements which could lower a home's waste of electricity.

“We can show members a variety of ways they can save—from something as simple as replacing air filters regularly to a cost-value assessment of installing new windows,” said ESR Derek Blankenship. “We also investigate any new technologies, products and methods that claim to be efficient and find out if these have any value for our members.”

So how does CAEC transfer all the information about these programs to you? That falls under the duties of the co-op’s Communications Specialists who utilize all available external communication tools to reach you, the member.

“People like to receive information in different ways,” said Communications Specialist Tiffany Trueblood. “With today’s technology, we can disperse information quickly through our Website or even our Facebook page. But sometimes, people still like to sit down and read a hard-copy, so we utilize *Alabama Living* magazine, bill inserts, direct mail and press releases sent out to local papers as other avenues for reaching out.”



From explaining the co-op’s rates to getting the word out about new products and services, the Communications Specialists also keep working relationships with media outlets so when critical news breaks, such as recovery after a storm or hurricane, it can be transmitted quickly to members through the media.

Keeping employees up-to-date and knowledgeable—whether it’s news about the cooperative or energy issues our country faces—is also important. Through internal communica-

tions, news affecting how we conduct business is relayed with in-house publications and a company Intranet.

“To many members, they see our employees as the energy experts and often look to them for answers,” said Communications Specialist Debra Williams. “We need to arm our employees with the correct information so when a member asks them about a particular item, they can offer assistance by answering the questions.”



Austin, Trueblood and Williams explore new avenues to reach not only our members, but our employees as well.

Communications Specialists also work with community programs such as the Bright Ideas Grant program, Youth Tour, Scholarships and more.

Leading all of these diverse yet related activities is the Manager of Energy Services and Communications. By coordinating and developing plans and marketing strategies and overseeing the daily duties of the Energy Advisor, ESR and Communications Specialists, information is dispersed in a timely manner gaining the optimal benefit for members.

“Information is vital to us all, whether it concerns saving energy dollars or preparing for an impending storm,” said Manager of Energy Services and Communications, Nagea Austin. “This team works very well together to keep our members and employees up to date on energy issues that matter to them.”

Generator Safety

Portable generators can be dangerous not only to you, but to linemen working to restore power to your home. Learn how to keep everyone safe when using a generator.

Safety is a top priority at CAEC, not only for our employees, but to our members and the public as well. When storms hit our area, our employees are dispatched to your aid as soon as possible to make repairs, safely taking all necessary precautions before they work on power lines.

While we're proud of our outstanding safety record, sometimes, no matter how many steps we take to keep everyone safe, you can unknowingly put the lives of our crews—and your own—in danger.

Portable generators, widely utilized when power lines are down, can prove fatal to line workers and your neighbors when used improperly. A generator connected to a home's wiring or plugged into a regular household outlet can cause backfeeding along

power lines and electrocute anyone who comes in contact with them. In 2005, a lineman died in Flomaton, Ala., when he contacted a power line that was energized by an improperly installed generator. Forty-

one-year-old Ronnie Adams of Winterville, Ga., was working to restore power after Hurricane Dennis when contact was made.

Utility workers aren't the only ones in danger when a portable generator is in use. Generator owners themselves may be at risk of electrocution, fire injury, property damage or carbon monoxide poisoning.

- Never connect a generator directly to your home's wiring unless your home has been wired for generator use with a double throw switch. Have a licensed electrician install equipment necessary to safely connect emergency generators to your home.
- Always plug appliances directly into generators. Connecting the generator to your home's circuits or wiring must be done by a qualified, licensed electrician who will install a transfer switch to prevent backfeeding, which could cause harm or death to line-workers.
- Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords. Make sure extension cords are free of cuts or tears and the plug has three prongs. Overloaded cords can cause fires or equipment damage.
- Always ensure that the generator is properly grounded.
- Never overload a portable generator, it should only be used when necessary to power essential equipment or appliances.
- Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
- Keep the generator dry and operate it on a dry surface under an open structure--but never indoors.
- Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby.
- Never fuel a generator while its operating.



CAEC offices will be closed Monday, July 4th, for the Independence Day Holiday

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High Humidity = High Energy Bill

How does high humidity affect your power bill? If you have an air conditioner, it can use as much as 50 percent of its energy consumption just to remove moisture from the air. Relatively high humidity can also reduce the efficiency of your appliances, adding to your home's overall energy use.

Even every day household activities such as cooking, cleaning, bathing and doing laundry can raise the humidity level. It has been estimated that the typical family of four converts between three to six gallons of water into water vapor each day.

To find out if you have a high humidity problem inside your home, buy a digital hygrometer (can be found at any home improvement store for an average cost of \$15), which measures the humidity level. In our region, the ideal indoor relative humidity (RH) for the summer months should be less than 60 percent and less than 40 percent for the colder months.

When you reduce the humidity in your home, you also reduce the possibility of having mold and mildew growth.

You can limit or control the amount of water vapor in the house by simply changing some of your daily habits:

cook with lids on your pots and pans, take shorter showers with cooler water and avoid hang-drying laundry in the house.

Here are some additional steps you can take to reduce humidity in your home:

- **Use a residential dehumidifier** - For a wise, economical choice, use a dehumidifier. A dehumidifier utilizes a fan to pull air from the surrounding area. As the air passes through, moisture is removed from the air. The collected moisture then drips into a reservoir. When using a dehumidifier, try moving your thermostat up a few degrees, because your air conditioner unit does not have to work as hard and allows you to maintain the same level of comfort.
- **Cover the ground area in your crawl space** - Moisture can seep through the soil into a home raising moisture levels throughout the house. Cover the ground completely in your crawl space or basement with a ground-moisture barrier (such as plastic) to slow down water vapor coming through the soil.
- **Use exhaust fans in your kitchen, laundry and bathrooms** - The kitchen, laundry and bathroom are all areas where water moisture is created the most. Using an exhaust fan while cooking, bathing/showering or doing laundry will help reduce humidity. If you do not have exhaust fans in these areas, consult with your heating and air conditioning expert for advice.

It can be costly to keep your air conditioned space comfortable when it's hot and humid. But applying some of the suggestions above can help save you money on your cooling bills. 