



WINTER BILLS

You may not be there, but your meter still is

Every winter, we get many of the same inquiries about billings and this winter is no different.

The call starts out, “I have a question about my bill. We haven’t even been there and it seems very high?”

It is important to remember that we have no idea what is happening on your side of the meter. However, we can say that we have seen it all. The meter does not spin without current traveling through it and unless you have opened your main breaker, you cannot be assured that you are not using electricity.

You have your “electricity vampires” such as a plugged-in television in standby waiting for a signal from a remote, clocks, ovens with displays, cordless phones in their chargers, and other electronic devices that we have noted many times before. These can add up surprisingly fast and in the average home account for up to 75 kWhs per month.

If you have left your refrigerator plugged in while you are gone for a couple months, keeping that half a bottle of ketchup, a stick of butter, and a jar of pickles cold while you are gone, you can count on something like 2 kWhs per day or 60 kWhs per month.

We have seen cases where a small heater is left on in a bathroom with the door open, leading to that “small” heater attempting to heat the entire home and essentially never shutting off.

We have also seen cases where a well pump that is left on cycles regularly because of a small leak, or a hole in a fitting caused by electrolysis. A well pump with a bad pressure tank will cycle significantly more often, leading to higher electricity consumption. If you are going to be gone from your home, regardless of heat status, we suggest opening the breaker. Not only will this potentially reduce consumption, but it can also prevent major damage should a leak occur.

Many homes here on the Island have a separate breaker panel for electric heat and we have had cases where someone had turned off the main breaker in the main panel, but forgotten about the heat panel. And, speaking of heaters, there are many line voltage thermostats out there that do not have an “off” position.

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Turning it all the way down does not mean the thermostat will not call for heat. In addition, we have seen “rogue” thermostats, that even though turned down, are not accurately calling for heat. One high bill call that we investigated occurred during the summer months and we discovered a baseboard electric heater that was pumping out the heat on a 75-degree day with the thermostat set at low. Only an open breaker can assure you that this will not occur.

If you leave something like a dehumidifier on, this can lead to an unexpected high bill. Of course, not having one on can lead to other, more expensive issues; however, it is important to realize what you have running.

One other thing we recommend is that you have someone check on your home if you are going to be gone for an extended period of time, no matter the season. We received a call about a high heat bill a couple winters ago and it turned out that one of the member’s doors had blown open in a storm. Not only was there snow inside the home, but the baseboards were actively attempting to melt it.

As we noted, we do not know what is happening on your side of the meter and all we can do is ask questions and give advice based on prior experience, but knowing what you have plugged in and running is key. One thing that has surprised us is the number of folks who buy a home without investigating what the previous owner’s usage has been. What may be a surprise to you, might not have been!

Fiber Update

CONNECTIONS CONTINUE, CUSTOMER SERVICE RESOURCES IN DEVELOPMENT

We continue to connect those of you who are here and continue to splice Network Interfaces Devices at homes and businesses. The mild weather has been a surprise and a blessing (if only it would have a positive effect on wholesale energy costs!).

Karcz is back running drops and some distribution fiber and Quantum is following close behind them splicing.

As we have discussed before, we will continue working for as long as we are able and the weather allows. Of note, our connection at the school—the very first connection, in fact—is now the primary connection and we are saving the taxpayers roughly \$1,200 per month in comparison with the Badgernet billings. We are also seeing members who are connected being able to disconnect Dish or DirectTV

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and saving money every month by streaming.

We are actively working on scheduling some informative sessions where we will discuss (with Quantum's help) streaming options, internet/cybersecurity issues, and other pertinent topics. We want to have a few more folks connected and using some of these options as we can all learn

from each other. We hope to discuss devices like smart TVs, Roku, Fire Sticks, and others.

In addition, stay tuned for a voice-over internet offering for landline phone that will allow you to port your existing number and take advantage of that fiber connection.

In the meantime, we are also actively working on customer service and support. You will be able to call in and get help with your connection and some diagnostics that will tell you whether a problem you are experiencing is due to the equipment we have provided or something on your end. It is likely that this will be a much more accurate diagnostic service than the one described in the high bill article that precedes this one.

In any case, we are working towards getting you connected. As we have noted in the past, in some cases where there is an underground service to the home, we will be able to temporarily run a line (if it can be done in such a way that it can't be damaged by incidental contact) on the ground until the weather and frost conditions allow



Old and new—Doug Delaporte sees the light! Nelsen's Hall gets connected and the phone in the photo will no longer be necessary.

us to get some conduit installed. Also, note that such installations will be accomplished as part of the service—within reason!

As a reminder, the rate schedule is as follows:

100M symmetrical service	\$59.99
300M symmetrical service	\$69.99
1G symmetrical service	\$89.99

We are still working out the details of the necessary Federal “hand in your pocket” charges such as the Universal Service Fund and the like and will keep you in the loop. In addition, we are working towards becoming enrolled in the FCC's ACP (Federal Communications Commission Affordable Connectivity Program) and more details will be coming regarding that program in future communication.

And, of course, we continue to pursue grant opportunities as they arise.



TREE TRIMMING INCREASES RELIABILITY

As winter progresses (and we are not fooled by the mild weather) we will continue our trimming efforts, concentrating on those areas that have been the cause of outages. We have made great progress on clearing right-of-way areas and feel that we have reaped the benefits of this not only from an access standpoint, but from a reliability standpoint.

We want to remind our members that in many cases, what started as a cedar hedge, if not maintained, can grow up into the lines and, while the contact might not cause an immediate outage, heavy snow will add to the issue and

increase contact. In such cases these once-harmless hedges have caused outages and are difficult to clear.

In addition, these situations cause a safety hazard because the tree in contact with the power line creates a path to ground for our 7,200V distribution line that is now within reach of those on the ground. We have had numerous cases where trees have been planted under the lines, and we swear that the lines were used in order to ensure the trees were planted in a straight line. Most trees planted under the lines will eventually grow into the lines, so please consider this as you plant.

Plant the right tree in the right place

LARGE TREES

Height/spread of more than 40 feet, such as:

- Maple
- Birch
- Oak
- Sweetgum
- Spruce
- Linden
- Pine

MEDIUM TREES

Height/spread of 25 to 40 feet, such as:

- Washington hawthorn
- Goldenraintree
- Eastern redbud
- American arborvitae
- Dogwoods

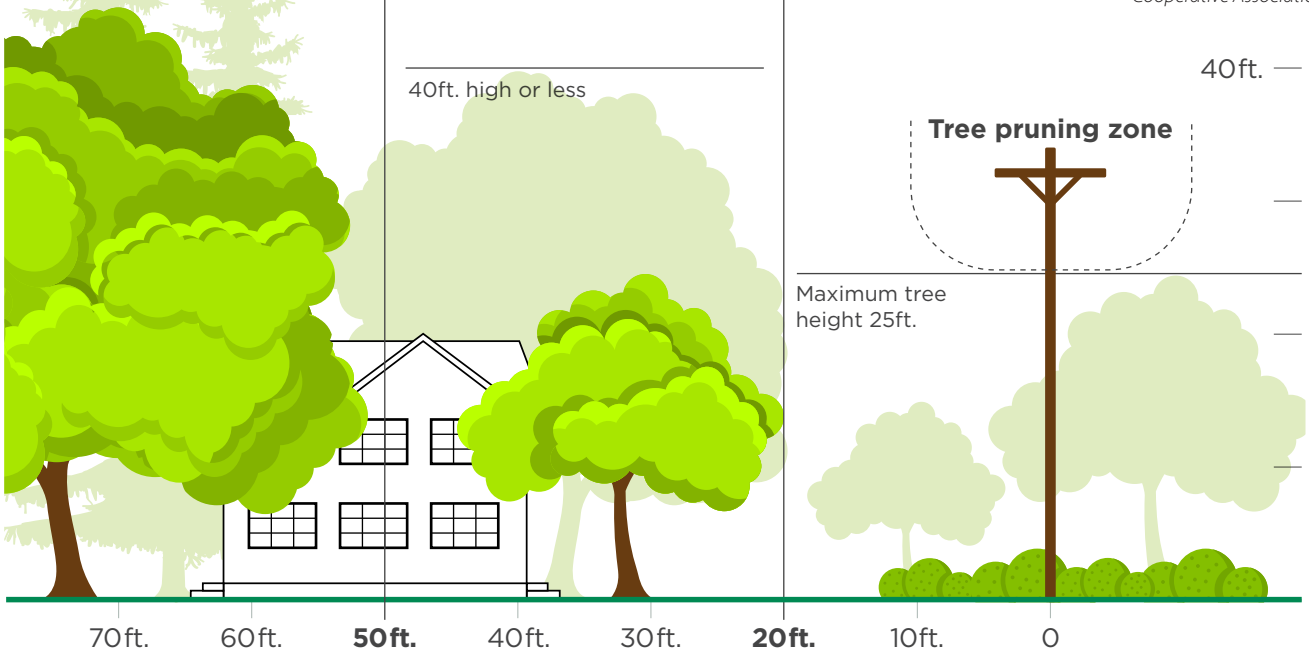
SMALL TREES

Avoid planting within 20 feet of power lines. When planting within 20 feet is unavoidable, use only shrubs and small trees.

Height/spread of no more than 25 feet such as:

- Star magnolia
- Crabapple
- Lilac

Source: The Arbor Day Foundation and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association



KNOW WHAT'S BELOW BEFORE YOU START DIGGING

As you may or may not be aware, The Washington Island Electric Cooperative is a member of Digger's Hotline. As a reminder, you are responsible to call in a locate request to the hotline for any digging you may do. It is a free service for the caller and, based on experience, some of the phone lines on the Island run in inexplicable areas. We have had many locates leave us scratching our head as to what the installers were thinking but we were glad to know where the lines were.

A company named USIC (United

States Infrastructure Corporation) does the locating for Frontier and the cooperative does its own locating. As an additional reminder, neither is responsible for locating private lines (anything after the meter in our case), private gas lines, water lines, etc.

If you dig into a line because you did not file a locate request, it is likely you will be responsible for the cost of repairing that line. Worse yet, should you dig into an electric line, you might not have to worry about the cost, but someone will have to worry about the

cost of your funeral.

This is not something exclusive to Washington Island, and most communities and states have similar programs in order to prevent damage or injury.

You can file a locate request by dialing 1-800-242-8511 or 811 or by going to their website at www.diggershotline.com. We (and Frontier) will be notified of your plans and will come to mark the underground lines (once again, not your private lines).

Call before you dig!

CALL BEFORE YOU DIG

It's Easy! It's Free!

Planning a digging project in your yard or on your property? If you dig without knowing what is located below, you could damage an underground line.

Not only could you become seriously injured, but you will be responsible for the cost of repairs. To avoid hassles and fines, call 811, the Call Before You Dig number, at least three

business days prior to breaking ground. (811 locators do not mark privately owned underground lines or pipes, such as service to outbuildings, sprinkler systems or invisible fences.)

An uneventful digging project is the best kind to have.

Safe Electricity.org®

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