

VERMONT

ELECTRIC



## CEO Update: Survey Results and Modest Rate Increase in 2022

By Rebecca Towne

I hope the season finds you well. I want to thank those members who took time this summer to participate in the annual member survey.

We take your opinions to heart and we were again reminded of the diversity of perspectives across our service territory - and we remain as committed as ever to doing our best to meet the needs of all of our members. (We have posted the survey results on our website under the News and Community tab in case you are interested in reading more.)

As we review the survey results we are reminded that the greatest priority members express is their interest in us keeping rates as low as possible. As we continue to work to provide safe, reliable service in an increasingly complex world, this concern is at the forefront of our minds as we face various cost pressures.

Because of these pressures, this month VEC will be filing for a 1.96 percent rate increase to go into effect on Jan 1, 2022. If this increase is approved, a residential customer with a monthly bill of \$100 would see an increase of \$1.96.

While we understand that any rate increase is unwelcome news, this request is necessary so that VEC can continue our core work of delivering affordable, reliable, and safe energy services while at the same time innovating in a changing energy landscape. This is VEC's first increase in two years and our ten-year average rate increase has been less than one percent per year over that time, including this proposed increase.

The increase is driven by various cost pressures including:

- Power purchases. This includes higher costs of existing and new power supply contracts and higher market pricing overall.

- Transmission costs. Utilities operating in the New England grid all share the cost of transmission of power through the region, and costs for that transmission are rising. However, there are critical benefits in terms of security and reliability to being part of an interconnected system. The value of a regional grid – and the threats that can arise when a system operates alone – was highlighted during the long-term outages last February in Texas.

- Increased cost of doing business. The cost of labor increases over time and as a provider of an

essential service, VEC must offer competitive salaries and benefits to attract and retain a talented and skilled workforce.

- Vegetation maintenance. VEC is working to accelerate our vegetation management schedule so that we clear dangerous trees (including ash trees affected by the invasive emerald ash borer) from our system sooner rather than later, all to ensure reliability of service in the coming years and fast and cost-effective restoration after storms.

Even as we contend with these upward pressures, we are always taking steps to contain costs, too. Like all businesses we look closely at our budget to ensure our spending is frugal and wise. We also regularly invest in projects that over time reduce costs such as utility and residential storage programs that reduce our peak usage and therefore our transmission and power supply costs. In 2022 we will expand these projects to continue to offset rising transmission costs.

These investments are also particularly important because the world is evolving quickly around us and we are an important part of the fight against climate change. As we integrate more renewables, and our

*Continued on page 5*

# A Reminder: Substations Are Critical, But Dangerous Too

There are a lot of links in the electricity system, all the way from point where an electron is generated at a power plant to the time it illuminates a lightbulb in your house.

One of those critical connections in the power grid are substations. You may notice them along roadsides – fenced in areas with lots of gray colored electrical equipment and signs saying DANGER KEEP OUT.

Substations serve a range of purposes, but broadly speaking they help convert high voltage electricity coming from transmission lines to lower, more manageable voltages that can be distributed through your neighborhood to your house or business.

VEC has 35 substations across our territory, a handful of which are shared with Green Mountain Power, Washington Electric Co-op, and VELCO. Besides being critical infrastructure, substations are dangerous places, and if you are not a qualified worker, it's not safe to be around them.

Regarding substations, please:

- Resist the temptation to use substation areas as off-road parking spots, or recreate anywhere near them.

- If you want to communicate with crews working in a substation, please wait well outside the fence until you can get the attention of the crews. Crews will then come out to talk.

- If you see anything alarming or unusual at a substation, please call VEC immediately, but only from a safe distance from the station.

Thank you for your help in keeping us all safe!



VEC's East Berkshire Substation, pictured here under construction in 2016, is one of 35 substations located across VEC territory.

# VEC Launches Residential Battery Storage Incentive Program

VEC recently announced the public launch of a home battery storage incentive program designed to save the co-op on power supply costs and support member resiliency.

"We're really excited to be offering this new partnership option for our members," said Rebecca Towne, VEC's Chief Executive Officer. "Home battery systems can increase members' resiliency, and when they are willing to share stored energy in their batteries with VEC when they don't need it, it can help the co-op as a whole save money," she said. "This program is one more way that VEC is joining forces with our members to participate in the evolution of the grid."

With several flexible load initiatives underway, including a water heater partnership with Burlington-based Packetized Energy, and incentives for off-peak electric vehicle charging, VEC continues to deploy innovative solutions in an effort to save the co-op money, add resiliency, and manage the integration of cleaner power supplies that are coming onto the grid.

VEC member Steve Peery of Bolton recently enrolled a home battery in VEC's program.

"I'd initially planned to sign up just because I think it is the right thing to do to support my community, lower our electricity cost, and help the environment," he said. "Then discovering that it includes a substantial monthly credit to my electric bill made the program even more inviting."

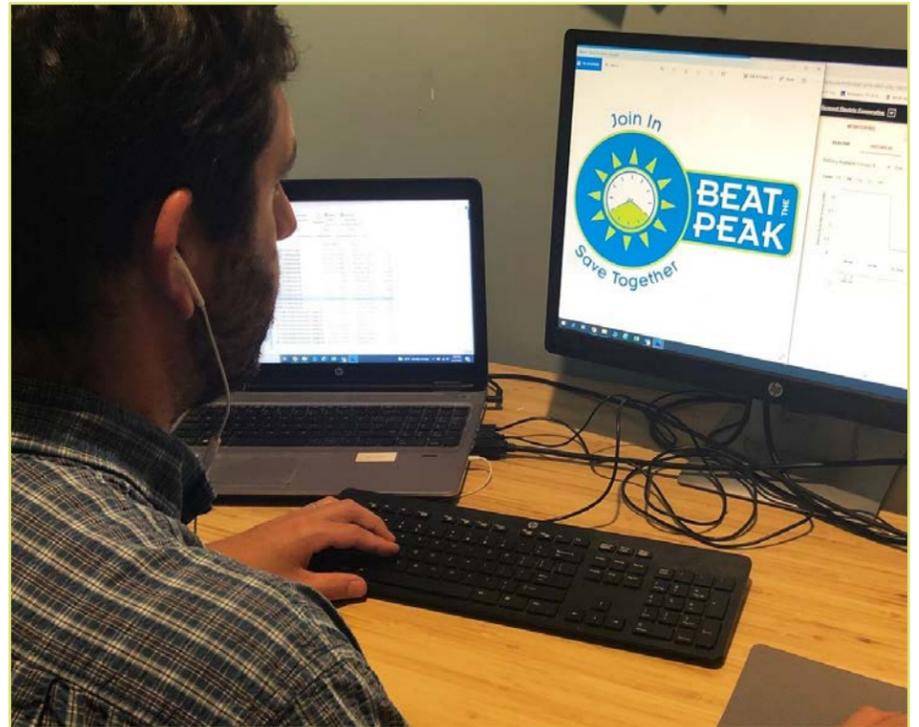
Under the program, members who are willing to allow VEC to tap their home battery a limited number of times per year when the co-op is expecting peak demand receive a monthly bill credit or combination of an upfront payment and bill credits. VEC will pay members either:

- A monthly bill credit of \$6.40 per kilowatt (kW), or
- An upfront payment of \$268 per kW and monthly bill credit of \$3.20 per kW.

For example, a member with a 5-kW battery would have the following options: a \$32/month bill credit or an upfront payment of \$1,340 and a \$16/month bill credit.

Battery types eligible for the program at this time include Generac PWRcell, Tesla Powerwall and Sonnen. Other batteries may be added in the future.

Members who participate in the program will be notified ahead of time be-



VEC Power Planning Analyst Dan Potter reviews a member's battery storage information. Courtesy photo.

fore VEC draws from their battery. In no case will VEC will discharge the battery below 20 percent of its capacity, unless the member sets a deeper discharge limit. In addition, VEC will make every effort to avoid drawing down batteries before a major weather event that could cause outages.

You can find out more on VEC's website here: <https://vermontelectric.coop/flexible-load>

Learn about VEC's culture of innovation, including the co-op's battery storage initiatives, in our video here: <https://vermontelectric.coop/flexible-load>

## VEC Again Recognized with Cigna Well-Being Award

For the third year in a row, VEC's received the prestigious Cigna Well-Being Award from the insurance company Cigna. VEC is the only company in Cigna's book of business that has won the award three years running.

A key reason that Cigna granted the award to VEC is that the co-op's program emphasizes not just physical health, but also related areas of social, emotional, environmental and financial well-being, said Katie Orost, VEC's Tariff and Rate Specialist and Wellness Team leader.

VEC offers employees a range of challenges and programs to promote health and wellness, including quarterly wellness challenges, annual allowances for the purchase of health-related items like exercise equipment or ski passes, and entry fees for running races. Cigna supports the effort through direct funding for the incentives to the Co-op.

"The wellness program incentives are great – it's that extra nudge to sign up for a race, get my flu shot, plant a garden, even rent a kayak on a Saturday," said Jeff Still, a VEC member service agent and member of VEC's wellness team. "I try to take advantage of as many of the programs as I can and I know it benefits my health and wellbeing, as well as that of my family."

Cigna Well-Being Award applicants are evaluated based on the core components of their wellness program, including leadership engagement, company culture, strategy and goals, implementation, and employee engagement. All applications are scored and reviewed by a panel of Cigna health promotion experts.



VEC's Key Account Manager Dave Lahar, at far right, and his sons Liam (left) and Jesseman (center) enjoy some time on Lake Willoughby this summer with kayaks they rented as part of VEC's Cigna wellness program. Courtesy photo.

## MEMBER NOTICE: RATE CHANGE

On November 12, 2021, Vermont Electric Cooperative will file with the Public Utility Commission a proposed 1.96 % rate increase to be effective starting January 1, 2022.

The primary drivers for the rate change include costs of power supply, transmission, increased cost of doing business, and vegetation management.

Questions and comments regarding the rate change proposal can be made to:

Vermont Electric Cooperative  
800-832-2667, [support@vermontelectric.coop](mailto:support@vermontelectric.coop)

Comments regarding the rate change proposal can be made to:

Public Utility Commission  
802-828-2358, [PUC.Clerk@vermont.gov](mailto:PUC.Clerk@vermont.gov)

Department of Public Service, Consumer Affairs and Public Information Division  
800-622-4496, [psd.consumer@vermont.gov](mailto:psd.consumer@vermont.gov)

## Five Tips to Improve Your Personal cybersecurity

Being cyber-smart is the best way to protect yourself and others from cyber-attacks. By taking preventive measures and making a habit of practicing online safety, you can decrease exponentially your odds of being hacked, and protect yourself from identity theft as well as lost time and money. Here are five tips:

- Be sure you are using strong passwords. A strong password is often a long and relatively complex phrase that is easy for you to remember but hard to guess. In addition, consider using a password manager. Doing so will add even more security and help you keep track of your passwords.
- Enable multi-factor authentication for your on-line accounts. Multi-factor authentication adds a second check to verify your identity when logging in. This sort of authentication takes a range of forms, but often works like this: when you try to log into an account, the company will ask to send you, via text, phone, or other means, a code. With this code you can gain access to your account. This way, even if a bad actor has your password, your account is more secure.



Image by Shafin Al Asad Protic from Pixabay

- Perform software updates. When your computer or other device prompts you to update the software, it may be tempting to simply click postpone, and ignore the message, but it's always good practice to choose the update. Having the latest security software, web browser, and operating system on devices is one of the best defenses against online threats.
- Do your research before downloading programs and apps. Check reviews and check for articles covering a given program or app's privacy and security features.
- Watch links and attachments. Be extra cautious with emails that contain links or attachments, especially from unknown senders. Take the time to verify the sender is who they claim to be before clicking.

# Up, Tie, Drop, Down: Pole top Rescues



One of the annually required training exercises lineworkers across the United States must complete is an annual pole top rescue drill. VEC lineworkers recently conducted this drill.

In this simulation, a lineworker on a utility pole (for training purposes a dummy is placed at the top of the pole) is rendered incapacitated – whether by shock, or other heart or respiratory problem, or even something as simple as hornet stings and a second lineworker has to rescue the incapacitated worker.

In the training scenario, the rescue dummy is placed at the top of a utility pole.

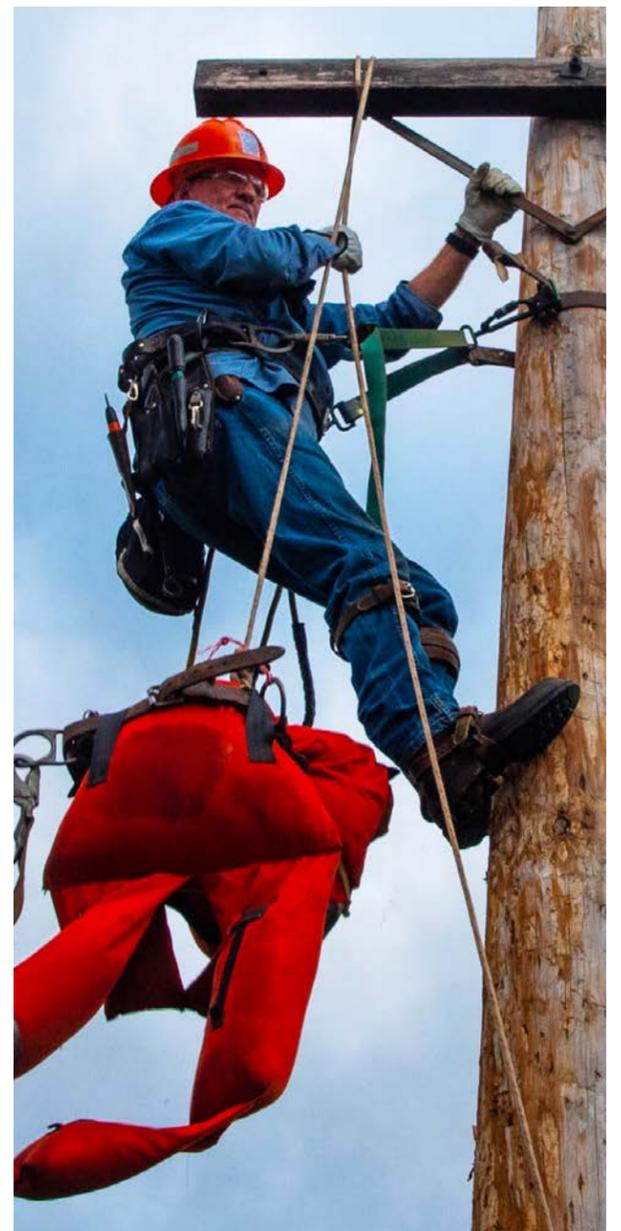
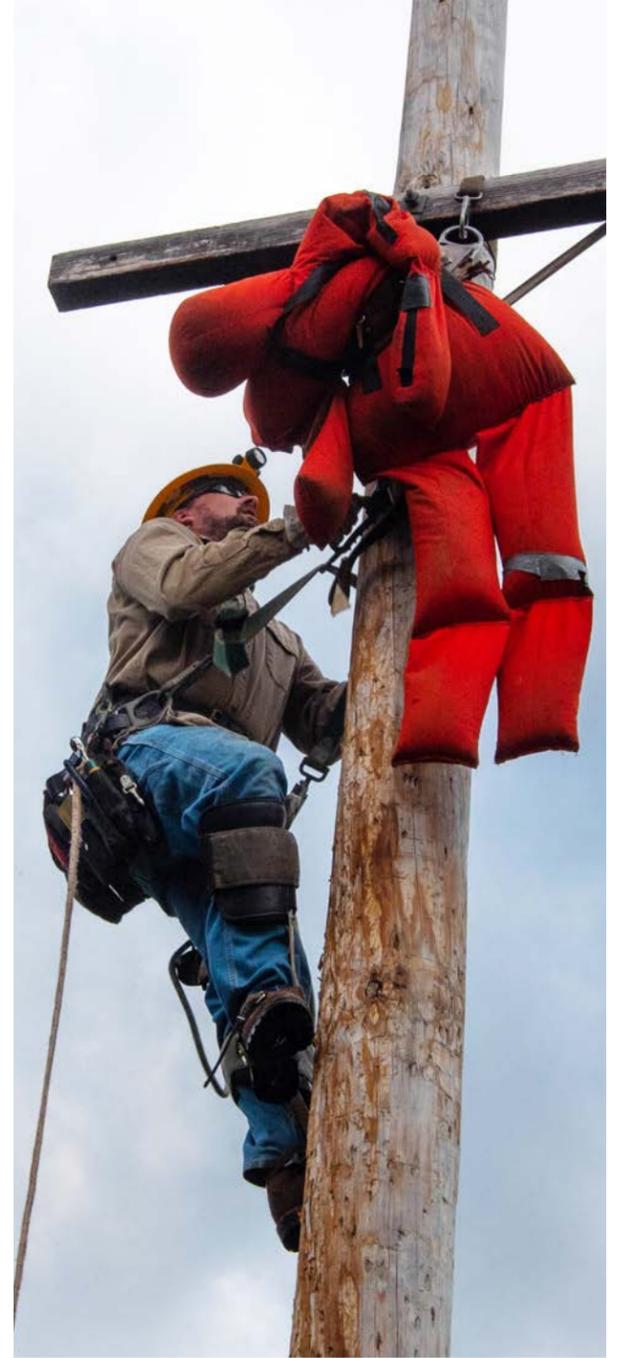
At the word “go,” the lineworker below the pole must execute the following:

- Issue a Mayday call to the VEC control center over a radio or cell phone
- Don climbing spikes and leather belt and pole attachment and pick up a rope (at least ½ inch diameter) and a sharp knife
- Quickly climb to the top of the pole and drape the rope over a cross arm or other secure structure on the pole
- Tie the rope under the arms and across the chest of the dummy, securing the rope with a bowline knot or several half-hitches
- Using the knife, cut the leather belt from the dummy to disconnect it from the pole
- Lower the dummy to the ground
- Climb down from the pole
- Start CPR and First Aid on a maniken on the ground.

These steps must be concluded within a 4 1/2 minute time limit in order to reduce the potential for organ damage. (Recently, VEC lineworkers averaged about three minutes to execute the drill.)

“People may often see a lineworker on a pole and at least one other on the ground and may wonder why that second worker is there,” said Manager of Service Operations David Young. “That second lineworker is there in large part for safety. The second person looks for hazards that the lineworker on the pole may not see,” Young said. “Should a worker on the pole have a problem, there is a chance of getting them back on the ground safely to provide timely first aid.”

*Photos courtesy Walter Oakes.*



# Are You Ready for the Next Power Outage?



A VEC lineworker approaches a line during Winter Storm Bruce in 2018.

Despite VEC's ongoing efforts to minimize outages, storms that knock out power are a fact of life. Below are a few steps you can take before a storm hits to allow you and your family to weather possible outages more comfortably:

**Build/restock an emergency kit.** This kit should include at a minimum: battery powered flashlight(s) or headlamp(s); extra batteries; first aid kit; manual can opener; bottled water; non-perishable food. Additional items could include a radio (battery powered or hand crank); sets of warm clothing and sleeping bags and/or blankets; toiletries including towels/wipes, hand sanitizer, diapers and prescription medications.

**Plan for medical needs/devices.** If someone in your home is dependent on electric-powered medical equipment, make sure you have a battery back-up or make alternative arrangements to ensure their needs are met.

**Stock water.** Before a storm arrives, fill a bathtub if you have one, so you have water to flush the toilet. (Avoid unsupervised bathroom access to children). Fill large containers for drinking water or buy bottled water.

**Charge devices, and fuel vehicles.** Be sure cell phones, computers and tablets are charged and vehicles are full of fuel.

**Watch the forecast.** Keep updated with storm alerts and news from the National Weather Service.

## What to do during an outage

**Stay informed.** Get updates on outages and estimated times of restoration on VEC's Outage Center as well as on VEC's Facebook and Twitter feeds. Radio and television stations may offer general outage information as well.

**Keep your distance from downed power lines outside.** Always assume every line is energized and dangerous. If you're in a vehicle and downed wires are on the car or across the road, stay in your car until emergency crews arrive. Don't touch anything that might be in contact with a downed line.

**Locate a shelter.** If your home becomes unsafe or you need resources during a major storm or during longer term outages, dial 2-1-1 to find the closest shelter in your area.

**Check on elderly neighbors and relatives.**

**Stay off roads.** Eliminate unnecessary travel. Traffic lights may be out, and roads may be congested and they may have downed lines and trees on them.

**Use generators and stoves safely.** Never use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area.

**Prepare for the surge when the power comes back on.** To avoid damaging equipment when the

## How to Report an Outage

If your power goes out and you suspect the problem is not in your house, please report the outage to VEC.

You can do that by:

1. **Reporting the outage on-line through SmartHub.** (If you have not signed up for this useful portal, you can do so here: [www.vermontelectric.coop/smarthub](http://www.vermontelectric.coop/smarthub))
2. **Reporting the outage via phone by calling VEC at either 802-635-23312 or 800-832-2667.**

Be ready to provide the name on the account, the location of the outage and the account number if you know it. You also may be asked how long you have been out of power and whether you saw or heard anything as the power went out.

**Important: If you walk outside and see a downed line, assume that it is energized and stay away from it.**

power comes back on, turn off or disconnect any appliances, equipment or electronics you were using when the power went out, with the exception of one light. (This will help you know when the power comes back on.) When the power comes back on in your home, it doesn't necessarily mean all repairs in your area have been made. Remain vigilant for and stay away from any downed lines or trees in your area.

**Take care of your food.** For detailed instructions on keeping food safe during outages visit the [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov).

### CEO Update (Continued from Page 1)

members increasingly look to our electric grid for heating and transportation, we must innovate to be sure we can continuously serve reliable, affordable power to our communities today and into the future.

We know the pandemic impact has been severe for some of our members, and we were able to take advantage of federal and state support to mitigate pandemic-related costs for VEC and our members.

First, we've been successful over the past year in helping members with COVID-related past due balances get access to state grants to help get paid up. If we had not worked with our members as we did, those costs would have landed on the co-op as a whole, adding more upward cost pressure.

The federal Paycheck Protection Program was another pandemic-relief program that allowed VEC to keep our employees working for our members during times of great uncertainty and has likewise al-

lowed us to contain costs.

Finally, it's important to note - earlier this year VEC was once again given an A+ credit rating, something that helps the co-op to save money because it results in lower borrowing costs for the co-op.

Ultimately, please be assured we are making a well-considered and prudent investments in the future health of the co-op. As we proceed with our rate request over the next few months, please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.

## VEC Offers Incentives for EVs and More

VEC is continuing to offer a wide variety of bill credits for members who purchase certain electricity-powered devices for their homes or businesses to transition away from fossil fuels. "These incentives are designed to help members who are want to choose technologies for heating and cooling their homes, for transportation, even cutting the lawn, that are more modern, cleaner and less expensive over the long term," said Jake Brown, energy services planner at VEC. There are bill credits available for electric vehicles (for purchase and lease, new and used), heat pumps, pellet stoves, heat pump water heaters, and other equipment. There are also custom opportunities through VEC's Clean Air Program (CAP) that can help replace fossil fuel usage, and reduce carbon emissions, through electric service upgrades or line-extensions.



## Top 5 Reasons People Think They Don't Want an Electric Car

If you're thinking about getting a plug-in electric vehicle (EV), you might have a few questions. Buying or leasing a car is always a big choice. If it's your first time looking at an EV, that choice comes with some unknowns. This guide addresses some of the common misconceptions about driving an EV. Understanding the truth about driving an EV in Vermont will help you make an informed choice when you next look for a car.

### Worried about winter? EVs are all-season cars

Vermont's cold and icy winters are a consideration for all car owners. If you're considering an EV for the first time, it's likely that you've wondered if it can handle the winter. It's a valid concern. Cold weather makes all vehicles less efficient. Your current gas car might lose about 15 percent of its fuel economy at 20 degrees.

For your EV, the battery that powers the car is also less efficient in cold weather. Running the heat to stay warm in the car drains the battery. Altogether, your vehicle might lose up to half its official range when temperatures drop below 0 degrees. But even at half range, most EVs can still handle commutes, errands, taking kids to school, and other common trips over the course of a day.

### Cost conscious? You don't need to pay luxury car prices on a new EV

More and more car manufacturers are offering all-electric or plug in hybrid options. As the cost of EV batteries declines, and more cars are made, there are more options available at lower costs. There are also incentives available from your local utility and the state of Vermont that can reduce upfront purchase or lease costs by up to \$14,000 in for qualifying customers.

It's also important to look at the total cost of owning an EV. Over its lifetime, you'll save money on maintenance and fuel. Over five years, you could save over \$6,200 on your car by not paying for gas and routine maintenance.

But saving money over the long-haul doesn't avoid the upfront cost. Here are some options for getting an EV without breaking the bank:

Try leasing: it's a popular choice for many EV drivers who want to test an EV without that upfront cost.

Go used: While availability of used EVs in Vermont is still lower than for gas cars, the number of cars available is growing.

### Time sensitive? Charging doesn't have to mean a long wait

One of the great benefits of owning an EV is that your home becomes your gas station. Get home at the end of the day, plug in your car, and it'll



be ready for you again the next time you go out. Most vehicle charging happens at homes or apartments. And most people who charge at home just plug into a standard home outlet. Some workplaces are also offering free charging.

But if you're out on an errand or a road trip and low on miles, you might need to find a public charging station. Vermont has the most EV charging per capita of any state with 300 public charging stations.

When you do need to charge downtown, it's a great time to support local businesses or have a meal.

### Worried about not having enough range? EVs make great second cars

If you commonly drive more than 150 miles in a trip, consider an EV for a second car. Many two-car families might be able to dedicate one car to road trips and long hauls. The EV is great for regular commutes, errands, and shorter trips. Think about what your family needs out of a car and whether an EV could replace an existing car.

### Is an EV right for you?

There are a lot of other benefits of driving an EV. They are great fun to drive and make almost no noise. They have no tailpipe emissions, which is healthier for your whole family. And the reduced maintenance means less time spent dealing with car appointments. Consider whether an EV could be the right next car for you.



## Scams: They are Sneaky and Clever - Don't Fall for Them

In recent years scammers have become increasingly sophisticated and they continue to attempt to take advantage of people, including VEC members.

One scam that is regularly directed at VEC members is a phone call in which the scammer attempts to collect a debt – a past due electric bill balance – that does not exist.

In this scam, the caller poses as a VEC representative and threatens to disconnect a member's electricity, claiming there is an unpaid balance. The caller then tells the member that unless they provide credit card information to make the payment, the power will be shut off. Often these scams target our members in waves, over a period of a couple of hours.

VEC member service representatives never demand such information in this manner or threaten to cut power without multiple contacts and attempts to set up payment arrangements on any past due balances.

If you have any doubt about the legitimacy of a caller, hang up immediately. Do not engage in any way with the callers. If you receive a call, please report it to VEC at 802-635-2667. Doing so can help us promptly warn other members of scam. As always, if you have any concerns about your bill or possible disconnection, please call VEC.

There are lots of types of scams out there, including scams promoting phony prizes, lotteries or sweepstakes, scammers posing as computer technical support experts, and of course phishing scams involving attempts to steal information using fake links or email attachments. (See related story on personal cyber safety on p. 3).

You can find out more about common scams, and sign up for scam alerts, from the Vermont Attorney General's Office here: <https://ago.vermont.gov/cap/stopping-scams/>



## Don't Miss Important Information

From time to time, VEC delivers critical messages to our members via an automated phone system and email. In many cases, these communications are sent to alert members to a planned power outage in their area that's necessary to repair or upgrade our system.

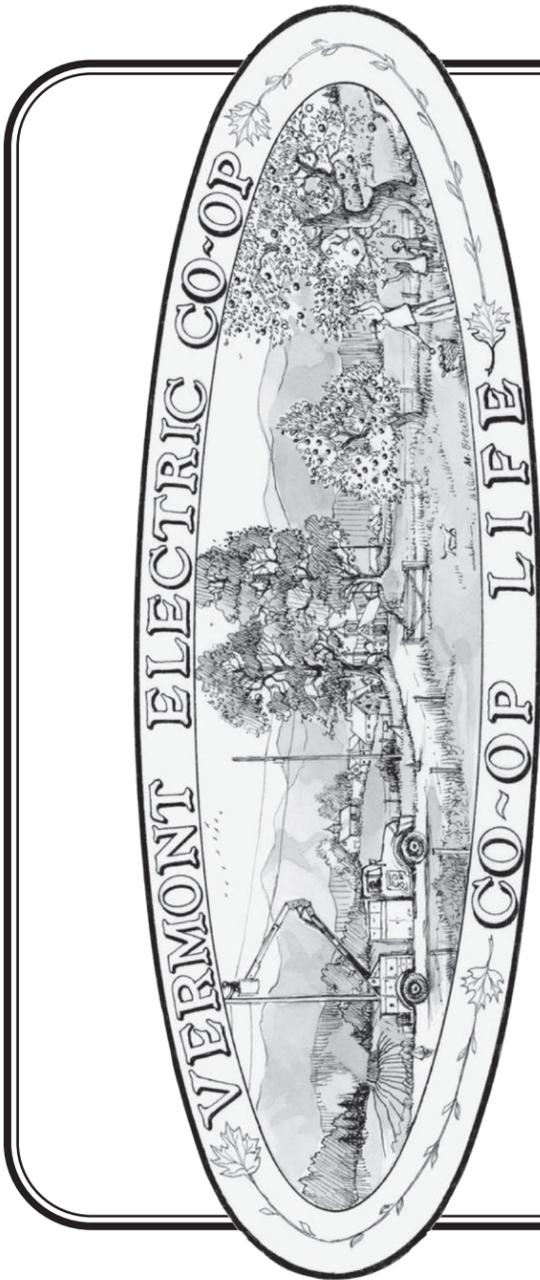
In other cases, we want to let members know about tree trimming in their area. If you have recently changed your phone number, or moved to a cell phone, or have recently changed your email address, please email us the updated information to [support@vermontelectric.coop](mailto:support@vermontelectric.coop). You can also update the information by logging into your **SmartHub** account either on the web or through the app. Thank you!

## Paperless Delivery Now Available for Co-op Life

In an effort to accommodate the changing reading preferences of our membership, we are now offering members the opportunity to opt out of receiving a hard copy of Co-op Life mailed to their homes or businesses. Instead, we will send those members a simple email with a quick summary of Co-op Life stories and links to the online version.

Co-op Life is our time honored, flagship publication that for years we have mailed directly to all of our members. We remain committed to delivering it to our many members who want a hard-copy publication to hold in their hands. At the same time, we want to accommodate members who prefer to get information digitally, so we are offering that option for those who would like it.

If you would like to sign up for paperless Co-op Life, please visit <https://vermontelectric.coop/forms/paperless-co-op-life> and fill out our online form.



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Electric lineworkers across the United States must complete an annual pole top rescue drill. The drill simulates the rescue of a lineworker incapacitated on a utility pole. Here, VEC lineworker Shawn Booth ties a rope around a dummy during a recent VEC training session. See story on page 4. Photo Walter Oakes.



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### Inside Fall 2021 Co-op Life

- CEO Update ..... pg. 1
- Substations Are Critical, But Dangerous Too..... pg. 1
- VEC Launches Residential Battery Storage Incentive Program ..... pg. 2
- VEC Again Recognized with Cigna Well-Being Award ..... pg. 2
- Member Notice: Rate Change ..... pg. 3
- Five Tips to Improve Your Personal Cybersecurity ..... pg. 3
- Up, Tie, Drop, Down: Pole Top Rescues ..... pg. 4
- Are You Ready for the Next Power Outage?..... pg. 5
- VEC Offers Incentives for EVs, More ..... pg. 6
- Top Five Reasons People Think They Don't Want an Electric Car.... pg. 6
- Scams: They are Sneaky and Clever – Don't Fall for Them ..... pg. 7
- Don't Miss Important Information..... pg. 7
- Paperless Delivery Now Available for Co-op Life ..... pg. 7

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