

## Members Approve Consolidation in November Election

BY SERINA COLE

The familiar names of Belfalls Electric Co-op (BEC) and McLennan County Electric Co-op (MCEC) will soon be replaced by Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative Inc. (HOTEC). With a majority vote from both cooperatives' memberships, the consolidation of the two neighboring utilities was approved on November 16.

With an approval vote of almost 80 percent at BEC and 90 percent at MCEC, both cooperatives voted in favor of the consolidation. The effective date of the consolidation is July 1, 2007.

Rick Haile, current CEO/general manager of MCEC, will maintain his position as CEO/General Manager of HOTEC.

"This consolidation effort has been long and tedious, but we would like to assure our members we have always had complete regard for their interests. Thank you to all those who voted; we greatly appreciate your support," Haile said. "This isn't a big corporate merger like so many others. We are simply two neighboring utilities who want to work together to obtain better buying power, greater efficiencies and market share in order to better accommodate our members. With this consolidation, we will experience the positive effects of a stronger and more viable organization."

The primary HOTEC office will be in McGregor, but the Rosebud-area

office will remain open as promised.

Both BEC and MCEC have taken great pride in the quality and efficiency of service they have provided over the past 70 years. However, after months of deliberation and preparations, the governing boards determined it to be in

the best interest of both memberships to establish a united Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative. This consolidation will allow a reduction in overhead and help maintain a competitive rate position for members. The strategic positioning will also allow the united cooperative an opportunity to enhance

the technical and professional staffs in order to provide better service.

"The process will be slow," Haile said. "We want to ensure we do things right. While some changes will be visible early on, combining the computer and billing systems as well as the operation practices will take a longer amount of time. For those members who have memberships at both Belfalls and MCEC, it will take several months before we have the ability to send one bill."

With the consolidation, the Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative will serve about 14,000 members and over 18,000 meters and will have 3,500 miles of energized line. Counties served will include parts of Bell, Bosque, Coryell, Falls, Hamilton, McLennan and Milam.

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## DON'T BREAK THE BANK TO SAVE ENERGY



There's no need to spend a lot of money to save a little energy. The Alliance to Save Energy has identified the best low- and no-cost ways to lower your energy bill and keep your piggy bank full:

**TURN OFF LIGHTS, TVS AND MUSIC SYSTEMS** when you leave a room. Shut down computers if you'll be away for a long period, or activate the unit's sleep mode for a short-term break.

**DRESS IN LAYERS** in the winter and throw an extra blanket on the bed so you can turn the thermostat down a few more degrees.

**LOWER THE TEMPERATURE ON THE WATER HEATER** to 120 degrees and wash clothes in cold water. Help your water heater work more efficiently by wrapping it in a \$20 insulation blanket.

**DON'T HEAT UNUSED SPACE** such as guest rooms. Close doors and vents until you need the room.

**WEATHERSTRIP YOUR WINDOWS AND DOORS.** It's inexpensive and easy to do, and it's one of the best ways to trap warm air indoors.

**SEAL JOINTS IN EXPOSED DUCTWORK** in the basement and attic.

**INSTALL STORM WINDOWS** or smooth plastic sheeting over the panes.

**LOW-FLOW SHOWERHEADS** and sink aerators pump out less hot water.

For more energy conservation tips that won't bust your budget, go to [www.powerisinyourhands.org](http://www.powerisinyourhands.org).

### IN EMERGENCIES

During regular business hours: (254) 583-7955.

Please contact our after-hours answering service in case of an outage not occurring during business hours: (254) 583-7955 or (254) 751-8458.

# Will Using an Electric Blanket Save Energy?

**DEAR JAMES:** I set the furnace thermostat lower at night, but my family complains it feels cold. Will using an electric blanket save energy overall? What are the most efficient ones, and are there other tips for staying comfortable? —*Sandi M.*

**DEAR SANDI:** Setting back the furnace thermostat at night can cut your utility bills significantly during the winter. Depending upon your climate, you can reduce your heating bills by 1 to 2 percent for each degree you lower the thermostat setting at night.

The best method to have a comfortable temperature setback at night is to install a programmable clock thermostat. Program it so it does not



**This heated mattress pad has dual ambient controls so each side of the bed can be a different temperature.**

start to lower the temperature until just after you are in bed and then raises it just before you awake in the morning. If you manually set a standard thermostat lower at bedtime, the entire house will be very cold when your family awakes in the morning. The earlier you can set the thermostat lower, the more you will save, so experiment with earlier times as your family adjusts to the tempera-

ture changes.

Using an electric blanket or heated mattress pad is an excellent method to stay comfortable all night long. My computerized thermostat always lowers the temperature at night, and I have used an electric blanket for years. Recently though, I have switched to a dual control (one for each side) electric mattress pad. I prefer feeling the warmth from beneath my body and less weight on top of me.

My queen-size mattress pad uses only 220 watts, and it cycles on and off to maintain a steady temperature. The average electricity usage is less than 100 watts, about as much as a standard light bulb uses. When you compare this to cutting your heating bills by up to 10 percent, the overall electricity savings are significant.

The key differences among various brands and models of electric blankets and mattress pads are the controls and the heating wires. The best, but more expensive, models use digital ambient temperature controls. This circuitry senses room temperature throughout the night and automatically increases the heat output to compensate for steady comfort. Better blankets also use longer-lasting fabrics.

Better controls have a preheat setting and also provide nearly silent operation. Cheaper electric controls make a quiet click when the internal thermostat switches them on and off throughout the night. If you cannot fall asleep easily, the clicking can become quite annoying.

Select a blanket or mattress pad with PTC (positive thermal coefficient) heating wire. Its resistance changes as the temperature changes. Where the blanket or pad is resting tightly over or under your body, and therefore warmer, its heating output decreases. This maintains a more constant sleeping temperature near your body. © 2007 James Dullely

# ELECTRICITY & YOU— WHAT TO DO FOR ...

## ELECTRICAL FIRES

- Get out.
- Notify 9-1-1. Tell the dispatcher it is an electrical fire.
- Stay away.

## ELECTRICAL SHOCK

- Do not touch anyone or thing you think might have been electrically shocked. The victim may still be in contact with the electricity.
- Call 9-1-1. Tell the dispatcher the incident involves electricity.
- Keep other people away from the continued danger.
- Understand that electrical shock may cause internal injuries. The person needs to be seen by a doctor, even if you don't see any burn marks.

## DOWNED POWER LINES

- Move quickly away even if you do not see sparks.
- Call 9-1-1.
- Stay away from anything that might touch the wire: a fence, a tree, a building, a car.
- Wait for help.

## POWER LINE TOUCHING THE CAR YOU ARE IN

- Stay in the car.
- If people move toward the vehicle, motion for them to stay away. Have someone call 9-1-1.
- Stay in the car until help arrives.

## POWER OUTAGES

Build a kit to help be more comfortable in the event of a power outage. Basics might include:

- Flashlights for each member of the household
- Battery-powered radio
- Extra batteries for each item
- Canned food and can opener
- Prepackaged foods
- Bottled water for drinking and cleaning
- First-aid kit
- Essential medications
- Toiletry items
- Books and games to pass the time

# Your Rights as a Customer of Belfalls EC

*Revised November 2006*

## **A. RATE AND SERVICE INFORMATION:**

You may, either by phone or by personal visit to the Cooperative's business office located at 128 Main, Rosebud, request copies of any portion of the Cooperative's rate and service tariffs and rules. A nominal reproduction charge will be made for each copy, and postage will be added if the copies are mailed.

## **B. METER TESTING:**

As provided by the Rules adopted by the Cooperative, you may request a test of your electric meter if you believe that the meter is not accurately reflecting your actual electric consumption. This test will be made at no charge to you, provided that the meter has not been tested during the previous four years. In the event you request a test more often than four years and the meter is not defective, you will be required to pay a charge of not more than \$15 for the test.

## **C. OUTSTANDING BILLS:**

Under the tariff of the cooperative, you have twenty-six (26) days from the date of the bill to pay an outstanding bill. The total of twenty-six (26) days consists of the sixteen (16) days from the date of issue to the due date, after which time a 5% late fee will be added, and a ten (10) day past-due disconnect period. If the due date falls on a holiday or weekend, the due date for payment purposes shall be the next work day after the due date.

A timely payment made to the Cooperative or an agency of the Cooperative shall be classified as a payment received on time by the Cooperative. A bill for utility service is delinquent if not received at the utility or at the utility's authorized payment agency by the due date.

## **D. TERMINATION OF SERVICE:**

Your electric service may be discontinued after proper notice for the following reasons:

1. Failure to pay a delinquent bill.
2. Failure to pay a delinquent account, or meet the terms of a deferred payment plan.
3. Violation of the Cooperative's rules for the use of service in such a manner that interferes with the service of others or the operation of non-standard equipment, provided that the Cooperative will make every attempt to notify you of the problem and allow you to remedy the situation.
4. Failure to comply with the Cooperative's deposit and guarantee requirements.

The Cooperative may also disconnect service at once and without notice where a dangerous condition exists and such disconnection shall remain in effect so long as the condition exists. Disconnection without notice may also be made when service is connected without authority by a person who has not made application for service or who has reconnected service without authority following termination of service for nonpayment. In instances of tampering with the

Cooperative's meter or equipment, bypassing same or other instances of diversion, service may be terminated immediately.

## **E. TERMINATION NOTICE:**

The Cooperative will either mail or personally deliver a written notice of termination at least ten (10) days prior to the date of disconnection. Unless a dangerous condition exists, or unless the customer requests disconnection, service shall not be disconnected on a day, or on a day immediately preceding a day, when personnel of the Cooperative are not available to the public for the purpose of making connections and reconnecting service. If mailed, the cut-off day will not fall on a holiday or weekend, but will fall on the next working day after the 10th day. The Cooperative will not issue late notices or disconnect notices to the customer earlier than the first day the bill becomes delinquent, so that a reasonable length of time is allowed to ascertain receipt of payment by mail or at the Cooperative's authorized payment agency.

If you are seriously ill or will become more seriously ill as a result of termination of service, you may have your physician call or contact the Cooperative within sixteen (16) days of the issuance of the bill concerning your condition. The physician must provide a confirmation letter to the Cooperative within twenty-six (26) days of the issuance of the bill and the Cooperative will then refrain from termination of service for sixty-three (63) days from the issuance of the bill unless a lesser period is agreed upon. If you make a request to avoid termination under this provision, you must enter into a deferred payment agreement.

## **F. SERVICE AND BILL DISPUTES:**

If you disagree with the Cooperative regarding any aspect of the Cooperative's service, you may request a supervisory review. If you make such a request, you have five (5) days to participate in the review before the Cooperative may terminate service if the dispute is one in which the issues may result in such termination, provided that notice has been given under standard disconnection procedures. The results of the supervisory review will be provided in writing to the customer within ten (10) days of the review, if requested. During the pendency of such appeal or other resolution of a dispute, but in no event more than 60 days; you may avoid termination of service by paying the average of your monthly bill for the past twelve (12) months as determined by the Cooperative.

## **G. PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS:**

As a member of the Cooperative, you have a right to request payment arrangements, in which an outstanding bill will be paid after the due date of the outstanding bill but before the due date of the next bill.

**DEFERRED PAYMENT PLAN:** If you have not been delinquent in paying your bill more than two (2) times in the last twelve (12) months and are unable to pay any or all of your bill, you are qualified for a deferred payment plan. Such plan requires that you keep all subsequent bills current and pay monthly an amount not to exceed one third (1/3) of the outstanding amount. The deferred payment plan may be made by visiting the Cooperative's business office or contacting the Cooperative by telephone. The deferred payment plan shall be signed by the customer and a copy of this signed agreement will be given to the customer. A five percent (5%) penalty will be applied when the customer is late with a scheduled payment as per the deferred payment plan. If you do not fulfill the terms of the agreement, your service may be terminated under standard termination procedures. Such breach of the agreement voids your right to a deferred payment plan or renegotiations to avoid termination. The Cooperative is not required to offer this arrangement if you have had service for less than three (3) months.

## **H. SERVICE RECONNECTION:**

If your service is interrupted for any of the reasons listed under Sec. D of the information sheet, you may re-establish service when all outstanding and delinquent bills are paid and when a deposit or other evidence of payment guarantee is provided to the Cooperative.

## **I. COOPERATIVE OFFICE AND BUSINESS HOURS:**

The Cooperative's business office is located at 128 Main in Rosebud, Texas. The office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, except holidays. The telephone number is (254) 583-7955.

If your power fails:

1. Check your fuses or circuit breakers to determine that the trouble is not in your own system.
  2. Check with your neighbors to see if they have electricity.
  3. Have your bill handy when you call the office so you can give your account number and/or meter number shown on your bill.
  4. Report an outage or emergency to the following number: (254) 583-7955 and if no answer:
  5. Persons calling long distance to report-an outage may call "collect."
  6. If the outage is the responsibility of the Cooperative, there is no trip fee charged.
- If the outage is on the customer's side of the meter, such as blown fuse or tripped breaker, etc., you will be billed for a trip fee.

## **J. METER READING:**

One way you get electric service at cost is by reading your own meter. The meter readings you send in to the Cooperative each month

enables the Cooperative to determine how much electricity you have used and how much you owe for it. The bill you receive from the Cooperative each month has a special place in which to write the numbers shown on your meter. Be sure to record the numbers exactly as they appear on your meter from left to right.

If you fail to send your meter reading to the Cooperative each month, the Cooperative will "estimate" the amount of electricity you have used.

Read your meter the day you receive your electric bill ... write the exact numbers in the space provided on the bill ... write the date read ... and return it along with your payment to the Cooperative no later than the due date indicated each month.

## **K. DEPOSIT POLICY:**

(a) Initial Deposit from Applicant: Subject to these rules, a residential applicant shall not be required to pay a deposit:

(1) if the residential applicant has been a customer of any utility for the same kind of service within the last two years and is not delinquent in payment of any such utility service account, and during the last 12 consecutive months of service did not have more than one occasion in which a bill for such utility service was paid after becoming delinquent and never had service disconnected for nonpayment; applicants are encouraged to obtain a letter of credit history from their previous utility, and utilities are encouraged to provide such information with final bills.

(2) if the residential applicant demonstrates a satisfactory credit rating by appropriate means, including, but not limited to, the production of generally acceptable credit cards, letters of credit reference, the names of credit references which may be quickly and inexpensively contacted by the utility, or ownership of substantial equity; or

(3) if the residential applicant furnishes in writing a satisfactory guarantee to secure payment of bills for the service required;

(A) unless otherwise agreed to by the guarantor, the guarantee shall be for the amount of deposit the utility would normally seek on the applicant's account. The amount of guarantee shall be clearly indicated on any documents or letters of guarantee signed by the guarantor.

(B) when the customer has paid bills for service for 12 consecutive residential billings without having service disconnected for nonpayment of bills and without having more than two occasions in which a bill was delinquent, and when the customer is not delinquent in the payment of current bills, the utility shall void and return any documents or letters of guarantee placed with the utility to the guarantor.

(b) Initial Deposit from Applicant 65 or older: All applicants for permanent residential service who are 65 years of age or older will be considered as having established credit if such applicant does not have an outstanding account balance within the utility or another utility for the same utility service which accrued within the

last two years. No cash deposit shall be required of such applicant under these conditions.

(c) Initial Deposit from Customer: An initial deposit may not be required from residential customers unless the customer has more than one occasion during the last 12 consecutive months of service in which a bill for utility service was paid after becoming delinquent or if the customer's service was disconnected for nonpayment. Such deposit may be required to be made within 10 days after issuance of written termination notice and requested deposit. In lieu of initial deposit, the customer may elect to pay the current bill by the due date of the bill, provided the customer has not exercised this option in the previous 12 months. The customer may furnish in writing a satisfactory guarantee to secure payment of bills in lieu of cash deposit.

(d) Additional Deposit: If actual billings of a commercial customer are at least twice the amount of the estimated billings after two billing periods, and a suspension notice has been issued on a bill within the previous 12-month period, a new deposit may be required to be made within 15 days after issuance of written notice of termination and requested additional deposit. If actual billings of a residential customer are at least twice the amount of the estimated billings after two billing periods, and a suspension notice has been issued on a bill within the previous 12-month period, a new deposit may be required to be made within 15 days after issuance of written notice of termination and requested additional deposit. In lieu of additional deposit, the customer may elect to pay the current bill by the due date of the bill, provided the customer has not exercised this option in the previous 12 months.

(e) Amount of Deposit: The required deposit shall not exceed an amount equivalent to one-sixth of the estimated annual billing.

(f) Deposit Interest: Each utility, which required deposits to be made by its customers, shall pay a minimum interest on such deposits at an annual rate at least equal to 3.09 compounded annually. If a refund of deposit is made within 30 days of receipt of deposit, no interest payment is required. If the utility retains the deposit more than 30 days, payment of interest shall be made retroactive to the date of deposit.

(1) Payment of the interest to the customer shall be annually if requested by the customer, or at the time the deposit is returned or credited to the customer's account.

(2) The deposit shall cease to draw interest on the date it is returned or credited to the customer's account.

(g) Refund of Deposit:

(1) If service is not connected, or after disconnection of service, the utility shall promptly and automatically refund the customer's deposit plus accrued interest or the balance, if any, in excess of the unpaid bills for service furnished. A transfer of service from one premise to another within the service area of the utility shall not be deemed a disconnection within the meaning of these sections, and no

additional deposit may be demanded unless permitted by these sections.

(2) When the customer has paid bills for service for 12 consecutive residential billings or for 24 consecutive commercial or industrial billings without having service disconnected for nonpayment of bill and without having more than two occasions in which a bill was delinquent, and when the customer is not delinquent in the payment of the current bills, the utility shall promptly and automatically refund the deposit plus accrued interest to the customer in the form of cash or credit to a customer's bill or void the guarantee. If the customer does not meet these refund criteria, the deposit and interest may be retained in accordance with subsection (b), (d), (e) and (f) of Deposit Policy.

## **L. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:**

The following governmental or social service agencies may be able to assist you if you are having trouble making your payment for electric service to the cooperative:

FALLS COUNTY: Economic Opportunities Advancement Corp. of Planning Regions XI, 500 Franklin Avenue, Waco, TX 76707, (254) 803-3751, (254) 753-0331 Ext. 218

BELL AND MILAM COUNTIES: Hill Country Community Action Association, Inc., P.O. Box 846, San Saba, TX 76877, (325) 372-5167, Ext. 232

MILAM COUNTY: Rockdale Senior Citizen Center, Rockdale, TX 76567, (512) 446-2666

ALL COUNTIES: Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs, Energy Assistance Section, P.O. Box 13941, Austin, TX 78711-3941, (512) 475-3800

## **M. NON DISCRIMINATION:**

Your Cooperative provides electric services without discrimination as to member's race, nationality, color, religion, sex, or marital status. Credit history shall be applied equally for a reasonable period of time to a spouse or former spouse who shared the service. Credit history maintained by one must be applied equally to the other without modification and without additional qualifications not required of the other.

## **N. SPECIAL SERVICES:**

1. As a special service to the deaf, a teletypewriter is provided by the Public Utility Commission of Texas. The telephone number for the teletypewriter is (512) 936-7136 TTY-FOR THE DEAF.

2. As a special service to someone on electrically operated life support equipment, the Cooperative maintains a list of these members, allowing the Cooperative to notify these members of planned electric service interruptions. To have your name added to this list, write the Cooperative a letter at P.O. Box 598, Rosebud, TX 76570, giving your name, address, telephone number, customer I.D. number, disability and a telephone number of a relative or friend the Cooperative can notify if we are unable to contact you by telephone. A letter from your physician describing your needs regarding the life support equipment would also be helpful.