



“This is monumental for us.”

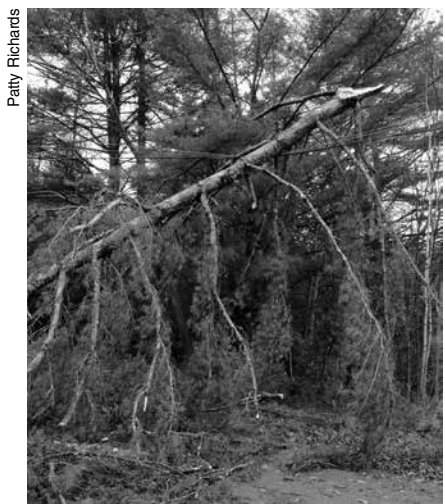
Massive, historic windstorm hits Northeast, 7,930 WEC members lose power

Damage causes hundreds of breaks in WEC lines, some members go six days without power

Forecasters knew the wind was coming. The weather report on October 29 showed high winds and rain overnight. Those who stayed up late to watch the long and exciting Game Five of the Astros-Dodgers World Series may have still been up when the wind started blowing. It grew so loud, ripping shingles from roofs, that many of those who had gone to sleep awoke. The wind howled through all of Vermont, and through all of the Northeast. The National Weather Service reported wind speeds as high as 115 miles per hour on the peak of Mount Mansfield. In the morning of October 30, Vermonters found trees snapped, property damaged, lines down, and for more than 70,000 customers, no power. 7,930 of those were WEC members.

Many storms intense enough to cause power outages are localized. Thunderstorms track a specific path. Microbursts create a lot of damage in a small area. The October 30 windstorm, on the other hand, was

“This was New England’s superstorm.”
 – Roger Hill



A tree snapped by high winds rests precariously on wires above North Fayston Road in Fayston.

so widespread that every utility in the state saw outages. The recovery effort took nearly a full week because utilities didn’t have crews to spare: throughout Vermont, and in neighboring states, line crews worked as fast and as hard as they could, for long hours, to get their own customers back online. The extensive damage “limited who we could call on for extra help,” said WEC General Manager Patty Richards. “For most of the restoration, WEC,

and all the other utilities, were on their own.”

How the storm happened

Meteorologist and WEC member Roger Hill, who waited five days for his power to return, noted that while weather models are highly accurate at tracking a storm’s path, they are less accurate at gauging how strong the storm will be. So while it was no secret a storm with heavy rain and high wind was coming, the intensity came as a surprise.

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Larry Gilbert, First Class Lineworker, works to set a new pole next to one broken by the windstorm. WEC replaced 19 broken poles in all.

For staff, a coordinated response: “It’s all hands on deck”

The morning of Monday, October 30, the heads of WEC, Green Mountain Power, and Vermont Electric Co-op—Patty Richards, Mary Powell, and Christine Hallquist—met with Governor Phil Scott and state emergency management officials. Together, the utility leaders looked at the entire state outage map. All Vermont counties were red. “That’s bad. Red means the highest number of outages,” said Richards. “We were all stunned.”

At the press conference following

the meeting, Gov. Scott described the storm’s severity and asked the public to stay away from downed lines and to check on neighbors. “Safety was our biggest concern, as we knew there were lines down in almost every town across Vermont,” said Richards. Richards told the press the storm damage was monumental. “We told everyone this would take days to get people back on line, and in fact, it took a week,” she said later.

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

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Community meeting recap: Strong turnout and great conversation October 12 in Worcester. P. 10.



While patrolling the lines, WEC employee Rick Stergas captured this mess of wires on a roadway, pinned under a tree toppled by high winds during the October 30 storm. Read more about WEC’s power restoration efforts on p. 4.

Members Write: Storm Edition

This is a small sample of the many notes WEC received from members in the storm's aftermath.

I just wanted to let you know HOW MUCH your customer service and extraordinary maintenance service is appreciated during this difficult outage time.

Every time I called WEC with an outage question—I was received with gracious, patient, informative responses. I know you must have been swamped by callers, so for the people responding to have so much patience and kindness is truly remarkable.

And, as always, WEC maintenance crews have worked WAY above and beyond to restore power to all.

Should WEC want to start a “coffee, hot drinks, and/or food” fund for those amazingly hard working folks out all hours of day and night, I would be glad to contribute.

My power was back on Thursday p.m. and I am very thankful to each and every one who made this happen.

Again, I so very much appreciate all WEC employee efforts during this power outage.

Stefanie Bernstein

There's a great article in the Washington Electric *Co-op Currents* about right of way crews keeping 1,250 miles of line cleared...BY HAND! It really puts into perspective when the power goes out what kind of long distance work these guys are putting in.

When we have major events like this week, it can be very frustrating and some times scary when the weather is cold. These hardworking crews are working night and day to get our power restored in the worst and most dangerous conditions.

My family and I want to thank all the hard working linemen, tree crews, and members of the power companies both in our region and those who came to our area to help out to get our power back. We take for granted the luxuries of life but these humbling moments remind us how quickly the switch can flip (pun intended). Thanks again to all those who worked long hours away from home and families to get our power back on!

Paul Cerminara (posted on Front Porch Forum)

I wanted to let you know that my husband and I live in the Town of Orange and had been without power since the early hours on Monday. We received a phone call from Dan Weston last night letting us know that WEC was showing that we had power. Dan asked my husband to check the outside power box, asking him to “flip the switch.” We still didn't have power, however Dan kept us on the phone while he worked with another WEC employee trying to troubleshoot the problem.

I also wanted to let you know that Dan was an absolute pleasure to work with—he definitely is customer focused, and really cared about our situation. This type of customer service, at a time where I'm sure Dan's has been working many, many additional hours, is refreshing and very much appreciated. Dan assured us that we'd regain power either “tonight” or at the latest “tomorrow morning (November 1).” After we hung up, power was restored in about 10 minutes.

We really appreciate Dan's commitment to helping WEC's members, and wanted to make you aware that Dan's act of kindness and professionalism was truly appreciated.

Kim Persons and Bob Dickson

Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson, at 224-2332.

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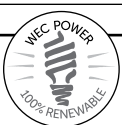


Patry Richards

Donnie Singleton, WEC Equipment Operator (front), works with Josh Leblanc from Rich's Tree Service (and a third person hidden behind Leblanc) on Zdon Road in Middlesex.

Got something to say?

Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: *Co-op Currents*.



A Letter from the President and General Manager

To our member-owners:

This Halloween felt more like trick than treat as we responded to the aftermath of severe winds that barreled through Vermont in the early morning hours on October 30. The winds were over 60 mph and brought down trees, branches, and many spans of wire, causing widespread outages across the four counties we serve.

WEC was not alone. The wind event hit all of Vermont and New England and beyond. Nearly a million and a half people lost power. This included some WEC members who were without power for several hours, and some unlucky members who were out for almost a week. At the peak, we lost power to 7,930 homes, businesses, and farms—over 70% of our members.

Losing power for any length of time heightens our awareness of the importance of electricity in our lives, and of its value. We need it for lights, refrigeration, water pumps, TV and computers. It keeps motors running and circulates the heat that keeps us warm. Our goal has long been to keep electricity reliable, clean, and affordable. When an event like this happens, everything else in our lives goes on hold until the power's back on.

In a storm of this magnitude,

WEC would normally find help from additional line crew from neighboring utilities, like municipals, GMP, and our sister co-ops Vermont Electric Co-op and New Hampshire Electric Co-op, but they were also grappling with widespread outages. Some of our outages occurred because of breaks on GMP transmission lines that feed three of our substations. Until GMP was able to restore transmission connections to those substations, it was impossible to determine what other outages were on WEC lines that fed from those substations.

No matter how well we prepare for a storm, when both WEC and all of New England are hit with winds of this velocity over such a wide region, we are left to acknowledge Mother Nature's strength and pick up the pieces once her fury subsides.

We responded accordingly. Every one of our employees was in storm on-call mode, working long days to

support to our line crew and others in the field. These crews worked 17 hour days over the week it took to restore electricity to our members.

Our respect and admiration for our employees cannot be measured, especially in times like this. And we deeply appreciate our members' understanding of what it takes to restore power after storm events of such widespread nature. It was truly all hands on deck at WEC and we all need to persevere until power is back up.

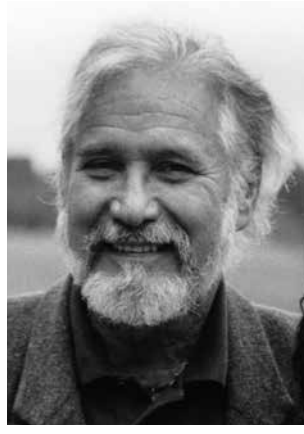
WEC will debrief over the next several weeks to find areas where we

can make improvements and enhance preparation efforts for the next major storm, which, we note, seem to be taking place more frequently.

On behalf of the WEC board and staff, we want to wish our member-owners a safe and healthy holiday season. Hopefully, without any major storms.

Barry Bernstein
President of the Board

Patty Richards
General Manager



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- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

WEC is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Important Annual Notice Regarding Herbicide Use in the Maintenance of Electric Utility Rights-of-Way

The Vermont Public Utility Commission has set forth rules under PUC 3.600 pertaining to the use of herbicides in the maintenance of electric utility rights-of-way. Each spring, herbicide applications may begin on or after April 1st. These rules afford you important rights and duties. Vermont electric utilities maintain electric line rights-of-way with several methods, including the selective use of herbicides on trees and brush. They also encourage low-growing shrubs and trees which will crowd tall-growing species and, thus, minimize the use of herbicides. Methods of herbicide applications may include stump, stem injection, basal, soil, and foliar. Only electric utility rights-of-way that have tall-growing tree species with the potential of threatening the electric utility system are treated.

If you reside on or own property in Vermont within 1000' of an electric utility right-of-way:

1. Sign up to receive written notification from your local electric utility of plans to apply herbicide on any ROW within 1000' of your property or the property where you reside. Check nearby poles for tags identifying the utility and/or pole number, complete the form below and submit it to your local electric utility by mail before February 15th, 2018 to be added to the notification list. If determined to be qualified, you will receive notification from the utility at least 30 days prior to scheduled herbicide application.
2. You are responsible to make your local electric utility aware of the location of any potentially affected water supply, and of any other environmentally sensitive area where herbicide application ought to be avoided.
3. Watch and listen for public service announcements in newspapers and radio ads noting upcoming herbicide applications.
4. Check with your local electric utility regarding the vegetation management cycle near your particular line.
5. You have the right to request, in writing, that the utility refrain from applying herbicides in the process of clearing the right-of-way, and the utility may offer alternatives such as herbicide stump treatment or herbicide stem injections.
6. You have the right to refuse, in writing, the use of herbicides whatsoever at no cost to you if the type of lines in the right-of-way are distribution lines, bringing electric service directly to individual customers.
7. You have the right to refuse, in writing, the use of herbicides whatsoever by paying a \$30 administration fee if the type of lines in the right-of-way are transmission lines or sub-transmission lines, bringing electricity to or between substations.

For more details, or to ask additional questions, please contact your local electric utility, or one of the following:

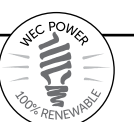
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| Washington Electric Co-op, Inc. 40 Church Street PO Box 8 East Montpelier, VT 05651 1-802-223-5245 | Agency of Agriculture Cary Giguere, Plant Industry Section 116 State St., Montpelier, VT 05602 1-802-828-6531 | Department of Public Service Consumer Affairs & Public Information 112 State St., Montpelier, VT 05620 1-800-622-4496 |
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Based on the information above, if you believe you qualify to be notified in advance of pending herbicide applications in the rights-of-way, mail the request below to your local electric company before February 15th, 2018.

| Resident/Property Owner Request to be Added to Herbicide Treatment Notification Mailing List | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Name | Town/City of Affected Property | | |
| Street Address | Home Phone Number | | |
| Town | Work Phone Number | | |
| State | Zip Code | O.K. to use work number? | Yes No (circle one) |
| Electric Utility Account Number | Best time to contact you | | |
| Affected Property: Year-Round Residence Summer Residence Commercial Property Water Supply Organic Farm Land Other (Circle all that apply) | | | |
| Line/Pole Identification: Utility Initials | Pole Numbers | | |
| Please fill out this request completely to help us determine if you qualify for herbicide treatment notification. MAIL THIS REQUEST TO YOUR LOCAL ELECTRIC UTILITY AT THE ADDRESS LISTED ABOVE BEFORE FEBRUARY 15 th , 2018 | | | |



Donnie Singleton (L) and Larry Gilbert (in bucket) setting a broken pole in Middlesex.



Windstorm

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All the meteorological models Hill consults “showed a track that would take it inland near New Jersey, but keep it very intense, with this deep area of low pressure, tracking up the Hudson Valley and up toward Montreal.” That area of low pressure draws winds from the east, and this one absorbed warm moisture from Tropical Storm Philippe over the Atlantic. “Kind of like what happened with Superstorm Sandy,” Hill explained. “This was kind of New England’s superstorm.”

Storms that bring strong easterly winds are not good for Vermont, Hill said. This one brought a high wind called a low-level jet, which ripped a perpendicular path across Vermont’s north-south mountain ranges. “That is a bad track for us, with downsloping winds and a low level jet. This low level jet was phenomenal,” said Hill.

It’s in line with the trend Hill notices as he studies the weather daily. “What

I’m seeing is an increase in more and more power outages, because our storms are stronger. That’s partly a function that the world is warming so it holds more moisture,” he said, and remnants of hurricanes and tropical storms over the ocean create larger systems of low pressure, which causes stronger winds.

Fixing broken poles is “a whole other process. It’s not just fixing the line, it’s fixing the structure that holds the line in the air.”

— Amos Turner

The wind speed threshold for tree damage is 40 miles per hour, he explained, and very few areas in the region saw wind gusts lower than that. Gusts a little higher, he added, break poles.

Line crews saw the effects of these gusts firsthand in fallen trees. First Class Lineman Kevin Lanphear said, “The direction of the wind is a big factor.” Normally, he said, winds come from the west, and trees grow accustomed to stress from that direction. “When it gusts 70 miles per hour from the southeast—things are going to knock over at that speed anyway—but since it’s different from what the trees get 99% of the time, they’re more vulnerable.”

Damage throughout the Northeast and WEC area

Power outages feel personal when it’s your line out, and your well pump doesn’t work, and the food in your chest freezer is thawing. But outages from the October windstorm were vast—from Virginia to Maine. The *Portland Press Herald* reported that two-thirds of Maine lost power. Central Maine Power Company said it was the largest number of outages in their company history. In neighboring New Hampshire, about 270,000 lost power, according to the *Union Leader*. The outage aggregator site poweroutage.us showed more than 1.4 million outages at peak.

Utilities in all New England’s northern states reported damage worse than that from each utility’s most historically damaging storm. New Hampshire and Maine utilities claimed this storm was worse than the ice storms of 1998 and 2008. On Vermont Public Radio, Patty Richards told the state, “It’s monumental for us. This is big. This is bigger than storm Damon in 2014,” the four-day winter storm that set WEC’s previous record for damages.

Infrastructure was damaged all over the state. WEC line crews faced 19 broken poles, and “that has got to be close to a record for us,” said

Construction Foreman Amos Turner. Broken poles take the longest time to repair, he explained—hauling a new pole onsite, using specialized equipment and crews to set the pole. “It’s a whole other process,” he said. “It’s not just fixing the line, it’s fixing the structure that holds the line in the air.”

In addition to broken poles, Turner said the storm caused a lot of broken trees that pinned wires down—and pointed out that when lines and poles come down, other equipment, like transformers, often get damaged as well.

On top of that, most of WEC’s lines cut through the woods, off the roadway. “The joke with us is, if you can see the line from the road, it’s probably not WEC,” Turner smiled. That means line and tree crews need to patrol the woods on foot, looking for breaks, instead of driving by in a truck. Then they need to bring in offroad equipment to fix the damage. Kevin Lanphear estimated it was about four times as fast to fix roadway lines versus offroad lines.

Issues and costs

Many WEC members recognized the hard work of line and tree crews and support staff, and sent notes

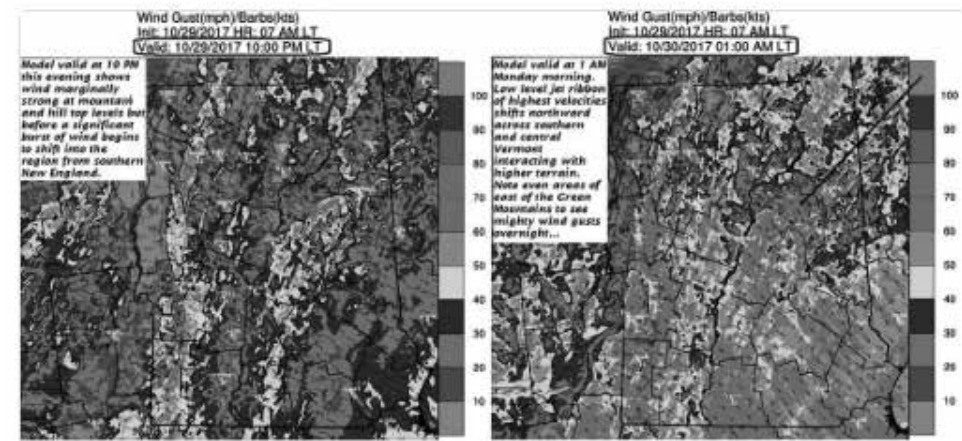
Patty Richards



Patrick Morrissey, Apprentice Lineworker. For members without power, the roar of chainsaws was a hopeful sound.

Roger R. Hill @wxeringheights · Oct 29

Blast of potentially damaging gradient wind gusts to shift into the state and adjacent areas. Shown 10 PM vs. 1 AM gusts - this is no drill.

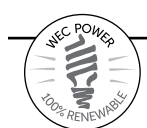


Just before the storm hit, local meteorologist Roger Hill tweeted a warning about high winds overnight.



A big spruce pinned this wire on Ducharme Road in Marshfield.

Patty Richards



of appreciation. A few of those are collected on page 2.

Others, especially those who endured nearly a week without power, were understandably frustrated. Especially frustrating, Richards noted, was when members watched WEC trucks drive by their homes—en route to fix a different break. “It can be infuriating. People want to know why they’re not stopping, when a line is down right here,” she said.

The reason is because fixing a particular break near the end of the line still wouldn’t cause the power to come on for that member. There’s a necessary order to the way breaks are repaired, and there are two factors that influence the order. The first is rooted in physics. The breaks closest to substations and on the main lines, called feeders, must be addressed before breaks farther out. In this storm, a couple of Green Mountain Power transmission lines that feed WEC substations went down, and WEC was forced to wait for GMP crews to fix those before proceeding to breaks on the lines drawing from those substations. Those wires feed smaller wires, and those feed the smallest wires.

“Think of a string of old fashioned

Christmas tree lights,” explained Richards. “If you have a couple of bulbs out, you can fix the one at the end, but it’s still not going to light up until you fix the others closer to the power source.” But when you’re watching the trucks go by—and you don’t know about the other dozen breaks in the line between your home and the substation—yep, it’s hard to be patient, she said.

The second factor is care. Utilities prioritize hospitals, schools, and other critical sites. WEC keeps a medical necessity list of vulnerable members. As soon as power can be restored to an area, crews try to prioritize these constituents to prevent as much harm or suffering as possible to people who are most at risk. But as the Member Services team cautioned, in a storm this widespread, even being on the medical necessity list is no guarantee your power will come back first, and it’s essential to have a backup plan. Read their advice on page 9.

Some have suggested that electric utilities should bury lines to make them less vulnerable to tree damage.

“Think of a string of old fashioned Christmas tree lights. If you have a couple of bulbs out, you can fix the one at the end, but it’s still not going to light up until you fix the others closer to the power source.”

— Patty Richards


On Vermont Public Radio, GMP CEO and president Mary Powell addressed the problem with burying lines. “The brutal fact is that it would be about \$10 billion,” to bury electric lines, she said, clarifying that figure was just for GMP—not for the entire state. She added that underground systems are far harder to restore after flooding, which is a real risk in a state with vivid

memories of Irene and plenty of regions susceptible to ice jams and seasonal flooding. Another way to think about the math, Richards offered, is “If WEC buries lines, everyone’s bill doubles.” WEC’s Director of Operations Dan Weston said the cost of undergrounding is 5 to 10 times more costly than building aboveground lines.

Because WEC is a not-for-profit utility, it is eligible to receive FEMA funds to help pay for damage. That’s unlike investor-owned utilities, whose storm costs are ultimately borne by ratepayers. And it’s significant, because before FEMA funds come through, WEC is facing about \$400,000 in

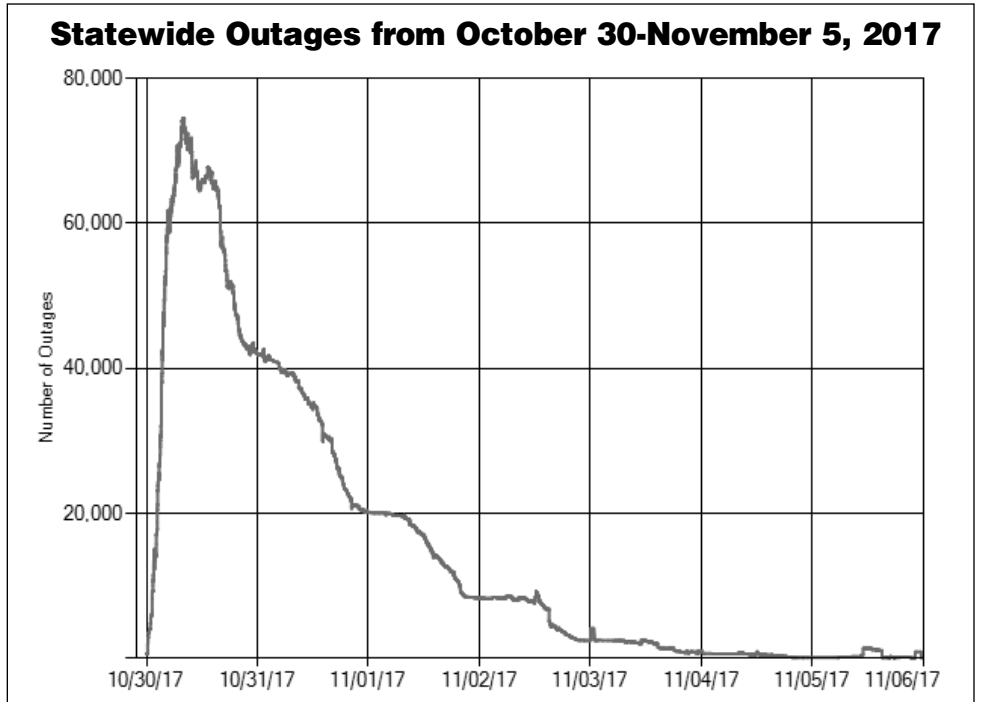
damages, said Richards.

At this writing, WEC’s finance team is not yet sure exactly how much FEMA funding will come through. FEMA funding is triggered by over a million dollars in damage statewide—this storm caused \$3.7 million in damage, the state estimates—and by the federal administration declaring the event a disaster, which has not yet happened. Then each county qualifies separately. Richards said that three of WEC’s four counties already qualified—Washington, Orange, and Orleans—and Caledonia is still to be determined. “We’ll recover roughly 75% of our costs from FEMA,” she predicted.

Two things were fortunate about the storm’s timing, Richards made sure to note. The first is that crews did not have to work in snow or ice. The second is that all staff were available to work. When the wind came through, First Class Lineworker Kyle Sands was preparing to volunteer with Hurricane Maria recovery in the U.S. Virgin Islands, due to depart November 6th. He had not yet left when the windstorm hit here, and he worked nonstop all week. After one day of rest, he flew to the Caribbean where, at this writing, he is once again helping to restore power to people. 



Pole setting is specialized work and an arduous process. Clockwise from upper left: Larry Gilbert; First Class Lineworker Kyle Sands, who left to volunteer with recovery efforts in the Virgin Islands after a week of nonstop storm cleanup at home; Rich’s Tree Crew workers (L-R) Ron Rich, Jeff Millington, and Josh Leblanc.



This chart from VTOutages.org shows how many Vermont households were without power over the week following the storm.



A Coordinated Response

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Everyone at WEC knew this meant there would be no rest until the damage was fixed. Crews would work nonstop. Member Services and dispatchers would transmit information, and all other staff would drop everything to support their colleagues.

Cooking for a crowd

For WEC Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson, the challenge of the storm was feeding people. Up to 40 people at a time. For 19 consecutive meals. “I got to know all the people at Shaw’s,” she said, about her daily trips to the grocery store. “They’d say, ‘There’s the lady who buys all our rolls!’”

When everyone on staff is working all hours, it takes a team to tend to some of their basic needs. The Old Brick Church, next door to WEC headquarters in East Montpelier, welcomed Johnson and her team to use their kitchen and space to prepare and serve food all week. Johnson described the week’s routine: The crews meet at the warehouse to get outage assignments and stock trucks for the day’s work at 5:30 a.m., she said. Then, “they come in at 6 a.m. ready for breakfast. They take a bag lunch, work all day, and they come back at 10:00 p.m. for supper. Then they go home and sleep a little bit. Then they come back in and do it all over again. They do this until everybody is back on.” For this storm, that took seven days.

Hungry crews included WEC’s 12 full time lineworkers, 15 tree cutters hired by WEC to clear right of ways, and 10 field staff. First Class Lineworker Amos Turner added, “Other field crews who aren’t linemen come out and help,” including Dan Weston, Director of Engineering and Operation; Brent Lilley, Operations and Construction Services Manager; Mike Myers, Right of Way Management Coordinator; and Rick Stergas, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist, as well as engineers, mechanics, and other technical operations employees. “Everybody’s out trying to help—it’s all hands on deck,” Turner said.

Later in the week, as Hardwick Electric and GMP were able to peel off six lineworkers to help WEC, mealtime included these crews as well. Finally, engineers, dispatchers, Member Services Representatives, and others in the office were also working long hours without stopping, Johnson said, so they always made extra food to bring back.

Johnson hired Sarah Bishop from the Plainfield Hardware Deli and Albert Sabatini from Goddard College’s foodservice to help cook delicious, healthy comfort food, like spaghetti and meatballs and chicken and potato salad. The crews got a hot breakfast daily. On Saturday night, WEC treated the crews to a prime rib dinner catered by Sambel’s.

This required lots of logistics. Johnson’s team helping cook, buy

food, and prepare lunches included WEC finance staff Cheryl Willette, Teia Greenslit, Linda Nelson, and Sy Daubenspeck, and community volunteers Shelia James and Lisé Couture, whose husband, System Maintenance Technician Dan Couture, was working on the lines.

WEC’s board also came to serve hungry crews: Don Douglas and his wife Charo Douglas, Roy Folsom, Roger Fox and his wife Linda Fox, Jean Hamilton, Steve Knowlton, and Annie Reed all took one or more shifts. Former board member Dan Wing, along with his wife Dina DuBois and friend Ginny Barlow, also helped. Board president Barry Bernstein, recovering from back surgery, wasn’t able to work a shift in person, but “Barry was here in spirit by phone,” Johnson said, and his friends Jeremy Weiss and former board members Michael Duane and Cort Richardson volunteered.

Having board and community members pitch in made a big difference to the guys in the field. Turner explained line crew shifts were 16-17 hours on for 7 days straight. “You know when you’re done, you’re going to get something to eat and then you’re going to get some sleep,” he said. So, he continued, at the beginning and end of those shifts at the Old Brick Church, “when we get there, the Board of Directors is serving us. It’s kind of cool, to have your bosses serving you.”

Richards said every time she was out checking damage and meeting with crews, field staff asked her, “What’s for dinner tonight?” As a marathoner and ultra runner herself, Richards understands the need to feed the body. “If you aren’t taking in the calories during grueling work, your body shuts down. In our rural service area, you’re not guaranteed a convenient place to grab lunch. We simply can’t afford to not feed our crews during storm restoration,” she said. The staff meals serve two purposes: it’s fuel necessary to get the work done, and it shows care

At right: Note the dangling wires on the left side of the pole. Below: Saturated ground, big pines, and high winds are a bad combination for poles and wires.

and respect to the people doing the hard, dangerous work. “The guys don’t say a lot when they eat, but they truly look forward to the meal and appreciate the effort to keep them fed. Dawn, the finance office, volunteers, everyone on the team did an amazing job keeping tasty, healthy meals coming,” said Richards.

Taking your calls

In WEC headquarters, the four members of the Member Services team arrived at 7:30 a.m. and wrapped up at 6 p.m. each day during the week. All four were on the phone nonstop the entire time. “It was a long week. We all had sore ears,” said Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden. Answering phones during a storm event is emotionally draining—the representatives can’t help but absorb the worries, fears, and frustrations of members who call in. As stress builds for members enduring a week-long outage and desperate for updates, that

sometimes spills over into emotion. And sometimes people don’t understand “that even though technology has advanced so much, we’re still dealing with poles and lines and trees. We can’t just push a button and restore power,” she said. But overall, every team member said they keep as positive, cheerful, and helpful as they can possibly be. And most calls, by far, are from members who are understanding, they said.

Occasionally, Member Services passed a call along to Richards. “I know people really want two things when they call: to tell us they are out of power, and to find out when they will be back on,” she said. “Even when the answer isn’t what you want to hear, people appreciate the facts. If they are going to be out for multiple days, we tell them. There were just so many breaks there was no way we could fix everything overnight.”

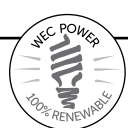
continued on page 12



Bradley Nubrown



Rick Stergas



Bradley Nutbrown



WEC crews go high to take down this very tall, very dangerous tree over the lines.

Below: Dan Couture, System Maintenance Technician, on Snow Hill Road in East Montpelier. Crews saw scenes like this throughout WEC's service area: wires pinned to the ground by fallen limbs.

Patty Richards



Tim Newcomb

Windstorm: An Index

Peak total windstorm outages, by household:
1,400,000+

Peak number of New England outages:
1,273,679

Peak number of Vermont outages:
73,000

Percentage of Vermonters who lost power:
30% (estimate)

Peak number of WEC outages:
7,930

Percentage of WEC membership who lost power:
70%

Number of people affected:
19,054

Number of trees that fell on WEC lines:
420

Number of line breaks that needed repair:
227

Number of poles broken:
19

Total member hours out:
316,465

Average outage, in hours:
16.6

Longest outage, in days:
6.5

Number of calls taken by WEC's Member Service Representatives:
4,994

Average wait time, in seconds:
47

Number of calls taken by CRC,
WEC's after-hours and overflow answering service:
4,992

Average wait time, in seconds:
41

Number of meals planned by Dawn Johnson and team:
19

Number of meals prepared:
600 (estimate)

Total number of hours line, tree, and field crews
worked on WEC lines Oct. 30-Nov. 5:
4,403

Number of hours worked, per crew member:
119

Typical full-time hourly work week:
40

Estimated cost of WEC storm damage:
\$400,000

Estimated percentage of WEC cost covered by FEMA:
75%

Estimated percentage of WEC cost covered by members:
25%

For investor-owned utilities, percentage of storm damage cost
covered by ratepayers:
100%



Timeline of the Storm's Aftermath

October 30

At 8:30 a.m., WEC clocked 7,930 of its 10,800 members were without power. 37 of the 41 towns that make up WEC's service area lost power. Over the morning WEC discovered about 50 line breaks—in time, that number would reach 227.

Outages occurred on all kinds of line—from Green Mountain Power transmission lines feeding WEC substations, to breaks at the ends of distribution lines that reach just one or two households. By the afternoon of October 30, GMP repaired a transmission line that fed the Maple Corner and East Montpelier substations, and that alone turned on the lights for hundreds of WEC members.

October 31

On Halloween, 3,900 WEC members were still without power. Crews continued working around the clock—one overnight, five by day. By this point, Hardwick Electric was able to offer help. Crews repaired broken poles and repaired several lines connecting to substations in Tunbridge and Williamstown and Barre (the Jackson Corner sub) as well as phase two feeder lines. Each of these lines reached several hundred WEC members.

Over the course of the day, the Northfield and Fayston feeder lines broke again due to tree damage, but were repaired by nightfall.

November 1

2,400 WEC members were still without power, and crews faced 96 remaining line breaks. Many of these breaks were deep in the woods, with lines still susceptible to falling trees.

By nightfall, 1,100 members were still without power, and the state opened emergency shelters.

November 2

At the end of the day 700 members were still without power. 73 line breaks remained.

By this point, crews completed damage assessments on all breaks in the line. Throughout WEC territory, crews continued to discover gnarly and dangerous conditions: broken poles, wires dangling or on the ground, and wires and equipment pinned under piles of fallen trees and limbs.

November 3

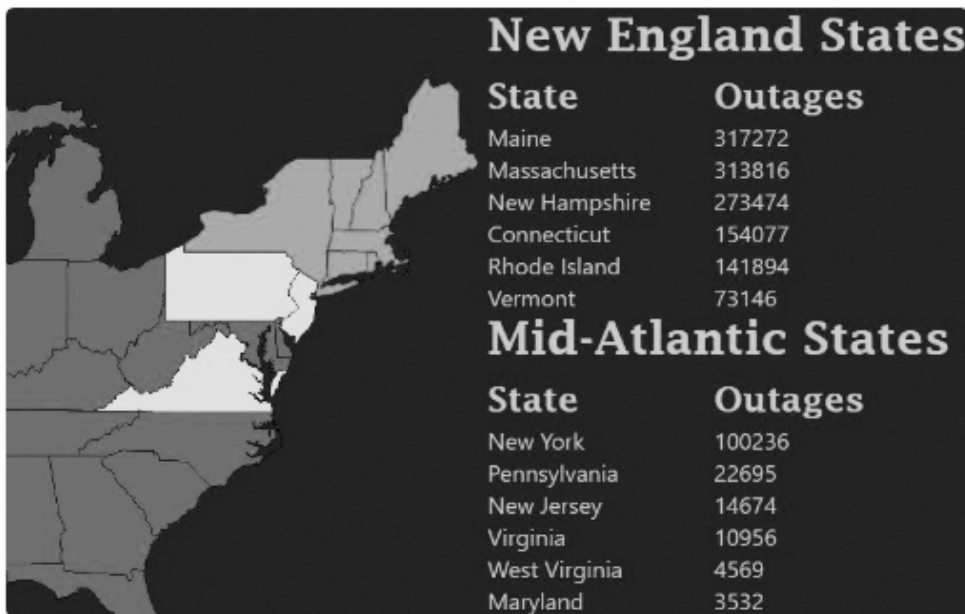
By midday, crews had moved on to repair all the individual breaks on small feeder lines—lines that serve 5 or fewer member households. Meanwhile, trees damaged by the storm continued to knock out small lines, including some that had already been repaired. By the end of the day, 297 members remained without power.

November 4 and 5

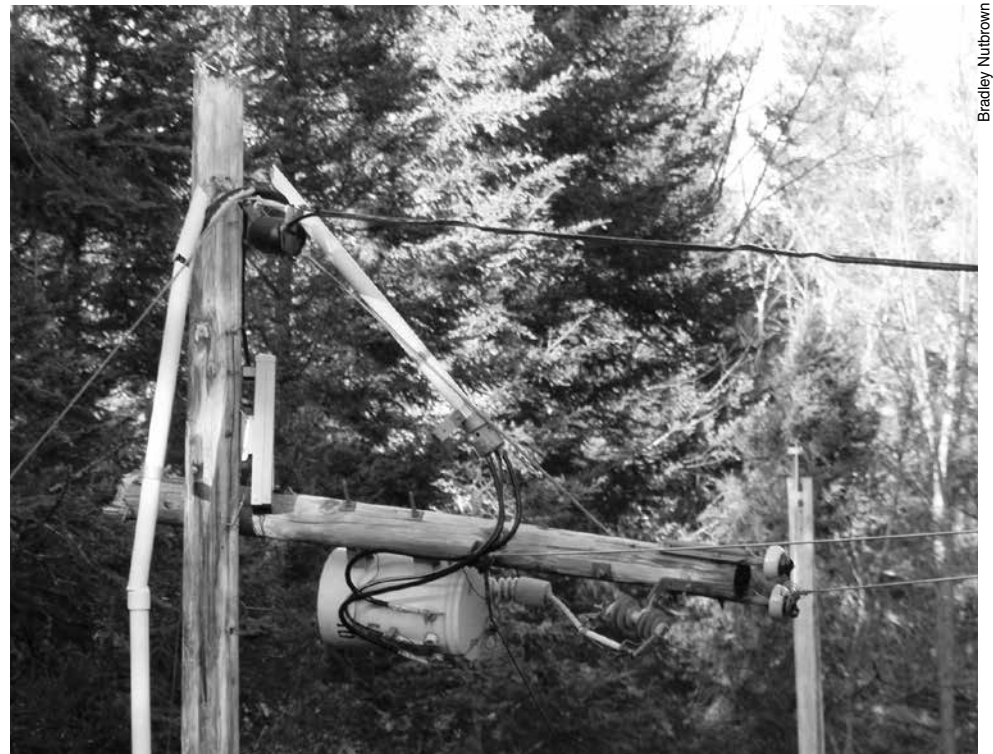
By Saturday, 36 members remained without power. By Sunday, November 5, all known outages were repaired, and all WEC members were back online.

If you still have computer power during an outage, check WEC's website for updates: washingtonelectric.coop/current-outage-status

poweroutage.us @PowerOutage_us · Oct 30
1.4 Million+ #PowerOutages on the #EastCoast due to a #Severe #Weather system. poweroutage.us



If this was in color, you'd be able to see all of New England and New York in red in this outage map tweeted by poweroutage.us.



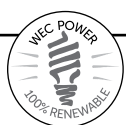
Bradley Nutbrown

A transformer dangles from a broken pole. When a pole snaps or wires come down, other equipment usually gets damaged in the process.



At least half a dozen trees or limbs fell on this span of wire in Middlesex.

Patty Richards



Preparing for the Next Big Storm

During outages, WEC's Member Services Representatives (MSRs) often get calls from people concerned about their elderly parents living alone, from people with disabled or ill family members who require special services, from home-based businesses for whom no power means no income. "It's heartbreaking for us," said Susan Golden, WEC's Member Services Supervisor. "We hear it, but there's nothing we can do to fix it. The thing we need to emphasize is, people need to be prepared."

MSRs take members' calls and feed outage information to Utility Field Technicians. These engineers, along with the IT team, act as dispatchers to line crews, to get power on as quickly and efficiently as possible. Here's what they all want you to know:

1. Have a plan

"If you have elderly folks in your family who can't be without power, you do need a plan," said Golden. MSR Beth Ouellette said, "If you need your heat, you need to think about where you can go."

Even if you or your loved ones are on WEC's medical necessity list, you may still have to wait for your power during an outage with this much damage. Golden explained that when every region of WEC's service area is impacted, and there are people on the medical necessity list throughout the service area, they have no way to prioritize whose medical needs are the most important. Beyond that, crews had hundreds of breaks to fix—not just a couple—and that kept people waiting. For people with medical needs, it's

especially important to have a plan.

Prepare for whatever your family might need: neighbors' and doctors' phone numbers, a spare key, a reliable backup power system. The page "What to do when the power goes out," on WEC's website has a lot of information to get you started: see link below.

"It's heartbreaking for us. The thing we need to emphasize is, people need to be prepared."

— Susan Golden

2. Stock what you need

"If you're a small business, you should have a UPS or a backup generator," said Ouellette. Similarly, she said, people with medical issues should keep reserves of what they may need, like oxygen tanks. More good advice is on WEC's website.

3. Keep in touch

Members' calls are critical. "We need calls to generate the outage [report]," said Brian Wilkin, Utility Field Technician. Member calls generate the search for the break in the line, he said. The computer locates every break using the closest meter location identified by the caller. Fellow Utility Field Technician Steve Hart said that if you know exactly where the break is—where a tree took down a line, for example—give as specific a location as possible for dispatchers to give the line crew.

The Member Services team added that some people on a line see their power come back on—and then it goes out again. Call us, they say. "We encourage people to call back if it goes out, because it may be a situation where we've shut the line down to do further repairs—but it may not be, and we think we've restored it but we haven't," said Golden.

MSR Gordon Matheson wanted to dispel any idea that utilities withhold details from people calling in. "Whatever information we have, we relay," he said. MSR Elaine Gonier added, "People want a timeline, and there's no way we can give them that. Even if we're working in your area, there's no way we can promise you'll be restored at that time."

Why is this? Golden explained, "We just don't know what they're finding, because they're busy fixing it." That's another reason, she said, to call in outages with as much specificity as possible: "The fewer details we have to hunt for, the quicker the problem gets fixed."

4. Stay safe

Power line voltage is deadly. Never

touch or drive over a power line, or attempt to move trees that threaten lines. Gonier took a call from a member who asked if it was possible to personally remove a tree from a line. "I said, 'You will get electrocuted and die,'" she recalled. It's that serious. There were reports of two animals electrocuted after touching a live wire, but fortunately, no humans.

And sometimes, even with plans in place, people still need support during outages. MSRs tell members to call 211 for any needs—from finding a place to charge their phone to locating an overnight shelter.

For more information:

washingtonelectric.coop/energy-services-safety/what-to-do-if-the-power-goes-out



A cautionary image courtesy of WEC Director of Products and Services Bill Powell. This molten space rock was created when a downed power line touched driveway gravel. Imagine what that same voltage could do to you. Never go near a downed wire!



Right of Way Management Coordinator Mike Myers surveys the scene. WEC member and Currents designer Tim Newcomb snapped this shot when he stepped outside his Worcester home to see lines down and familiar faces repairing the damage.

Reflecting On the New Reality

At the 2017 Community Meeting in Worcester, conversation about energy use and cost fairness on the cusp of Vermont's renewable future. And that gingerbread!

Before rate design, before net metering, it was the Post Office Café's gingerbread that had the crowd talking at WEC's annual Community Meeting, held this year at the Worcester Town Hall on October 12. "It has a wonderful flavor," raved Richard DeCosta, who lives in town and is also the town hall's janitor.

The Post Office Café provided turkey and cheese sandwiches, soup, salad, and slabs of their famous gingerbread for dinner before the meeting. It's the homemade factor that makes their treats so good. Leslie Sabo, who owns the café with Betsy Gledding, said, "We bake our own bread. We do everything ourselves." She later added that the café uses as much food grown and raised by their neighbors as possible—produce from Good Heart Farmstead, mushrooms from Peaceful Harvest Mushrooms, maple syrup from Rugged Ridge Forest—all Worcester businesses. Post Office Café, which is celebrating five years in business, is well known to locals as the place to get coffee, breakfast, lunch, pastries, and even takeout meals from the cooler.

WEC covers the costs for Community Meeting dinners and makes the event a fundraiser for the host town—proceeds usually support the local school in some way, sending kids on a trip or funding a project. This year, WEC allocated a \$5 donation per plate and Sabo helped WEC connect with Worcester's Doty Memorial School. School cooks Katie O'Rourke and Neha Shukla happily accepted a gift of \$350 to their Local Foods Account. The money helped them buy cider, meat, and produce from local farms to feed



Leslie Sabo (R), co-owner of the Post Office Cafe in Worcester, and Rhianna Weiss provided a delicious dinner for the Community Meeting. These sandwiches were made with turkey from Stonewood Farms in Orwell, cheese from sister co-op Cabot, and fixings from Worcester's Good Heart Farmstead.

Worcester's kids.

After dinner, General Manager Patty Richards gave the full house of Co-op members some other topics to chew on, including asking for volunteers for "listening groups" WEC assembled to tackle rate redesign. She also made a pitch for donations to WEC's Community Fund. All contributions to the fund come from members who earmark their capital credit refunds

or add a few extra dollars per electric bill. All funds are reinvested back into the community, given to "small, local nonprofits that don't have the ability to do major fundraising," Richards said.

At this, member Michele Hill pointed out that the very building that hosted the meeting, the Worcester Town Hall, benefited from a gift from the Community Fund.

Dan Weston, WEC Engineering

and Operations Director, was next to speak. He reported that at the Coventry landfill methane generation plant, the new SRS, or Siloxane Removal System, was working well, scrubbing 99% of all siloxane from captured methane gas.

In the poles and wires arena, this year was a tough one for outages, he told the assembled crowd, though Worcester and surrounding towns enjoyed good reliability. Normally at this time of year, he said, WEC saw about 64,000 "member hours" of outages, a "member hour" being one hour of outage per household affected. This year, by October 12, WEC had already seen 140,000 member hours out. "We've had issues with some big pine trees falling right through our three-phase feeders," he said. But, he said, WEC has continued to improve reliability every year since 2005. He ended with a reminder to always call in downed or danger trees or downed wires—but to never, ever touch them.

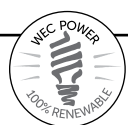
At this point the floor opened for questions. A question about a chemical smell on a recently treated pole led Weston to give a quick lesson on the preservative pentachlorophenol, or penta for short. While WEC uses no

"There are a lot of people who would love to be carbon neutral, but don't have the capital to buy a heat pump. Conservation, to me, still is a very important thing."

— Bodo Carey



Member Bodo Carey (L) reflects on the importance of conservation. To Carey's left is member Allen Gilbert, also quoted in this article.



herbicides in its right of ways, it does use poles treated with penta, which Weston said does not migrate, and degrades when exposed to light. Even so, the presence of penta is why WEC sites poles 200 feet from any potable water source (the state minimum is 50 feet). If poles on your property need to be treated again, he asked, please alert the crew if there is a well nearby. Penta is in widespread use, he explained, because an untreated pole would degrade within a decade, while treated poles last up to 70 years.

Member Allen Gilbert asked what benefits WEC sees from new smart meters installed at members' homes. Weston explained that the meters help determine the locations of outages—helpful especially given WEC's rural territory. Someone needs to call in the outage to “wake up the computer,” he said, and then line crews can look at meter reports to tell which line was affected and locate the outage site.

Bill Powell, Director of Products and Services, added the digital meters benefit members too, saying, “You don't need to wait for your bill to see your energy usage.” You can even plug a dollar or kilowatt-hour budget into an app, he said, that will alert you when you are close to your limit. Richards also said meters have helped WEC and members diagnose high use issues—identifying time periods and appliances that require more electricity than homeowners may have realized.

There was a brief tangent to discuss the call service WEC uses. “Used to be,” said Weston, “if 80 of you called in with an outage, 79 would get a busy signal.” Now those calls are diverted to the CRC, or Cooperative Response Center—which is a co-op itself, and works expressly to provide call support to electric co-op customers. It's an enormous improvement and relief knowing that members are able to reach someone with news of an outage, said Richards.

Gilbert followed up to ask about moving data over electric lines, and asked if WEC is considering double purposing utility lines to carry both electricity and high speed Internet. The board has discussed it and may look into it more, Richards said, but WEC would need to hire consultants and currently lacks the technology—fiber optic lines—to pursue it in scale. High speed Internet is “a risky business industry to jump into,” she said. Gilbert pointed out that many rural residents lack cellular service and high speed Internet, and in this age, that's kind of like being without electricity. When it comes to high speed Internet, “I don't know how we're going to get it without nonprofit electric services picking up the ball,” he mused.



Michele Hill reminds fellow Co-op members that the Worcester Town Hall, site of the 2017 Community Meeting, was a beneficiary of WEC's Community Fund.

From here, the conversation moved to rate redesign as it relates to the state's goal of achieving 90% renewable power in all forms—vehicular and heating power as well as electric power. When a member asked what utilities can reasonably do about this, since electric vehicles are not yet practical for

“Even if you're net metering, you're still using the grid 99% of the time.”

— Patty Richards

most Vermonters, Richards reminded the group that EV technology is rapidly improving. Range is improving, cost is coming down, more models are entering the market, and there are strong incentives like subsidies and rebates, she said.

Member Betsy Hill put it this way: “The idea was, we used to conserve. Now we're encouraged to use?” It did sound like a reversal, Richards agreed, but people need to look at the whole picture. “Look at your total footprint. You're taking your gas bill and moving it over to the already-renewable electric column,” she suggested. Hill asked if there was any concern, as households and businesses began using electricity for appliances that had previously been powered by fossil fuels, that the grid wouldn't be able to keep up with increased electric demand. Renewable generation or sources of electricity aren't the problem, assured Richards. “We now have pockets with too much generation and not enough load,” she

said.

But switching from gas appliances to electric requires investment, and conservation-minded folks tend to use appliances and cars for as long as they will run. Member Bodo Carey said thoughtfully, “It's tricky. I bought a propane dryer because my electric bill was high. I think you need to be careful and go slow because there are a lot of people who would love to be carbon neutral, but don't have the capital to buy a heat pump. Conservation, to me, still is a very important thing.”

Board President Barry Bernstein appreciated this, saying conservation was still very important to him, too. “For those of us who decided to save, we did the right thing,” he said. Now, he went on, we need to look once again at all the ways we use and save energy.

Betsy Allen and Plainfield Energy Coordinator Bob Atchison turned the conversation to net metering. Allen used WEC's member incentive to buy a new electric Nissan LEAF, and wondered if there was an incentive to get a Level 2, or 240 volt, charger installed (not yet). She is also considering installing solar to offset her electric bill—which is increasing, especially with an electric car now plugged in—and wondered how going from WEC's power mix to net metering affects members and the utility.

In a single year, the number of new

net metering installations in WEC territory is going to double the amount installed over the previous 15 years, Richards said. Net metering members invest significant dollars at their home to install renewable systems (mostly solar), and receive credits to offset those costs over time from the co-op and its members. But home based solar systems don't operate off the grid. They need the wires and poles and infrastructure, just like any other member. “Even if you're net metering,

you're still using the grid 99% of the time,” Richards said, pointing out it's infrequent that a member's energy generation and use match exactly. In hours home generation is short, the member uses the grid to serve their home's remaining needs. In hours home generation is excess, power is moved onto the grid and purchased by others. Based on the state's new rules for net metering and other legislative decisions, she explained, WEC is forced to rethink how it charges for electric service.

Allen asked, “Is that something you'd consider in the base charge? I would want to be fair,” highlighting a possible leverage point that could address the two big issues of net metering and rate redesign. Richards agreed fairness was the key issue—fairness for those who invest in solar and fairness for ratepayers who don't or can't, and good faith in WEC's investment in Coventry, Wrightsville, and a clean portfolio on behalf of every member. New England's larger-scale generation plants are also likely to be scaled back when personal solar goes online—the nature of net metering projects means they're prioritized as power sources, while more dispatchable fossil fuel sources of electricity are treated as fallback. Environmentally speaking, this is great when solar use is high enough to turn off a natural gas power plant.

“We want to see net metering out there. We just want it at a price point that's fair for everyone. If you don't want to do solar, we have already purchased 100% renewable power for you,” said Richards.

As that thought resonated, the meeting closed, and members went back for one more piece of gingerbread for the road—“This tastes just like my grandmother's,” one was overheard to say, which anyone knows is the highest compliment for a baked good. Afterward, board member Steve Knowlton expressed appreciation for the insightful and thorough conversation. “People were really well informed. What do we do with the Co-op that reflects the new reality?” he contemplated. 🐼



Post Office Cafe's almost-world-famous gingerbread.

A Coordinated Response

continued from page 6

Connecting the calls to the trucks

Down the hall in headquarters, Utility Field Technicians Steve Hart and Brian Wilkin, Information Database Technician Sandy Gendron, and Manager of Information Services Kevin Stevens worked dispatch. All week, Stevens stayed overnight, dispatching to the overnight line crew in the field. Hart said that usually just one works as a dispatcher—but in a big storm, they divide up the tasks, connecting outage reports to locations as reliably as they can for the crews in the field.

On the morning of October 30, it took a while to get the full picture of the damage. “You have to wait until the dust settles a little bit,” explained Wilkin. “There’s a lot of stuff coming at you at once, and you’re just trying to get people steered the most productive way, but it doesn’t always work that way.” He said there’s a tipping point: dispatchers try to get as many members back on at one time as possible, and then to move crews as efficiently and productively as possible—“you’re trying to clean up an area,” one at a time, he put it.

“We send to what affects the most number of people, or what’s the most

significant outage. And that changes. Sometimes we have to reroute,” said Hart. The dispatchers communicated constantly with Member Services and crews in the field to make these decisions. This kind of strategic work continued all week. Meanwhile, Weston and Lilley made sure everyone in the Operations area covered key functions and met critical needs each day. “You need strong technical leaders during a storm event like this,” said Richards. “Weston and Lilley are seasoned professionals in operations.” Weston made sure the restoration process proceeded as quickly as possible, and Lilley assured crews were fully stocked with supplies and targeted the right locations. Weston also kept an eye on critical functions, emergency conditions, and dangerous situations like live downed wires. Whenever a call came through reporting a live wire on the ground—these were still being discovered Wednesday—crews redirected to secure the dangerous situation. While work progressed, Weston relayed information to the Member Services team to get updated information out to members.

“Everyone did their job, but more intensely, and with extra care and goodwill toward each other. It’s no accident everyone came through unscathed and in good spirits.”

— General Manager
Patty Richards

The last group the dispatchers communicated with was WEC’s overflow and after-hours answering service, the Cooperative Response Center (CRC), a co-op that serves electric co-ops with member care and dispatch support. CRC, which has offices in Minnesota, Tennessee, and Texas, beefed up staff to support its member co-ops

throughout the Northeast and posted WEC updates on its answering service, so WEC members in the queue could still hear updates. This seemed to work: WEC’s CRC liaison said, “In the first few days, half the members calling in listened to the recorded message, and then hung up,” indicating they got the information they needed, and didn’t need to speak with anyone. WEC’s Member Services team confirmed this, saying when they picked up members sometimes told them they were just calling for the update in the queue message. That’s good feedback—WEC will continue posting recorded updates during storm events.

In the front office (or out in the field)

Over the week, Patty Richards kept the website outage blog up to date for members while taking calls from distressed members, answering emails, working with emergency management and state officials, advocating to open shelters, and keeping in touch with the press. Along with Weston and Lilley, Richards ate with the lineworkers and field crews each night, and checked on all staff each day.

“It’s important to keep an eye on everyone, especially as we get into multiple days. Employees get tired, and that’s when injuries are most likely,” she said. “But take someone



Apprentice Lineworker Nick LeBlanc inspects a downed line on Hampshire Hill Road in Worcester.

like Rick Stergas, who’s our Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist. He was out patrolling the lines, and he also made sure everyone in the field was safe.” She went on to say, “Everyone was like that: they did their job, but more intensely, and with extra care and goodwill toward each other. It’s no accident everyone came through unscathed and in good spirits.”

Clearly proud of her team, Richards added, “Believe me when I say we put everything we had into restoration. Many WEC employees didn’t see their families for days, and missed Halloween with their little ones. Some worked all day to get power restored for members, and then went home at night to a house without power. We all put our lives on hold until power is restored to the very last member.”

Board Candidate and Bylaws Petition Deadline Announcement

In 2018, Washington Electric Co-op will host its 79th Annual Membership Meeting. The meeting will be held **Wednesday, May 2**, at WEC’s Operations Center in East Montpelier.

Considering running for a seat on WEC’s board of directors? It’s time to start planning. Every year, elections are held for three of WEC’s nine board seats. In 2018, incumbents Roger Fox, Stephen Knowlton, and Richard Rubin are all expected to seek reelection. Any member of the Co-op is eligible to run.

Contact WEC Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson at 802-224-2332 to request a candidate’s packet that contains the materials necessary to run for a seat on the board. The deadline to submit all materials, including a petition signed by a minimum of 25 WEC members, is **Friday, February 9**. In March, *Co-op Currents* begins Board election coverage, with candidate introductions, areas of interest and expertise, and policy priorities.

Members of the Co-op have the right to petition for changes to the Co-op’s bylaws. The bylaws are available on washingtonelectric.coop, or you may contact WEC for a hard copy. To petition for a change, you are required to collect signatures in support from a minimum of 50 WEC members. Petitions for bylaws changes are due **Wednesday, February 7**.

Look for more information about board elections and bylaws in the January 2018 issue of *Co-op Currents*.



Loops of wire hang dangerously from this distribution line.

Rick Stergas

Tim Newcomb

