

ALONG THE LINES



DEDICATED TO SAFELY PROVIDING RELIABLE SERVICE TO OUR MEMBERS.

AUGUST 2026
VOL.19, NO. 8

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AUGUST CALENDAR



August is National Back to School Month

Aug 3-9: National Stop on Red Week
Back-to-School Safety

Aug 4: Coast Guard Day

Aug 11: National 811 Day - Safe Digging

NEXT MONTH:

"Along the Lines" will be delivered to you
inside of **Illinois Country Living Magazine!**

HOLIDAYS OBSERVED:

New Year's Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day,
Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day,
Thanksgiving Day, the day following Thanksgiving,
Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Eve.



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UNDERSTANDING YOUR ELECTRIC BILL

MJM PRESIDENT/CEO, JOE HEYEN



August is typically one of the warmest months of the year, and that means air conditioners across our community are working overtime to keep homes comfortable. During periods of extreme heat, many members may see an increase in their electric bill and wonder what factors contribute to the cost of electricity.

At MJM, we believe understanding your electric bill is an important part of being an informed member. While the total amount due may seem like a single number, it actually reflects several different costs associated with delivering reliable electricity to your home or business.

The largest factor is often the amount of energy you use. Electricity is measured in kilowatt-hours (kWh), and the more energy your household consumes, the higher your bill will be. During the summer, air conditioning is typically the largest driver of increased energy use. When temperatures climb into the 90s or higher, our cooling systems run longer and more frequently, consuming significantly more electricity than they do during milder weather.

Another major factor is the cost of generating or purchasing electricity. Like many distribution cooperatives, MJM purchases power from Wabash Valley Power Alliance. The cost of producing electricity fluctuates based on fuel prices, including natural gas, coal and other energy resources used to generate power. Changes in wholesale power costs influence the price of electricity delivered to members.

Transmission costs also play a role. Before electricity reaches your home, it must travel across a network of high-voltage transmission lines that connect power plants to local distribution systems. Transmission equipment requires ongoing maintenance and upgrades to ensure reliability, especially as electricity demand continues to grow.

Closer to home, MJM maintains the local electric distribution system—utility poles, power lines, transformers, substations and other essential



equipment that safely delivers power to members.

Maintaining this equipment is covered through the monthly service delivery charge. This is a flat monthly fee all members pay, regardless of how much electricity they use. This fixed fee ensures all members pay a fair share of the basic, operational costs required to keep the power grid reliable and ready to serve your home or business. Whether a member uses a little electricity or a lot, we must maintain infrastructure and have crews, equipment and resources available to provide electricity around the clock.

Summer temperatures can also influence costs in less obvious ways. When the demand for electricity is high across a region, wholesale power prices can increase. Utilities and grid operators must ensure enough generation is available to meet peak demand, and those costs can be reflected throughout the electric system.

The good news is that simple steps to lower energy use can make a meaningful difference. Setting your thermostat a few degrees higher when you're away, replacing dirty HVAC filters, using ceiling fans, sealing air leaks and avoiding the use of major appliances during the hottest parts of the day can help reduce energy consumption, lower your bill and reduce strain on the local grid during peak demand.

MJM's mission is to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity while being transparent about the factors that impact energy costs. We understand every dollar matters, and we are committed to making smart investments that keep the lights on and support the communities we serve.

If you ever have questions about your electric bill or co-op programs designed to help you save, please reach out. We're here to help you make informed decisions that work for your household.

ALONGTHELINES

by MJM Electric Cooperative
www.mjmec.coop

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OFFICE HOURS:

Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m.- 4:00 p.m.

HOW TO REPORT AN OUTAGE:

Call **217-707-6156** or use your **SmartHub app**.

- When you report an outage, give your **name** and **location number**.
- Before calling, check your fuses or circuit breakers.
- Check with your neighbors. Call to report hazardous conditions.

Please do not report outages on Facebook/Social Media.

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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AI Tools & Uses

Potential for improved service and reliability.

MEMBER TRADING POST

FOR SALE: A 1982 IH 5088 tractor, new paint, new interior, approximately 6,000 hours, good tires, new front tires, all gauges work, runs good, \$17,500. Call: 618-535-0275 or 618-535-0276

FOR SALE: Split Seasoned Firewood, pickup truck bed loads \$120 or call for delivery price. Call Leroy @ 618-972-4658

FOR SALE: 12' Aluminum V-bottom boat and trailer (1950's) \$200, 7HP Troy-Bilt Tiller \$300, 2-ton floor jack \$75, 8" Craftsman table saw \$50, Deer cart \$40, 2 old 20" steel wheels \$20 each. Coffeen area. 618-541-9949

FOR SALE: A 9N Ford Tractor, \$500. Bush Hog Finisher, \$200. Heavy Duty Forks, \$100. Heavy Duty 6ft Blade, \$250. Engine lift, \$200. All parts fit a 3pt hitch. Call: 217-742-4095

WANTED: Electric Typewriter with correction feature. Please text: 217-825-9272

To list your free ad, email info@mjmec.coop, call 217-707-6156, or mail the ad to MJM Electric Cooperative, P.O. Box 80, Carlinville, IL 62626.

Each ad will run for one month. Some restriction may apply.
No Ads in May edition/Annual Meeting Booklet.

Deadline for next month's issue is **August 10th** and/or until space is filled; first come, first serve basis. Member Trading Post is printed only if space allows.

The Modern Grid

Nearly every facet of the electric power industry has undergone significant change over the past decade. What was once a centralized, “one-way” system is rapidly evolving into a dynamic and interconnected network. The modern grid is characterized by a diverse generation mix, an explosion of technological advances in things like automation, sensors and data analytics, and platforms that allow consumers to better understand and control their energy use.

● Local Generation

Local solar, storage and wind help shave peaks and improve reliability.

● Power Generation

Advanced gas turbines, hybrid renewable plants and system digitalization are improving uptime and reliability.

Transmission Lines

Composite-core conductors boost line capacity and reduce sag.

Step-Down Transformer

Smart distribution transformers enable remote monitoring and predictive maintenance.

Distribution Lines

Advanced materials and composite cores improve strength and reduce thermal expansion.

Step-Up Transformer

Smart and solid-state step-up transformers improve visibility, functionality and reliability.

Transmission Substation

Digital substation gear allows better monitoring and automation.

.....Distribution Transformers

High-efficiency cores and digitally enabled transformers reduce load loss and improve resilience.

...Meter

Advanced meters allow real-time data transmission and two-way communication.

Consumer and Commercial Use

Distributed energy resources and Internet of Things devices allow users to better manage energy use.

Breaker Box

Smart panels enable real-time circuit-level monitoring and remote control.

....Wiring

Structured wiring combines power and data cables to support smart home automation.

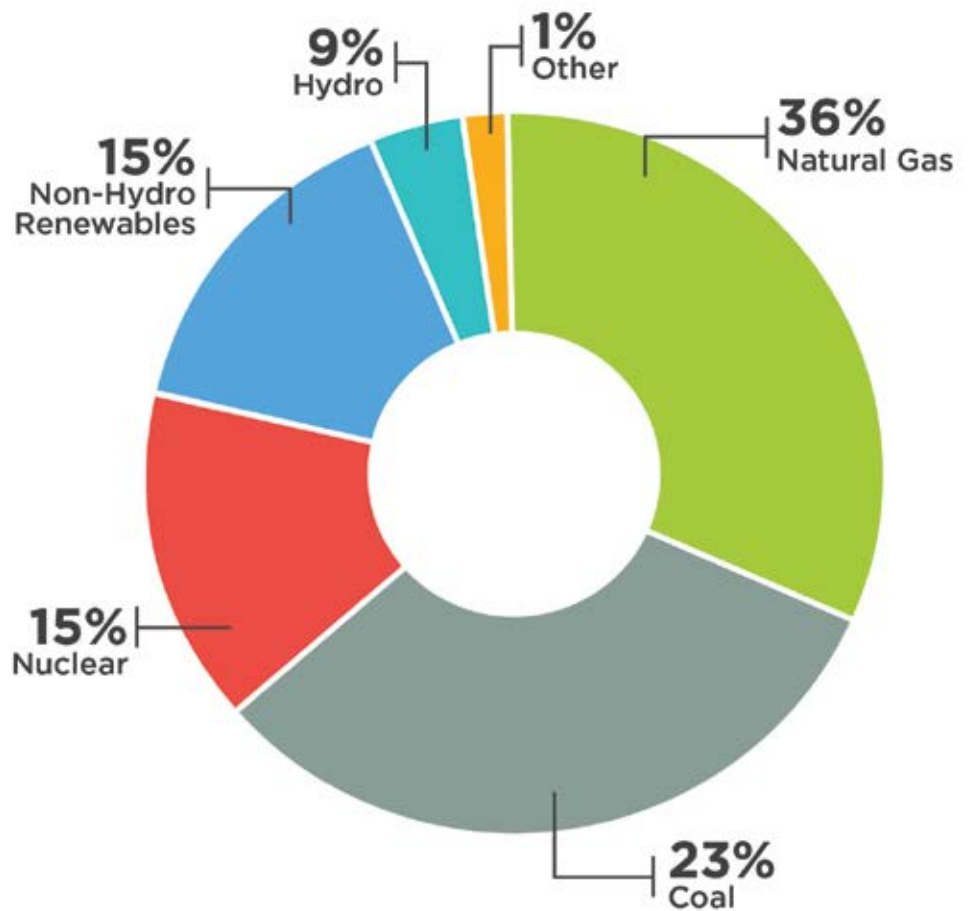


Co-op Energy Sources

Nationally, electric cooperatives use a variety of fuels to power consumer-members' homes and businesses.

This diverse fuel mix supplies co-op members with the safe, reliable and affordable power they depend on.

Source: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (2024 data)



HOW ELECTRICITY GETS TO YOU



step 1

Generation

Electricity is generated from various sources.



step 2

Step-Up Transformer

Voltage is increased to push the electricity over long distances.



step 3

Transmission Power Lines

Lines carry electricity over long distances.



step 4

Transmission Substation

Voltage is lowered so electricity can travel across the local system.



step 5

Distribution Substation

Voltage is lowered further for safe distribution.



step 6

Distribution Power Lines

Electricity travels across these lines in your community.



step 7

Final Stop

A transformer reduces voltage a final time, and electricity is sent to your home.



EXPLORING AI'S POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVED SERVICE AND RELIABILITY:

by Chris Franzen, MJM's IT Administrator



Like it or not, artificial intelligence seems inescapable. Even a quick Google search produces an AI-generated smorgasbord of results, rather than a simple list of links. AI is even shaping conversations about the future of energy.

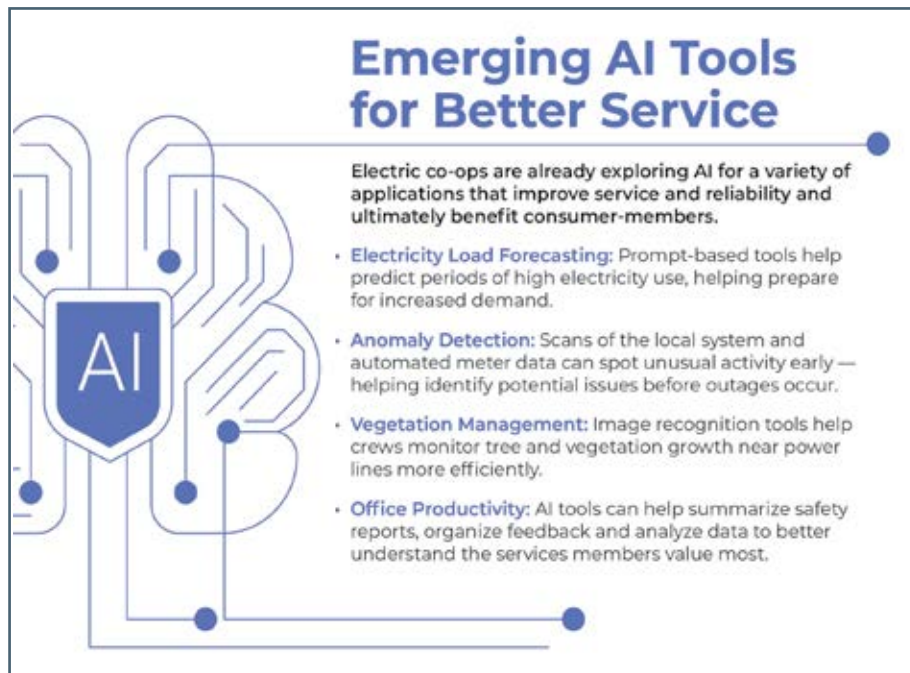
While news headlines often focus on the rapid growth of AI, electric cooperatives are taking a measured approach to understanding how these tools might help improve service for the local communities they serve.

For MJM, our goal is not to adopt AI technology simply because it's new. Instead, any tool or innovation must provide a clear benefit to our members, whether that's improving power reliability, increasing operational efficiency, or helping our team make better-informed decisions. As we explore AI tools, we are doing so cautiously, evaluating where it can add value while maintaining a strong focus on member needs, privacy, and system reliability.

One area where AI shows promise is electricity load forecasting. Electric demand changes throughout the day and fluctuates significantly during periods of extreme weather. Advanced forecasting tools can analyze historical data, weather patterns, and additional factors to help predict when electricity use is likely to increase. Better forecasts allow us to prepare for higher demand, manage resources more effectively and support reliable service during peak periods.

AI tools are also being used to identify potential problems along the local grid before they lead to power outages. By analyzing information from automated meters and other equipment across the electric system, AI-powered tools can detect unusual patterns or anomalies that might otherwise go unnoticed. These early warnings could help our crews investigate issues sooner, potentially reducing the likelihood or duration of outages.

Maintaining power lines is another critical area where AI technology may offer benefits. Trees and overgrown vegetation are one of the leading causes of power outages. Many electric utilities, including co-ops, are



exploring image recognition tools that can help monitor vegetation growth near power lines more efficiently. Rather than replacing the expertise of our field crews, these tools can help identify parts of the system that need attention, allowing crews to prioritize work areas and make the best use of their time.

Beyond the electric system itself, AI could also improve day-to-day operations. For example, AI tools can assist office employees by summarizing lengthy reports, organizing member feedback, and analyzing large amounts of data. These types of tools could help our team spend less time on repetitive administrative tasks and more time focusing on members and addressing our community's energy needs.

Even with these potential benefits, we recognize that AI is not a cure-all. Human oversight remains essential, and decisions that affect our members will never rely solely on automated systems.

As AI tools evolve, MJM will continue exploring their potential. But as with any new technology, adoption will be guided by a simple principle: if an AI tool helps improve reliability, efficiency, or services for our members, it's worth considering. If it doesn't, we will continue exploring solutions that do.



MAKING THEIR MARK

Local student represents MJM in D.C.

Students representing electric and telephone co-ops across the state recently returned home following Youth Tour, a tradition spanning decades that sends students to Washington, D.C., for an unforgettable weeklong trip.

This year, 49 students sponsored by 25 Illinois electric and telephone cooperatives took part in the 2026 Youth Tour, held June 15-22, to visit the nation's capital for an immersive experience designed to educate and inspire the next generation of cooperative and civic leaders.

MJM sponsored a student from Carlinville, **Thekla Cooper**, who joined more than 2,000 students representing 44 states for the annual event.

"Electric and telephone cooperatives across the state are investing in the next generation through Youth Tour," said Brooke Gross, member services manager and facilitator of youth programs at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. "It gives students a chance to see our nation's history and government up close. Just as importantly, it helps them discover their own potential as leaders."

Central to the Youth Tour experience is the formation of a mock student-run cooperative called Chip 'n' Pop Co-op. Students selected the co-op's board of directors. The board later interviewed and selected a co-op manager. Throughout the week, the co-op handled snack sales, decision-making and budgeting – giving participants a hands-on look at how cooperatives operate. All students were members of the co-op.

"Being part of this co-op helps students understand what makes a cooperative different," said Gross. "It's all about working together and making decisions that serve everyone – not just one person or company."

Over the course of the week, students visited historic landmarks, including Gettysburg, Arlington National Cemetery and the U.S. Capitol, where they had the opportunity to meet U.S. Senator Dick Durbin. They also strolled the National Mall and explored the Smithsonian museums.

Midweek, students took part in the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Youth Day, where they joined hundreds of other teens from across the country to hear from national leaders and learn how to use their voices back home.

In addition, Corn Belt Energy Corporation's Colton Leonard was selected to represent Illinois on the national Youth Leadership Council (YLC). Those interested in becoming Illinois' YLC representative filled out an application, and five were selected to be interviewed for the position. He will represent the state at national and state meetings and events in the year ahead.

"It's so awesome that the co-ops are able to do this for us all," Leonard said. "Everyone comes from so many different perspectives, and getting to meet other individuals is just so empowering."

The week concluded with a farewell dinner and dance, and by the time students returned home on June 22, many said they felt changed by the experience.

"These students arrive in Washington, D.C., not knowing what to expect," said Eric Cooper, MJM Communications and Member Service Coordinator. "By the end of the trip, they've built friendships, expanded their perspectives and gained a better understanding of how they can make a difference in their communities."

High school students (Sophomores and Juniors) who live within the service area of MJM are eligible to participate in the annual program. To learn more about Youth Tour, go to youthtour.coop or facebook.com/ILYouthTour.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

TIP OF THE MONTH

August heat can put your air conditioner to the test, making it a great time to check your system's air filter. A dirty, clogged filter restricts airflow, forcing your cooling system to work harder than necessary to keep your home comfortable. That extra strain can reduce efficiency, increase energy use and contribute to unnecessary wear and tear on equipment. Inspect your filter monthly during periods of heavy air conditioner use and replace it if it appears dirty. A clean filter supports efficient operation and can even enhance indoor air quality—helping you stay cool and comfortable during the hottest days of summer.

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS



One of the best ways to protect yourself from online scams is by using strong passwords. While many people focus on complexity—adding symbols, numbers and capital letters—password length is equally important. A longer password or passphrase is generally harder for cybercriminals to crack than a short, complex one. Consider creating a memorable phrase made up of several unrelated words, and avoid using personal information like birthdays or pet names. Use a unique password for each account and enable multi-factor authentication when possible. Taking these simple steps can help keep your personal information and online accounts secure.

Source: CISA

