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Okanogan County Electric Co-op

May 2019 Newsletter

OCEC Implements FireWise Plan to Reduce Fire Risks

Recently the Methow Valley has experienced a "new normal" of longer, dryer, more dangerous fire seasons. OCEC is taking proactive actions to lower the risk of trees outside the required clear zones and easements of our overhead lines creating ignition sources. These actions are based on similar programs California utilities developed in response to recent fires in their areas.

OCEC has an ongoing right-of-way maintenance program to manage vegetation posing a threat to power lines. OCEC is augmenting this program by bringing in an outside forester to survey the lines and the trees outside of the easements and develop a FireWise plan. OCEC also relies on members to notify us of large branches or hazard trees that could potentially fall through the lines on windy days. If you encounter these situations, please report them so we can check them out.

In addition to vegetation management, OCEC has taken the extra step to minimize the risk of fire during red flag conditions by turning off reclosers. A recloser is an automatic high-voltage electric switch that operates much like a circuit breaker in your home. When a household breaker trips, it will remain off until it is manually reset. A recloser will test the electric line by automatically closing to see if the problem has been removed. If the problem was

only temporary, the recloser will stay closed and power will remain on. This operation is sometimes seen as a "blink" at your home. To mitigate the risk of fire, OCEC will place the reclosers on "non-reclose" so when there is a possible problem, the breaker will operate and the line will be de-energized until OCEC crews can manually inspect the line for problems. Once the line is manually inspected and it is all-clear, the line will be re-energized. This will possibly create longer, more frequent outages. Also, certain remote, forested areas will have their reclosers turned off starting in June.

One of the fire mitigation techniques employed in California is "Public Safety Power Shutoffs". These are used in California during red-flag conditions when high winds are forecasted. OCEC is studying the possibility of also using this as a last resort when high winds are forecasted during red flag conditions. This would involve proactively de-energizing portions of circuits during these extreme conditions. OCEC is working with the outside forester on possible protocols, conditions and locations of these possible proactive outages.

Taking these proactive steps during red-flag conditions may cause more frequent and longer outages but we hope that our members will understand the benefits of reduced risk outweigh the increase in possible outages.

OCEC Board of Directors:

Sara Carlberg (scarlberg@ocec.coop) | John Kirner (jkirner@ocec.coop) | Chris Legler (clegler@ocec.coop) | Michael Murray (mmurray@ocec.coop)
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Annual Meeting Update

The 2019 OCEC Annual Meeting was held on April 15th. Some of the highlights include:

- Vice President Sara Carlberg opened the meeting. This was the 80th OCEC Annual Meeting and the 20th anniversary of OCEI, the propane company.
- Treasurer Alan Watson reviewed the finances.
- John Kirner and Chris Legler were elected to a full three-year Board term. Michael Murray was elected to complete the last two years of a three-year term.
- Operations Manager Glenn Huber reviewed 2018 accomplishments in the Operations department.
- Propane Manager Tracy McCabe reviewed propane operations for 2018 and presented two safety films on propane.
- Office Manager/CFO Lynn Northcott discussed the Revolving Loan fund, capital credits and the upcoming revamp of the website.
- GM David Gottula discussed the new OCEC FireWise program.
- As always, pie and ice cream were served by the American Legion Auxiliary Post #120 and enjoyed by members.

OCEI Hires New Employee



OCEI is excited to welcome Kelly Brennan to our propane team as our new Billing Clerk! Kelly has lived in the Valley since 2002 and now resides in Twisp with her husband Luke and two sons.

Road Clean-Up

Thursday April 18th OCEC and OCEI staff participated in our semi-annual road cleanup. Twice a year employees don safety vests and work gloves to cleanup the roadside along the West Chewuch.

Pictured left to right:

OCEI Propane Manager Tracy McCabe, Jesse Potvin, Steven Konrad, Tony Faulkner, Kelly Brennan, and General Manager David Gottula.

