

Between the Lines

Customer Newsletter Winter 2019 BentonPUD.org

Dedicated Benton PUD employees keep your lights on

This winter is one we will remember. What often gets overlooked are the significant efforts made by Benton PUD employees to ensure the power stays on in our community, even under the most extreme conditions.

Snow, wind, and frigid temperatures whipped across the state in mid-February. Schools closed. Roads were treacherous. Businesses operated with minimal staff. And our crews were out in the middle of it. Not only were they taking care of outages caused by tree limbs falling on lines, cars sliding into transformers or power poles, and ice buildup on equipment, they also assisted first responders. Performing work safely, along with ensuring the safety of the public, was at the top of their minds.

In February, two Benton PUD linemen partnered with a Benton REA crew to assist Benton County Sheriff deputies and the Washington State Patrol to rescue motorists stranded in snow drifts along the Paterson Highway. Conditions were so difficult the roads had been closed. The two utility crews used snow crawlers designed to navigate through heavy snow where snow plows could not get through. Working late into the night, they retrieved a family of four, a husband and wife, and several hunters who were stranded in their cars for many hours. The snow was so deep that each of the snow crawlers became stuck in snow drifts requiring help from the second crawler to be pulled out of the drift.

During that same weekend, another line crew was asked to respond to a call about a damaged transmission pole near Paterson. Interstate 82 was closed due to significant snow fall and high winds, so the crew needed to coordinate with the Department of Transportation to use the interstate. Use of the roadway was granted, the crew successfully traveled many miles through heavy snowfall to inspect the pole, and then rerouted power so customers did not experience an outage.

A couple of weekends later, a crew responded to a power outage affecting communications equipment on the top of Rattlesnake Mountain. Given that the equipment could operate with backup power for only a limited period, a crew started up the mountain with a snow crawler which broke down half-way to the top. A Benton REA crew responded to a request for help, but their crawler also broke down in the deep snow. Both crews had to hike down the mountain in frigid temperatures and high winds – at night. Crews went up the next day on snow mobiles to retrieve the vehicles and restore power.

Many other Benton PUD employees worked all hours and under difficult conditions in support of our mission. Warehouse workers, automotive mechanics and maintenance personnel worked to keep the parts flowing, the trucks running, and facilities and parking lots open – and safe.

Not very often do our customers experience an outage, but when they do, there are dedicated people behind the scenes taking care of the problem. It's with pride – and thanks - that I share these stories.

Chad Bartram, Benton PUD General Manager



Benton REA and Benton PUD crews worked together to get through unplowed roads and drifting snow to reach stranded motorists during a February snow storm.

Joe Garner and Shawn Hiebert, Benton PUD linemen, used the Polaris side-by-side often during the snow storms that plagued the region this winter.



For more information  BentonPUD.org or call Customer Service 509.582.2175



You can count on us!

Extreme weather impacts your bill

The extreme cold in February caused customer usage to be up substantially from normal levels at Benton PUD and utilities across the region. This resulted in large increases in customer bills as compared to the previous couple of months and prior years.

"If a customer has a question regarding the increase in their bill or needs extra time to pay, we encourage them to call us or contact us through our website," said Paula Ball, Director of Customer Programs and Services. "We can discuss payment options, such as payment arrangements or the budget payment plan which levelizes monthly payments over the year and avoids spikes with extreme temperatures."

For December and January, average customer bills were down about 5-15% from what they typically would have been. Temperatures in December were about 5°F warmer than normal and January was 2°F warmer than normal.

Temperatures plummeted around February 4 and have remained consistently colder. Average daily temperatures in February and early March were between 10° to 20° F below normal.

Because the cold spell has lasted many weeks, the higher usage may affect one or more bills a customer receives. Bills issued in the last week of February are showing average increases in the range of 20-25% or higher over bills issued in January. Bills issued in the next week or two could be even higher.

Each customer is different and may experience higher or lower increases depending on specific circumstances such as heating source. During cold weather, furnaces work longer which accounts for nearly two-thirds of an average home's usage. In addition, people tend to be home more in inclement weather, which means more electricity is used for lighting, electronics, appliances and heating water.

We encourage customers to use Benton PUD's SmartHub® which offers the ability to monitor usage on an hourly, daily or monthly basis and track trends over time.

Ways to save energy...and money

- Use less hot water. Encourage family members to help lower usage by taking shorter showers. Only run full loads in the dishwasher and clothes washer.
- Turn off lights, TVs and other electronics when not using them. Unplug chargers and other electronics when not in use.
- Don't turn up the heat just because you are cold. If you lowered the temperature on your thermostat while you were gone, turn it back to the temperature you normally keep it and not higher. The house will warm up at the same speed.
- Turn ventilating fans off as soon as they have done the job. Fans pull warm air out of the house.
- Clear snow and debris from around your heat pump. Change the filter in your furnace as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Drip cold water through pipes to prevent them from freezing.

Many convenient ways to pay your bill

Benton PUD offers several easy and convenient ways to pay your bill including: Smarthub, payment kiosks located at our offices, or via our automated Pay by Phone system. Payments made through these self-service payment options are applied to accounts in real time.



"Immediate Service Restore" now available

If your account has been disconnected for non-payment, you can now use our self-service payment options to get reconnected. The amount due will be available through the payment option you choose. When your account is paid in full, power will be restored immediately if a remote reconnect meter is installed at your location. Thanks to Benton PUD's advanced metering system, more than 90% of the time meters are reconnected remotely rather than having to dispatch a crew to restore service.

This is the first step to provide prepaid services, a new payment option that will be offered in the coming year. Our prepaid service program will allow customers to pay for electric service in advance, avoid fees and monitor their usage more closely.

It is always a good practice to turn off ovens and burners on stoves, and make sure there are no flammable materials near or on heat sources. When your power goes out, this will ensure a safe environment when service is restored.

Benton PUD expands low income discounts to Veterans and Active Military

Income-qualified active military and veterans are now eligible for a discount on their electric bill. Customers can receive a 10%, 15% or a 25% discount based on their income.



The new discount aligns with the existing discount programs offered by Benton PUD to low income senior and disabled customers.

"We are pleased to offer the discount to our military families," said Chad Bartram, General Manager. "We appreciate their service to our country."

To qualify for the discount customers must provide proof they are currently serving in the military or previously served and were discharged with an honorable or general (under honorable conditions) discharge. Income verification is also required. Verification of military status and income will be performed by the Benton County Department of Human Services located at 7102 W Okanogan Place in Kennewick.

Applications for each discount are available online at BentonPUD.org or by contacting Customer Service at (509) 582-2175 in Kennewick.

Q&A

Q: Have you heard of our Landlord Agreement?

A: An "Agreement" is a convenient way for you to request continuous service at your rental property when your tenants move. The Agreement authorizes Benton PUD to start service in your name instead of disconnecting power between tenants, making it much easier to prepare the unit for the next tenant. Landlords will be notified when a tenant is moving and stops service. Without a signed Agreement, Benton PUD will disconnect between tenants if there is a gap in service, and will require your authorization before service can be started at your property for the new tenant. Having a signed Agreement in place allows us to provide you and your tenants quicker response time to requests for service.

To request an Agreement, please call Customer Service at (509) 582-2175 or go to our website at BentonPUD.org

Where Does Your Power Come From

Coal	0.8%	✱ Wind	6.6%
✱ Hydro	82.2%	✱ Other	1.0%
Natural Gas	1.4%	✱ indicates carbon free	
✱ Nuclear	8.0%		

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