



*Big Country Electric
Cooperative, Inc.*

MEMBERGRAM

December 2017

Our offices will be closed Friday, December 22 and Monday and Tuesday, December 25 and 26 for Christmas. We will also be closed Monday, January 1, for New Year's Day. Phones will be answered and crews will be standing by to respond to any outages. We wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Please travel and celebrate safely.

Big Country Electric Cooperative Urges Consumers to Beware of Scam Targeting Utility Customers

Big Country Electric Cooperative (BCEC) received notice from a member who was recently contacted by someone who fraudulently identified themselves as an employee of Big Country Electric Cooperative, claiming that the member's account was past due and would be disconnected if not paid immediately.

This is the work of a scam that has occurred in many locations nationwide. We urge you to be vigilant and protective of your personal information: Do not give out personal information and be sure that you use a secure Internet connection and close out apps and websites completely once you have completed business transactions.

Please know that anytime BCEC contacts members:

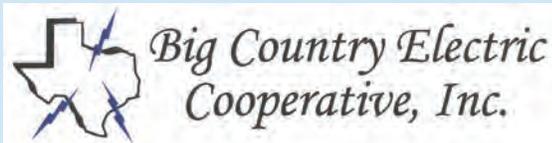
- Our office phone numbers are local and will display on your Caller ID when BCEC contacts you. Some of our employees may call from cell phones when working in the field away from the office, but this will be limited to when they may be doing work near you and will not be related to billing or financial transactions for your BCEC account.
- Employees of Big Country Electric Cooperative will identify themselves by name as employees of Big Country Electric Cooperative, not as "your electric company". Example: "This is _____ with Big Country Electric..."
- BCEC adheres to the most stringent data security practices to protect our members' information. We will NOT ask you for personal information such as bank account, social security numbers, PIN numbers, birth dates, or any other sensitive information. We will only ask for limited identifying information for verification purposes on a call that is initiated by the member. Our billing employees can only see very limited personal information.
- We will NOT ask you to wire money, to use or send a prepaid money card.
- Most calls to members are made during business hours. Some automated payment reminder calls may occur after hours, but will show BCEC's local number.
- Our payment reminder calls do not demand immediate payment, but state that we have an important message about the account asking you to contact the cooperative by a specific time and date.
- We do not schedule disconnects for delinquent accounts after our regular business hours.

If any contact claiming to be BCEC seems suspicious or inappropriate, or if you would like to verify the validity of any communications from BCEC, please contact our offices at (325) 776-2244.

If you have been the victim of such a scam, please contact your local law enforcement and BCEC.

Big Country Electric Cooperative will alert law enforcement to any instances of misrepresentation and fraud.





Monday - Thursday 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Friday 7:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Call Toll Free: 1-888-662-2232

Roby: (325) 776-2244 Stamford: (325) 773-3684

Snyder (325) 573-3161

www.bigcountry.coop

Please call to report all power outages! For outage and safety tips, visit www.bigcountry.coop and click on the Outages icon.

We're mobile!

Access your BCEC account anytime, from anywhere!

www.bigcountry.coop

Click on the Smart Hub icon.

Pay your bill, request service and more!



You can also download the SmartHub app from the App Store or Google play for free!



Call 811 at least 2 working days before you dig. Visit www.texas811.org for more information.

Rural Development Assistance Available Through BCEC

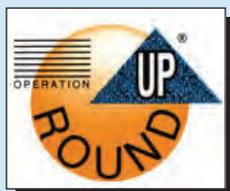
Big Country Electric Cooperative, Inc. has a limited amount of funds available for low-interest loans to qualified applicants to stimulate rural development. Applicant does not have to be a member of Big Country Electric Cooperative. Please contact Sarah McLen at smclen@bigcountry.coop for details.



BCEC is an Equal Opportunity Lender

Agricultural Tax Exemptions - In order to claim an exemption from Texas sales and use taxes on electricity and other items used in agricultural and timber operations, you are required to provide us with a registration number on Texas Agriculture Sales and Use Tax Exemption Certification Form 01-924. All water wells should be exempt if used for irrigation or watering livestock. The Texas Comptroller's Office issues the registration number and those wanting to claim the exemption must fill out an application. Registration numbers must be renewed every four years. Applicants can request a paper application to mail in by calling 1-800-252-5555 or download a copy from the comptroller's website, www.getreadytexas.org. The generic exemption certificate, Form 01-339, cannot be used to claim the agricultural exemption. Accounts that do not have the new required form on file will be subject to taxation.

Commercial Tax Exemption Records - A completed and signed exemption form is required for each commercial tax exempt account. Accounts that do not have current exemptions on file will be changed to taxable accounts. Any refunds for taxes must be claimed from the State of Texas. Thank you for your help.



For complete information about our Operation Round Up program or to opt out of participation, visit our website and click on the Operation Round Up icon.

Looking Back on 2

This year has flown by! Your staff at BCEC has been busy. Here's a horizon for us in 2018.

Inside the Office

Our accounting department saw the retirement of two key positions, which created the opportunity to reorganize job descriptions to improve efficiency. The transition has been a wonderful advance for the co-op, improving transparency of financial information and communication between departments. In October 2017, we presented mid-year financial information to you to keep you better informed about your cooperative. Our strategic planning and budget processes were streamlined, leading to an enhanced, more comprehensive budget planning process. In 2018, a couple of key goals are: financial forecasting to ensure the long-term health of BCEC, and to continue to keep you updated on the co-op's financial and operational status.

You asked for the ability to complete all membership forms online and we delivered! This will hopefully alleviate inconvenient trips for you, as well as cumbersome faxing or emailing documents back and forth. We are also researching the possibility of accepting payment of membership and other fees during the same process and will keep you updated.

BCEC will begin offering prepaid metering in 2018. Prepaid metering is as simple as it sounds: consumers pay for electricity before it is used, then use the electricity until the credit expires. Prepaid metering accounts will stay informed of their balance using our SmartHub app, which is accessible on your mobile device or computer. This will be an available option for all residential accounts, but will be beneficial to members whose accounts have been disconnected for non-payment. This will allow them to reconnect without having to make a large deposit. Prepaid metering will also be an attractive option for new members who would like to avoid paying deposits. Prepaid metering protects your co-op from incurring debt due to unpaid accounts. We plan to have this available mid-year and will publish more information soon.

We are improving functions of our software and plan to offer online chat in 2018. Applying these new technologies allows us to serve you better and with more flexibility.

Training

Two first class linemen completed the BCEC Journeyman Lineman Program, a rigorous program with onsite/offsite training as well as on-the-job training. We implemented this program in 2016; The goal is to grow our workforce in skill, knowledge and above all safety. We have seen our linemen flourish and are seeing the benefits this year as our linemen advance through the program. Links have been created between this training with South Plains College and Wayland Baptist University for Associate and Bachelor degrees, respectively.

Training programs for our billing/customer service representatives and staking technicians are currently under development and expected to be implemented in 2018.

2017, Ahead to 2018

Look at some noteworthy accomplishments for 2017, and plans on the

Operations and Engineering

Maintaining a strong electric system is one of our top priorities. We have budgeted to proactively rebuild over six miles of line in various locations across our system in 2018, to shorten spans in some cases and overall improve structural integrity of our system, reducing chances for outages to occur. We will continue our aggressive preventive maintenance program, which has continually proven to be a prudent investment on your behalf. As a part of this program, poles are routinely inspected and replaced if necessary, reducing and likely preventing outages.

We are happy to report that our AMI (Advanced Metering Infrastructure, otherwise known as Automated Metering), consistently and successfully reads over 99%, which is outstanding! This means that we only manually read meters in a few isolated instances, which reduces overhead expenses. Our on-site, fully-functional meter shop can test and repair meters, resulting in considerable savings for the co-op. We will soon be adding a relay test shop and adding more downline reclosers to the SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) system, which allows us to remotely monitor our electric grid.

In 2018, we will continue testing and repairing meters and system maintenance to keep costs down and quality of service high.

In Our Communities

We strive to increase our community presence in 2018. One way we do that is by continuing to offer safety demos for schools and as many other groups as possible. We discuss safety aspects beyond 'don't put things in an electric socket' - such as how to safely exit a vehicle if you contact downed lines in a collision. Electrical safety demonstrations for first responders and all county-related agencies are in the works as well. We will happily customize a demonstration to meet your needs. Please let us know if we can do this for you!

In three years, our Operation Round Up program has collected over \$167,400 which has been donated to charitable organizations and families with demonstrated financial need locally. You have been our partner in helping: train firefighters, support food pantries, Meals on Wheels and senior citizens' centers, after-school tutoring programs, emergency medical services, child protective services, and a variety of other groups that provide essential community services. Thank you for your part in this effort.

2018 is our 80th anniversary!

Stay tuned – it will be a year to celebrate!

THANK YOU for being a member and for allowing us to serve you.!

Longtime Stamford Lineman Roland Gonzales Retires

After 35 years, Roland Gonzales retired in late October, trading his hard hat and hooks to spend more time with his golf clubs. As he gained knowledge and experience, Roland moved up through the lineman ranks becoming crew foreman and then maintenance coordinator, responsible for the east side of our electric system. Pete Anders – also a familiar face from Stamford – will step in to fill Roland's shoes. Pete brings over three decades of experience to the job and has been with the co-op since 1983, so we know that our system remains in very capable hands. Roland was honored with a retirement reception October 25, surrounded by family, friends, and past and present coworkers. Pictured with Roland to the upper right are his family: grandson Justin, wife Debbie, daughter-in-law Christina and son, Roland Jr. Below right, our Stamford office staff posed for one last group photo with Roland. Roland, we miss you already but know that wherever you spend your days, you're shooting under par!



Be an Angel to Someone in Need this Christmas!

Stop by one of our fund raiser cookouts for local charities who make Christmas happen for families in need. Lunch is on us when you make a donation!



- Stamford, Wednesday, December 6, 11 am - 2 pm at the Square, benefiting Goodfellows.
- Roby, Thursday, December 7, 11 am - 2 pm at the Courthouse Square, benefiting No Need for Need.
- Snyder, Tuesday, December 12, 11 am - 2 pm at the Pocket Park (west side of the Courthouse Square), benefiting KSNY Radio's Christmas for Kids.

On the menu: grilled sausage wraps with all the fixin's, chips, drinks & cookies. If you're in a rush, we'll brown bag it to go.

Give the Gift of Light

Have you ever had a problem trying to decide what gift to give someone? A great gift that can be appreciated by anyone is **The Gift of Light**, in which you can pay any amount toward the electric bill of a co-op member. You can pay by cash, check, or credit card. We can even send a card letting the recipient know that they have received **The Gift of Light** and the amount of the gift. You may remain anonymous. Your gift can be made for any occasion or for no occasion at all. Contact us if you would like more information.

Hey Students! Let's go to DC this Summer! Apply for the 2018 Government-in-Action Youth Tour!

Big Country EC will send three students on the 2018 Youth Tour, an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, DC, June 6-15. The three winners and one runner-up will each receive \$1,500 scholarships as well. Winners will join more than 140 of their peers from Texas and another 1,700 from across the U.S. on this trip of a lifetime. The trip starts with a day in Austin with a tour of the Texas State Capitol, Capitol Visitors Center, Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum and Texas State Cemetery.

Once in Washington, students partake in guided tours of historic sites, museums and congressional offices, where they meet with their U.S. representatives. We will see a performance at the Kennedy Center and enjoy a dinner and dancing cruise on the Potomac River. Participants also attend Youth Day, hosted by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, for a day of learning and inspiration. We can honestly say this experience is awesome!

Eligibility Requirements

- Current 10th, 11th, and 12th graders at schools in Big Country EC's service area (Borden, Fisher, Garza, Haskell, Jones, Kent, Mitchell, Nolan, Scurry, Shackelford, Stonewall and Throckmorton Counties) are eligible.
- Students' parents/guardians DO NOT have to be members/customers of Big Country Electric Cooperative in order to compete in and win the Youth Tour contest. Previous Youth Tour contest winners who went on the trip are not eligible. Immediate family of co-op directors or employees ARE NOT eligible.

Application Submission

- Download application at bigcountry.coop, click on the Youth Tour link. Submit per instructions on form by 5:00 p.m. Thursday, January 18, 2018. Once your application is received, you will receive an email with a link to the BCEC Youth Tour 2018 closed group to post your video. Videos will only be available to the group of Youth Tour applicants, not the public. Videos must be uploaded by 10:00 p.m. Thursday, January 25, 2018. Please include your name with the video title. Example: *Title of my Video by John Smith.*

Video Topic and Scoring

- This year's topic is: *Tell the story of electric cooperatives.* We have a long and detailed history – you're sure to find great material to work with! Be unique, be creative, learn something, and have fun!
- Winners will be selected on a competitive basis, using the following points for scoring:

Knowledge of Subject	50%	(40 points)
Presentation	50%	(40 points)

10 points for each: Presentation quality, Poise, Personality & Appearance
- Videos must be a minimum of 3 minutes but no more than 6 minutes long.
- Multiple applicants CANNOT submit the same video. If your name is on the application, it's your video. The video MUST BE YOUR OWN ORIGINAL CREATION!

Finalist Selection

- The three winning contestants will be chosen by an independent panel of judges. An alternate will also be chosen in the event a winner cannot make the trip. Results will be announced by Noon on Friday, February 9, 2018.

Questions?

Contact Sarah McLen at 325.776.3803 or smclen@bigcountry.coop

