

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

## Separating Fact From Fiction

**Energy Myths**

Pages 8-9

**Energy Scams**

Pages 12-13



Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations with Sioux Valley Energy, brings more than 35 years of experience in the electric industry and helps set the record straight on common energy myths.  
*Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.*

# Powering Growth Responsibly

## Oahe Electric Cooperative's Approach to Data Centers



**Jordan Lamb**  
CEO

As interest in large-scale data centers continues to grow across our region and within the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) footprint, we want our members to understand how we evaluate and serve these loads while protecting reliability and keeping rates fair for everyone.

Data centers represent significant economic development opportunities in rural areas.

They bring an array of jobs, from turning wrenches to computer scientists, long-term tax revenue, and infrastructure investment. However, they also require substantial electrical capacity and careful system planning. Our approach is simple: growth must not come at the expense of existing members.

### 1. Contribution in Aid of Construction – Up Front

We require large-load customers, including data centers, to provide a Contribution in Aid of Construction (CIAC) up front.

This ensures:

- Existing members are not subsidizing new infrastructure.
- All transmission, substation, and distribution upgrades required to serve the facility are paid for by the customer driving the need.
- Financial risk to the cooperative is minimized.

By collecting these funds in advance, we also have the ability to prudently invest prepayments, generating a return that benefits the system overall and strengthens our financial position. That investment income helps reduce long-term borrowing needs and improves balance sheet stability.

### 2. Generation Must Be Paid for by the Load That Requires It

Data centers can require hundreds of megawatts of capacity. We require that:

- They fully fund their generation responsibility, whether through new generation construction, long-term power supply contracts, or other approved mechanisms.
- Costs are structured so that our residential, agricultural, and small business members are not exposed to stranded asset risk.

Importantly, under SPP rules, capacity must be accredited to count toward planning reserves. Any generation used to serve a data center must meet SPP accreditation standards. That ensures reliability is maintained across the region without shifting compliance obligations onto existing members.

### 3. Mandatory Curtailment During System Peaks

A key component of our policy is curtailment during peak system conditions.

Data centers must agree to:

- Curtail load during regional or local peak events.
- Respond to emergency or reliability-driven reduction requests.
- Participate in structured demand response programs.

This provides two major benefits:

#### 1. Reliability Protection

Curtailment protects the system during extreme weather events or generation shortages, helping avoid forced outages or emergency market purchases at extreme prices.

#### 2. Faster Payoff of Existing Generation

When a large load curtails during peaks:

- It reduces the need to build new peaking generation.
- It allows existing generation assets to operate more efficiently.
- Revenues generated during high-load periods accelerate the payoff of existing plants.

In effect, curtailment helps retire existing generation debt sooner than otherwise would occur, without forcing construction of new generation that may not be capacity-accredited through SPP or economically justified.

### 4. Avoiding Unnecessary New Generation

Because curtailment reduces peak demand obligations, we can:

- Utilize already-accredited capacity more efficiently.
- Avoid overbuilding generation.
- Prevent stranded costs that would otherwise burden members.

In a capacity-accredited market like SPP, this is critical. Building generation that does not receive full accreditation can create financial and regulatory inefficiencies. Structured curtailment allows us to maintain compliance while minimizing capital exposure.

### 5. Significant Tax Contributions to Schools

Data centers are substantial contributors to local economies. In particular, they pay:

- Large amounts of kWh-based utility taxes
- Property taxes on high-value infrastructure

These revenues:

- Flow directly to local school districts.
- Reduce funding pressure on counties.
- Help stabilize school budgets without increasing property tax burdens on residents and farmers.

For rural communities, this downward pressure on local tax levies can be transformative.

*Continued on page 3*

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS OAHE ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 019-042)

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### Our Mission

Oahe Electric delivers high quality, low-cost electric service to our local member-owners. As a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative, we are committed to meeting the highest standards of customer satisfaction. We do business with accountability, integrity, innovation and commitment to community. As an electric co-op, we are part of America's most trusted network of high quality energy providers.

## Pierre Senior Is 'Scholar of the Week'

Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. is proud to announce its Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week. The recipient of this honor is Tiger Duinkherjav, a senior at T.F. Riggs High School in Pierre. The honor, bestowed by Dakota News Now, gives Duinkherjav bragging rights for the week of March 15, 2026.

Tiger boasts a 4.00 grade-point average and participates in All-State Band, All-State Orchestra, SDSU Honor Band, USD Honor Band, Augustana Honor Band, Dakota Wesleyan Honor Band, T.F. Riggs HS Jazz Band, Symphonic Band, Concert Band, and Concert Choir. Tiger is the son of Sheridan Hansen of Pierre.

Duinkherjav received \$250 from Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. in partnership with East River Electric Power Cooperative, to reward him for his academic achievements. Another perk for being selected, Tiger is automatically in the running for a \$1,000 scholarship, to be awarded at a special banquet later this spring honoring all of this year's scholars.



Oahe Electric CEO Jordan Lamb (left) with Scholar of the Week Tiger Duinkherjav.

The "Scholar of the Week" is an ongoing joint effort between Touchstone Energy co-ops, like Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc., and Dakota News Now. The program recognizes the achievements of high school seniors throughout the region. The honor is awarded to highly motivated seniors who excel in the classroom as well as in their community.

### Powering Growth Continued

## 6. Risk Mitigation & Financial Discipline

Our policy framework ensures:

- No cross-subsidization between member classes.
- No stranded generation risk borne by legacy members.
- Protection from wholesale market volatility
- Strong liquidity through upfront funding and invested prepayments.

We also structure agreements with:

- Long-term commitments.
- Credit protections.
- Security requirements.
- Exit provisions to protect members if load leaves unexpectedly.

## 7. Economic Development with Member Protection

Data centers can be positive additions to our service territory when properly structured. They:

- Provide economic activity.
- Increase system utilization.
- Strengthen regional infrastructure.
- Support local schools and communities.

But growth must be disciplined, transparent, and member-focused.

Our responsibility remains clear: Reliability first. Fairness always. Growth only when it strengthens – not weakens – the cooperative. If you have questions about large load integration, generation planning, or how these projects affect your rates, please contact our office. We are committed to full transparency and protecting the long-term interests of our member-owners.

# STAYING FOCUSED BEHIND THE WHEEL: A SIMPLE GUIDE TO SAFER ROADS

Distractions behind the wheel aren't just inconvenient – they're deadly. Each moment you allocate to anything other than driving increases the risk for you and everyone sharing the road. According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, distracted driving claimed 3,522 lives in the United States in 2021, underscoring how costly a split-second lapse can be. The good news is that small, deliberate habits behind the wheel can make a big difference. Here are three practical ways to stay focused.

First, minimize phone use. Store your device out of sight before starting the engine. Texting or scrolling through apps draws your eyes from the road, your hands from the wheel and your mind from the task at hand. If you must communicate, pull over safely or use hands-free features only if absolutely necessary and legal in your area. Remember, many places have laws prohibiting texting while driving, with penalties that reflect the risk. Consider enabling “do not disturb” modes that silence notifications while you drive, and set your status to indicate you're driving. This simple barrier can prevent impulsive checks and help you maintain steady attention.

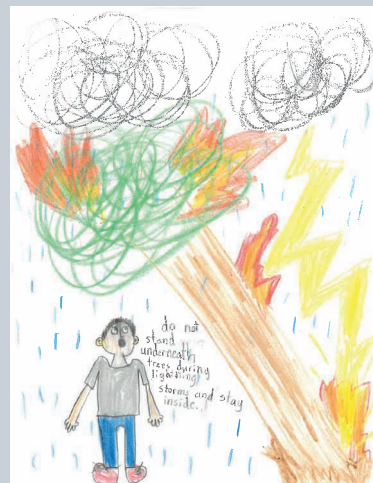
Second, plan your route before you depart. Entering a destination while driving is a dangerous distraction. Take a few minutes to review the route, check traffic conditions, and set your navigation system in advance. With your route loaded, you can keep your attention on driving rather than on-screen instructions during the journey. If possible, choose routes with fewer turns or fewer heavy-traffic segments, and be ready to adjust if conditions change. Having a mental map of the journey can also reduce the need to peek at the screen for updates.

Third, ensure you are well rested. Fatigue can dull reaction times, reduce concentration, and cause your eyes or your vehicle to drift. Prioritize a good night's sleep before long trips, and consider stopping for short breaks on extended drives to refresh your focus. Even brief pauses for stretching and deep breathing can reset your alertness and help you respond more quickly to changing road situations.

Beyond these tips, practice general safe-driving habits: obey speed limits, maintain a safe following distance and stay alert for pedestrians, cyclists, and other motorists. If you feel distracted or fatigued, it's wiser to pause and reassess rather than press on. Safe driving is about consistent, proactive choices that protect everyone on the road.



**"Do not stand underneath trees during lightning storms and stay inside."**



**Ramsey Faini,  
Age 8**

Ramsey warns readers about the dangers of lightning storms. Thank you for sharing your picture, Ramsey! Ramsey's mom is Katie Faini from Rapid City, S.D.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

# MAIN DISHES

## HOMEMADE MAC & CHEESE

### Ingredients:

16 oz. box elbow macaroni noodles  
Oil  
1 pkg. bacon  
3 cups whole milk  
1/2 cup butter (melted)  
5 oz. can (about 2/3 cup) evaporated milk  
16 oz. block Velveeta cheese (cut into cubes)  
1 tsp. salt  
Guda cheese  
Parsley (to taste)  
1 tsp. garlic powder  
1/2 tsp. black pepper

### Method

Cook noodles as directed. Drain noodles and pour a small amount of oil on them while in the strainer. Cook bacon and cut into small pieces. Add all of the ingredients into a Crock-Pot and mix. Cover and cook on low for 1.5 hours, stirring once or twice while cooking. Serve and enjoy.

**Cindi Foster**  
Codington-Clark Electric

## CHEDDAR POTATO SOUP

### Ingredients:

1 medium onion, chopped  
3/4 cup celery, chopped  
1/4 cup butter  
5 cups peeled potatoes, cubed  
3 cups water  
3 cups milk, divided  
4 tps. chicken bouillon granules  
1/2 tsp. salt  
1/2 tsp. pepper  
1/4 cup flour  
4 cups (16 oz.) cheddar cheese, shredded

### Method

In large Dutch oven or kettle, saute onion and celery in butter for 5 minutes. Add potatoes and water, bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Stir in 2 cups milk, bouillon, salt and pepper. Combine flour and remaining milk until smooth, gradually stir into soup. Bring to a boil, cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Reduce heat, add cheese and stir until cheese is melted.

**Sally Florey**  
Charles Mix Electric

## CARAMELIZED HAM & SWISS SLIDERS

### Ingredients:

12 Hawaiian dinner rolls, split  
1/4 cup horseradish sauce (optional)  
12 slices deli ham (or 24 if it's thinly sliced)  
6 slices Swiss cheese, cut in fourths (so you will have 24 squares of cheese)  
**Sauce**  
1/2 cup butter  
1/4 tsp. onion powder  
2 tbsps. brown sugar  
1 tbsp. Dijon mustard  
2 tps. poppy seeds  
1 1/2 tps. Worcestershire sauce  
1/4 tsp. garlic powder

### Method

Spray a 9x9 or 9x13 glass dish with non-stick cooking spray. Set aside. Preheat oven to 325°. Spread roll bottoms with horseradish sauce (if using). Fold up pieces of ham to fit the rolls and place them on the bottom halves of the roll. Next, place 2 squares of cheese. Replace tops and place in a single layer in the prepared pan.

### Sauce

In a small skillet, heat butter over medium-high heat. Stir in remaining ingredients. Pour over rolls. Cover with foil and bake covered for 20 minutes. Remove foil and bake 5 more minutes. These can also be made ahead of time. Just cover with foil and refrigerate for several hours or overnight. Bake as instructed.

**Jerald & Virginia Jensen**  
Sioux Valley Energy

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# Operation Round Up®

## Small Change Makes a Big Difference

### What is Operation Round Up?

Operation Round Up® is just what the name implies: each month, Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. simply “rounds up” the electric bills of voluntarily participating members to the next highest dollar. For example, a member’s monthly bill of \$132.68 would automatically be rounded up to \$133, with the additional 32¢ going to the Operation Round Up Fund.

### How do I participate?

Oahe Electric’s Operation Round Up® program is an opt-out program – meaning that you are automatically enrolled, with nothing else needing done to participate! If you are not interested in donating, you can call the office at 1-800-640-6243 and request to be removed from the program.

### How much will it cost members?

The most a member can contribute is 99¢ per month x 12 months = \$11.88/year – this doesn’t sound like much, but with this small change, thousands of dollars can be generated and will mean a big difference to the people and organizations in our area.

### Where will the money go?

All Operation Round Up® donations are placed in a trust and are administered by an independent Board of Trustees. The board is made up of Oahe Electric members who serve on a voluntary basis. The board evaluates all requests for funds, determines who will receive funding and how all Operation Round Up® funds will be distributed.

### Who is eligible for funds?

The funds are used to address charitable community needs, whether it is disaster relief for an individual, or an organization funding a special project. Since the program’s first disbursement in 2009, the program has distributed over \$160,000. The region served by the fund is primarily the electrical area served by Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc., including Hughes and Sully counties.

### How do I apply for funds?

The easy-to-complete applications for funding are currently available and can be requested by phone at 605-962-6243. Applications can also be found on our

website at [www.oaheelectric.com](http://www.oaheelectric.com). All applications are due by April 30, 2026. Completed applications may be mailed to: Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 216, Blunt, S.D. 57522, faxed to: 605-962-6306, or emailed to: [oahe@oaheelectric.com](mailto:oahe@oaheelectric.com). After the deadline, the Board of Trustees will meet and allocate the funds to those they feel are in the most need.

### How do I get involved?

There is currently one, 2-year Board of Trustees position open. Trustees normally have to commit one afternoon a year to review fund request applications in person, with the possibility of correspondence regarding emergency fund requests throughout the year. If you are interested in offering your time to this endeavor, please contact Samantha Irvine, Operation Round Up Coordinator, at 1.800.640.6243 or [oahe@oaheelectric.com](mailto:oahe@oaheelectric.com).

Together, by giving a few cents each month, Oahe Electric members can make a big impact on life in our area!

## Understanding Power Lines: Primary Vs. Secondary

When requesting an underground locate, it’s important to understand the difference between primary and secondary lines.

### Primary Lines

Primary lines are owned and maintained by Oahe Electric. These lines run up to your electric meter.

- Located free of charge through 811
  - Maintained and repaired at the cooperative’s expense
- Simply call 811 to have these lines marked before you dig.

### Secondary Lines

Secondary lines run from your meter to your home, shed, barn, well or other outbuildings.

These lines are owned by the member.

- Locate and repair costs are the member’s responsibility
- Members must hire a qualified electrician to locate these lines
- Oahe Electric does not have the equipment to locate secondary lines



Butte Electric Cooperative employees and other volunteers with Betty Krause after painting her house in Belle Fourche. Photo submitted by Clint Haffner

# Co-ops in the Community

## Butte Electric Volunteers Bring Fresh Paint and a Smile to Retired Nurse

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

Concern for community is the seventh cooperative principle, and when Butte Electric Cooperative CEO Matt Sleep was approached to help with a nearby volunteer project, he knew it was his co-op's time to act.

•••

In Belle Fourche, about 25 miles southwest of Butte Electric's headquarters in Newell, City Code Enforcement Officer Clint Haffner keeps a busy schedule. When he's not on the clock for the city handling code enforcement and animal control matters, he's helping lead the local United Way chapter, where he organizes volunteering projects aiming to make Belle Fourche shine a little brighter.

"When I started the job [with the city], I'd come across situations where people are just physically unable to shovel a sidewalk or take care of things," Haffner said. "Some are simply too old. That's kind of how our group began – there just wasn't anyone helping the people who can't do it."

When Butte Electric reached out

to Haffner about potential volunteer opportunities, it didn't take him long to think of a project. Betty Krause, a 97-year-old retired nurse had spent 45 years of her life from 1950 to 1995 taking care of the Belle Fourche community. Haffner figured it was time the community gave something back to her.

Haffner approached Butte Electric about painting Betty's house, garage and shed. After all, who would be better than linemen with experience on ladders and working with their hands?

CEO Matt Sleep enthusiastically accepted, and a few weeks later on a warm September morning, volunteers from Butte Electric, Monument Health and the Belle Fourche United Way arrived at Betty's house to begin the work.

"We descended on the property with ladders, scrapers, paint buckets, paint brushes, a paint sprayer, weed eaters, tree trimmers, etc. and got busy," Sleep recalled.

The Butte Electric employees split into four teams; two would tackle the house, one the shed, and the other the garage. They made quick work of the project as Haffner kept everyone fed and hydrated.

"The Butte Electric guys are wonderful," Haffner said. "They're hard workers, handy, crafty, good on ladders. The paint job at Betty's place was smooth and efficient work."

It took about a day of work between the setup, scraping and painting of the three

buildings – Betty was awestruck when she went outside to see the finished job.

"It was pretty wonderful, and I've had many compliments," she said of the result. "It shows it's a caring community. It's just awesome and amazing that they'd do it for one person."

While Betty's house received a coat of fresh paint, Sleep said the volunteers also took something back with them.

"When the painting was done, I think Betty's appreciation and thankfulness brought a great feeling of joy and accomplishment to all of us there – maybe even a tear or two," Sleep said. "A project like this just adds a little bit of goodness back into a community. And, we all need a little bit of goodness in our lives."



Butte Electric Cooperative employees paint a house in Belle Fourche in Sept. 2025. Photo submitted by Clint Haffner



From left, in the Sioux Valley Energy shop: Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations; Chad Williams, manager of operations; journey lineworker Jager Rus; and journey lineworker Paul Schamber. Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy

# BUSTING ENERGY MYTHS

## with Ted Smith of Sioux Valley Energy

**Frank Turner**

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Electricity powers nearly every part of daily life, yet most people only think about it when the lights flicker or a bill arrives. Because the system works quietly in the background, assumptions about how it operates tend to fill the gaps.

To sort through several common misconceptions, Cooperative Connections spoke with Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations at Sioux Valley Energy, the cooperative serving South Dakota counties of Brookings, Lake, Moody, Kingsbury, and Minnehaha and Minnesota counties of Rock and Pipestone. Smith has worked in the electric industry for 35 years, including 20 years at Sioux Valley, where he

oversees engineering, line crews and dispatch.

Here are several claims he regularly hears from members and how he responds.

**Myth: If the lights go out, it must be a local problem.**  
**Smith: That's definitely a myth.**

An outage can begin anywhere from inside your home all the way back to a generating station two states away. The electric grid is highly interconnected. A disruption in one area can ripple outward across transmission lines that serve multiple utilities.

There have been large historical outages, especially in the eastern United States, where a single event such as a tree contacting a transmission line triggered a cascading failure across multiple states. Entire cities lost power

because one initiating fault spread across the network.

Closer to home, severe weather in one region can affect transmission lines feeding a much broader footprint. If a major transmission line trips offline, and another line is already out for maintenance, service interruptions can extend far beyond the original storm area.

“Just because your lights go out doesn't mean the problem started down the road, close to home” Smith said. “It could be much farther upstream.”

**Myth: The grid can be powered entirely by renewable energy.**  
**Smith: At times, yes. Around the clock, no.**

Smith pointed to hydroelectric dams along the Missouri River as renewable generation that run continuously, but other renewable resources, such as wind and solar, simply aren't reliable sources of energy and only contribute

significantly when conditions allow.

“Although sometimes it seems like it, the wind doesn’t always blow in South Dakota,” Smith said. “And solar only produces during daylight hours.”

Although battery storage has improved in recent years, Smith says storing enough energy to power the grid around the clock is prohibitively expensive at this point in time.

For now, maintaining reliability requires a mix of generation resources so supply remains available regardless of weather or time of day.

**Myth: If my neighbor has power and I do not after a storm, the cooperative skipped me.**

**Smith: That’s not how it works.**

In some cases, the cooperative may not yet know a member is without service. Reporting outages remains important.

Another possibility is that the issue is on the member side of the meter. Crews may restore cooperative equipment and determine that the damage is within the member’s own service.

“When crews see it’s a problem on the member side of the meter, they will call dispatch and have them contact the member,” Smith said.

He also emphasized the importance of keeping current phone numbers on file. Fewer households rely on landlines today, which makes updated cell phone numbers critical during storm response.

**Myth: Burying all power lines would eliminate outages.**

**Smith: No.**

Underground lines are not exposed to wind and ice, but they are not immune to failure. Over time, underground conductors deteriorate. Rodents such as gophers can damage them. Excavation damage is also common when individuals dig without confirming where utilities are buried.

Before digging, members should always contact 811, the national call-before-you-dig number. That service

notifies utility providers so buried lines can be located and marked before excavation begins. Failing to call 811 can be dangerous and increase the risk of damaging underground infrastructure, causing outages.

And even when damage occurs naturally, locating the fault underground can take time.

“With overhead lines, crews can usually see the damage,” Smith said. “Underground, it takes troubleshooting to figure out exactly where the fault is, sometimes leading to longer outage durations.”

He recalled one outage that proved especially difficult to diagnose.

“One time we had an outage that we just could not narrow down,” he said. “When we finally found the damage, we saw that a gopher had chewed the bottom of the wire. You could not see it from the top. We had to dig up about 20 feet of cable and turn it over before we could see the damage.”

Underground systems can reduce certain types of outages, but they do not eliminate them, and repairs often require more time and labor.

**Myth: Wind and solar power are free once installed.**

**Smith: The fuel is free, but that’s the only thing that’s free.**

Wind turbines require ongoing maintenance, including mechanical components that need to be regularly serviced. Solar power relies on inverters and other equipment that must be maintained and eventually replaced.

There are construction costs, financing costs and transmission costs involved in delivering electricity from generation sites to homes and businesses. Those transmission and maintenance assets are accounted for over time and included in the overall cost of electricity.

Free fuel lowers one portion of cost. It does not remove the need to build, maintain and replace infrastructure.

**Myth: Electric cooperatives raise rates to increase profits.**

**Smith: No. Cooperatives are not-for-profit.**

Electric cooperatives are member owned, not investor owned. That means there are no outside shareholders expecting earnings. Instead, cooperatives operate on margins, collecting enough revenue to pay expenses, maintain infrastructure and meet financial obligations.

“The only place we get money is from the people at the end of the line,” Smith said. “We don’t have a printing press in the basement.”

In fact, if revenue exceeds expenses in a given year, a portion of those margins are allocated back to members as capital credits when the board determines it’s financially appropriate. Capital credits represent a member’s share of the cooperative’s financial performance during the years they received service.

However, in recent years, equipment costs have risen significantly. Smith cited bucket trucks that once cost around \$220,000 have since more than doubled in price, and major system components have seen similar increases. Usually, the cost of wholesale power from the cooperative’s power suppliers makes up the largest share of the budget and those costs have been increasing as well.

Rate adjustments reflect those rising operational costs and the need to maintain reliable service, not profit distribution.

Electricity may seem simple at the flip of a switch, but as Smith makes clear, the system behind it involves infrastructure, coordination and constant evaluation. Understanding how it works helps members separate assumption from reality and better appreciate the network that serves them every day.

# Think You Don't Use Data Centers? The Real Answer Is That You Probably Do



**Valerie Marso**  
CFO

Data centers come up in a lot of conversations, especially lately it seems, but they're still easy to misunderstand. Most people never visit one, never see what's inside, and don't really think about them unless a headline pops up. That makes it easy to imagine them as something distant or unfamiliar.

In reality, data centers are already part of daily life for most of us. We just don't realize it.

### What a Data Center Really Is

At its simplest, a data center is a lot of computers. Those computers store information and run the digital services people use every day. There are no assembly lines or crowds of workers coming and going. Once a data center is built, it's designed to run quietly in the background – securely and reliably.

If the internet feels “always on,” data centers are a big reason why.

### “I Don't Use Data Centers” (Most of Us Do)

You don't open an app called “Data Center,” so it's easy to feel disconnected from them. But if you've ever:

- Stored or printed photos using a service like Snapfish
- Checked or searched your email using Gmail, Outlook, or another provider
- Looked up online purchase history or digital receipts
- Ordered groceries or household items online
- Watched Netflix, Disney+, Paramount, Hulu
- Listened to Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora

...you've used a data center.

Your phone or computer is just the front door. The information lives somewhere else; that “somewhere else” is usually a data center.

Every time you send an email, back up photos, order groceries online, or log into an account instead of visiting an office in person, a data center is doing work behind the scenes – even if you never think about it.

### Why Water Comes Up in the Conversation

Computers generate heat, which has to be managed. That's why cooling is such an important part of how data centers work, and why water usage comes up in discussions.

Years ago, many data centers used cooling systems that relied heavily on water. Some of those older facilities are still operating today, and they often shape how people think about data centers as a whole.

But cooling technology hasn't stood still.

### Not All Data Centers Are the Same

It's easy to think of all data centers as being alike, but timing matters a lot.

Thinking about data centers as all the same is a bit like thinking a car from 2008 is the same as a car today. They're both cars, but fuel efficiency, emissions, safety features, and technology have changed dramatically.

The same goes for phones. An early smartphone and a modern one may look similar, but today's phones use less power, manage heat better, and do far more with fewer resources.

Data centers have followed a similar path. Newer facilities are often designed with more efficient cooling, better energy management, and – in many cases – much lower water use than older designs.

### How Newer Data Centers Handle Cooling

A common assumption is that all data centers use large amounts of drinking water. That isn't always the case today.

Many newer data centers use:

- Outside air for cooling, with no water involved
- Closed systems that reuse the same water instead of constantly drawing more
- Liquid cooling that focuses directly on the hottest components
- Reclaimed or non-drinking water if water is needed at all

Because of this, water usage can vary widely from one facility to another.

Data centers support things many people rely on every day – email, banking, shopping, healthcare and storing personal memories. They aren't just about entertainment or technology companies.

That doesn't mean questions shouldn't be asked. It does mean the conversation works better when it's based on what data centers actually are today, not just what they were years ago.

Most of us use data centers every day without noticing. They're part of the background of modern life, much like electricity or internet service.

Taking a moment to understand how they work – and how much they've evolved – can help turn a heated debate into a more informed one.

# Thank you, Linemen!

## Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup> Is National Lineman Appreciation Day



**Matt Eldridge**  
Chief Operations  
Officer

As Chief Operations Officer of Oahe Electric, I have the privilege of seeing firsthand what it truly takes to keep the lights on for our members. Each April, we pause to recognize the brave men of Oahe Electric –our lineworkers – who go above and beyond in service to our communities.

When storms roll in and outages occur, many experience inconvenience.

Our lineworkers see a call to action. They are always ready when it matters most – leaving family dinners, working through the night, and stepping into challenging conditions to restore power safely and quickly. That readiness doesn't happen by chance. It comes from rigorous training, deep experience, and a shared commitment to serving others.

What makes lineworkers especially remarkable is that they aren't just restoring power to a system – they're restoring power to their own communities. They live here. They raise their families here. They know that electricity is more than a convenience; it's essential to daily life, to local businesses, to schools, farms, and emergency services. Powering the places we call home is personal to them.

Electric cooperatives like Oahe Electric were built on the principle of neighbors helping neighbors, and our lineworkers embody that spirit every day. They are the first to respond and the last to leave, often working long



hours behind the scenes. Sometimes serving our neighbors means going beyond our own service territory through a process known as mutual aid. During major outage events, Oahe Electric crews stand ready to assist neighboring co-ops – whether nearby or across state lines – to help restore power. This spirit of mutual aid strengthens all cooperatives and ultimately benefits the members we serve.

We understand that any outage can be frustrating and disruptive. We are deeply grateful to our members for your patience and encouragement during these times. Linework is demanding, physical, and at times dangerous. Our crews approach each job with a focus on safety, teamwork, and pride in their craft – and with a deep appreciation for the trust you place in them.

On April 18, 2026, we will celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day. But one day is hardly enough. Every day, we thank our lineworkers for their service and dedication, which form the backbone of our cooperative.

To our lineworkers: thank you for your hard work, your readiness, and your unwavering commitment to the communities we serve. We are proud to stand behind you

## Check Out Our Lending Library

**Did you know there's a Lending Library right in our entryway?**

It's a fun, free way to discover something new to read – anytime you'd like. For the kids, you'll find a special bookcase designed to look like a bucket truck. Adult titles are available on a separate bookshelf, so there's something for readers of all ages.

The library runs on a simple system: take a book, leave a book – or just take one to enjoy! There's no checkout process, no due dates, and no limits. Best of all, our entryway is open 24/7/365, so you can stop in and browse whenever it's convenient for you.



# ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ENERGY SCAMS

Photo by Frank Turner

### Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

It's no April Fools' joke. Consumers with an electricity connection have long been targets for scams. In today's digital world, those schemes have evolved. As more daily business is conducted online, scammers have shifted their tactics to match. They now use phone calls, texts and emails to create urgency, confusion and fear, hoping consumers will act before taking time to verify the claim.

For victims, these scams can lead to financial loss and identity theft, but understanding how the most common schemes work and what they typically look like is one of the best defenses to staying safe.

### The "Past Due" Disconnection Threat

One of the most common tactics that scammers use is the disconnection threat. They use a fake message claiming a bill is past due and that service will be disconnected immediately unless payment is made on the spot.

The call may sound official. The message may include account numbers

or appear to come from your local cooperative's phone number due to caller ID spoofing. The scammer's goal is simple: create panic so you pay first and question later.

In reality, cooperatives follow clear procedures and provide advance notice before any disconnection. A demand for instant payment, especially with threats attached, is a major red flag.

### The "You Overpaid" Refund Scam

Who would not want a refund? Scammers take advantage of that instinct.

In this scheme, a text, call or email claims a member overpaid an electric bill and is owed money. The message often includes instructions to click a link or provide banking information so the refund can be "processed."

The message can sound especially convincing to cooperative members because electric cooperatives do return margins to members in the form of capital credits. Capital credits represent a member's share of the cooperative's annual margins and are returned over time.

However, capital credits are distributed through established,

official processes. They are not issued through unsolicited texts, surprise phone calls or links requesting personal banking information. When your local cooperative retires capital credits, members are notified through official channels such as billing statements, newsletters, verified mailings or even through Cooperative Connections.

An unexpected refund message that asks for sensitive information is a red flag. When in doubt, pause and contact your local cooperative directly using trusted contact information.

### Gift Card and Cryptocurrency Demands

Scammers often insist on unusual payment methods such as gift cards, prepaid debit cards or cryptocurrency. They may provide detailed instructions on how to purchase gift cards and read the numbers over the phone.

This is a clear warning sign. Legitimate cooperatives do not request payment in gift cards or cryptocurrency. These forms of payment are nearly impossible to trace or recover, which makes them attractive to criminals.

## Spotting a Scam

Regardless of the method, every scam has similar warning signs that members can watch for:

- High-pressure tactics that demand immediate payment
- Requests for payment through gift cards, prepaid debit cards or cryptocurrency
- Emails or text messages with poor grammar, spelling errors or unfamiliar web addresses

Scammers rely on urgency. Taking a few extra minutes to verify a message can prevent lasting financial consequences.

## What Your Local Cooperative Will and Will Not Do

Your local cooperative will not demand immediate payment without prior notice. Cooperatives follow

established procedures and provide advance communication before any service interruption.

Your local cooperative will not ask for Social Security numbers, banking details or other sensitive information through unsolicited phone calls, emails or text messages.

Members have secure payment options available through official cooperative channels, including the cooperative's verified website and approved payment systems. When in doubt, independently locate the cooperative's official contact information rather than using links or phone numbers included in a message.

Text alerts are only sent to members who have enrolled in official notification programs, such as outage updates.

## Avoiding Energy Scams

If you receive a suspicious call, text or email claiming to be from your local cooperative, do not use the contact information provided in that message. Instead, use the phone number printed on your billing statement or listed on the cooperative's verified website.

Also, reporting suspected scams helps protect fellow members. By alerting your local cooperative to fraudulent activity, members help strengthen the community's defense against energy scams and ensure the cooperative network remains secure for everyone.

Have a question about whether something is real or not? Reach out to your local cooperative. Electric cooperatives are owned by the members they serve and powered by the communities around them.

## SIGNS OF AN

# ENERGY SCAM

### High-Pressure Tactics

Scammers will pressure you, creating a sense of urgency. Claims that your power will be disconnected without immediate payment are common with utility scams.

### Sketchy Payment Methods

Scammers may ask for unusual payment methods like gift cards or cryptocurrency. In these cases, it's likely a scam.

### Dodgy Communication

Whether an email, text message or letter, utility scams typically include poor grammar, spelling errors or unusual email addresses. These are common warning signs of a scam.





# DIAL 8-1-1 BEFORE DIGGING

South Dakota One Call teamed up with South Dakota's Electric Cooperatives to promote safety at the South Dakota State Fair.  
*Photo by Jacob Boyko*

## S.D. One Call/811 Q&A With Steve Barnett

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

When planning any excavation project in South Dakota – whether installing a backyard fence, planting trees or building an outdoor shop – one simple phone call can protect lives, property and vital infrastructure. South Dakota One Call is the statewide system that helps homeowners, contractors and landowners locate underground utilities before digging begins. It's easy to get started – all you do is call 8-1-1.

Steve Barnett has served on the S.D. Call Board since 2022 when he was hired as the general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association.

Barnett attends S.D. One Call's board meetings where he advocates for the interests of the utilities and co-op member-owners he represents, while helping guide the organization to better respond to the needs of utilities, rate payers, excavators and everyone else who may use the service.



**Steve Barnett**

S.D. One Call Board Member  
Representing Electric Cooperatives  
SDREA General Manager

Barnett sat down with Cooperative Connections to discuss the importance of S.D. One Call and how it benefits electric cooperatives and their members.

### **Q: What's your role on the South Dakota One Call board?**

I serve on the South Dakota One Call Board of Directors as the representative for the 31 rural electric cooperatives operating within our state. The One Call board includes representatives from different utility sectors as well as excavators. I've been involved in this role to help ensure our members' infrastructure is protected and that we're promoting safe excavation practices statewide.

### **Q: Why was South Dakota One Call founded, and why is calling 811 so important?**

South Dakota One Call serves as a centralized notification center for underground infrastructure. The system was created in 1993 to provide one central point of contact for excavators to encourage more responsible digging. Prior to the founding of S.D. One Call, excavators doing their due diligence needed to make multiple calls to various utilities. Today, thanks to S.D. One Call, the only number you need to dial is 811. That call triggers notification to all participating utilities in the area so they can send locators out to the digsite.

It's important to call 811 because state law requires it. If someone digs without a locate ticket and damages a buried utility, they are fully responsible for the damages and liability. Beyond that, hitting a gas or electric line can be extremely dangerous. There are thousands of miles of buried electric, gas, water, sewer, communication lines and drain tile underground.

Calling 811 is free, and it protects the excavator and the utilities.

## Q: What happens after I call 811?

When you call 811 or submit a request through [sdonecall.com](http://sdonecall.com):

- Your information goes to the South Dakota One Call center.
- You identify and map out where you plan to dig.
- The system notifies all utilities with infrastructure in that area.

Utilities have 48 hours from the start of the next business day to respond by marking their lines with paint or flags.

After that 48-hour period, excavation can begin.

The service is free to the caller, as the utilities fund the system by paying a small fee every time their infrastructure is identified in an excavation area. The utility is responsible for marking its own facilities.

During this year's legislative session in Pierre, legislators voted to enact a change to how the 48-hour locate window is determined.

Starting July 1, South Dakota will be a "midnight state," meaning the day you submit the ticket does not count toward the 48-hour window. The clock begins at 12:01 a.m. the next business day.

If you submit a ticket at 4 p.m. on a Tuesday, the 48-hour window will start Wednesday at 12:01 a.m. Your project start time will be Friday.

## Q: Since serving on the One Call board, what's one interesting thing you've learned?

What I've come to better understand is how much protection the system provides the excavator. When you call 811 and obtain a valid locate ticket, you've documented that you followed state law and gave utilities the opportunity to mark their facilities. If something is properly marked and you dig carefully around those markings, you've significantly reduced both safety risks and liability exposure. On the other hand, if you dig without a ticket and hit a line, you are fully responsible for the damages and any related costs.

I've also learned how many different types of underground infrastructure exist – everything from electric and fiber to water, sewer, gas, and even private drain tile that crosses into public right-of-way.

## Q: What's the mission of the One Call board?

I think you can summarize the board's mission pretty succinctly: promote public safety by preventing damage to underground utilities, and ensuring excavation across the state is conducted safely and responsibly.

Apart from that, our goal is to continue improving our one-call notification system, making it more efficient and effective, as well as just getting the word out. We've done some of that through letters to the editor in various newspapers and with booths at events including, the South Dakota State Fair. The more we can get the word out, the less problems we have, and that means keeping costs low for our member-owners.

At its core, the board's mission is to reduce injuries, prevent service disruptions and protect both excavators and utility providers through communication, compliance and education.



### Mark Meier, Chairman

Watertown Municipal Utilities  
South Dakota Municipalities

### Ryan Barr, Vice Chairman

Midco  
Community Antenna Television Companies

### Kay Braaten

Northern Border Pipeline  
Interstate Pipeline Carriers

### Steve Barnett

South Dakota Rural Electric Association  
Rural Electric Cooperatives

### Scott Wiese

Otter Tail Power Co.  
Investor-Owned Electric Utilities

### Brad Wenande

NorthWestern Energy  
Investor-Owned Natural Gas Companies

### Loren Beld

LL & Sons Excavating, Inc.  
Excavating Contractors

### Jim Wedin

CenturyLink  
Telecommunications with > 50,000 customers

### Lloyd Rave

Minnehaha Community Water Corporation Board  
Rural Water Systems

### John Morris

Morris Inc  
Excavating Contractors

### Jake VanDewater

SDN Communications  
Small Telecommunications with < 50,000 customers



**APRIL 9-11**  
**Annual Schmeckfest**  
 German Festival of  
 Tasting  
 Freeman, SD  
 605-925-4237  
 www.schmeckfest.com

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

**MARCH 27-APRIL 4**  
**The Passion and the Cross**  
 Orpheum Theatre  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-367-6000  
 www.ThePassionMusical.com

**APRIL 3**  
**Bachelors of Broadway:  
 Gentlemen of the Theatre**  
 7 p.m.  
 Johnson Fine Arts Center  
 Aberdeen, SD

**APRIL 5**  
**Easter Sunrise Service**  
 7 a.m.  
 Mount Rushmore

**APRIL 9**  
**McCrossan Wildest Banquet  
 Auction in the Midwest**  
 Jimmy Buffett Tribute  
 Polynesian Paradise Dancers  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 www.mccrossan.org

**APRIL 9-11**  
**Annual Schmeckfest**  
 German Heritage Celebration  
 Freeman, SD  
 605-925-4237  
 www.schmeckfest.com

**APRIL 11**  
**Women VetsConnect Retreat**  
 A Wellness Retreat for  
 Women Veterans and Military  
 Spouses  
 9 a.m.-2 p.m.  
 Our Savior's Lutheran Church  
 909 W. 33rd St.  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**APRIL 11**  
**Minnehaha County Pheasants  
 Forever Annual Banquet**  
 5:30 p.m.-10 p.m.  
 Blue Haven Atrium  
 46594 268th St.  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-214-1415

**APRIL 11-12**  
**The Black Market**  
 Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
 W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds Expo Bldg.  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-332-6004

**APRIL 18**  
**Brookings Quilt Show XII**  
 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Admission: \$10  
 Dakota Bank Center  
 Brookings, SD  
 605-690-3246

**APRIL 18**  
**Tri-Valley Chorus  
 75th Annual Show**  
 4 p.m.  
 Centerville, SD  
 605-201-9398

**APRIL 20**  
**The Bronx Wanderers**  
 7 p.m.  
 Johnson Fine Arts Center  
 Aberdeen, SD

**APRIL 25**  
**Screams by Night  
 Halfway to Halloween Con**  
 11 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 The Social  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**APRIL 28**  
**American Legion Bingo**  
 5-6 p.m. Social  
 6-6:30 p.m. Meal  
 6:45 p.m. Bingo  
 American Legion Post 15  
 1600 W. Russell  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-682-1222

**MAY 2-10**  
**Rustic Designs & More Spring  
 Show, Flea Market**  
 41450 264th St.  
 Ethan, SD  
 605-770-2411

**MAY 2**  
**Cinco de Mayo Fiesta**  
 2-8 p.m.  
 Milbank, SD  
 605-432-6656

**JUNE 13**  
**Journey Into Historic Pickstown**  
 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Ft. Randall Town & Museum  
 Pickstown, SD  
 605-487-7299

**JUNE 26-27**  
**Buckhorn Rodeo**  
 Britton, SD  
 605-880-5077

**Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.**