

Making Electricity Clean, Keeping it Affordable

The ability of the United States to meet the electricity needs of American consumers reliably and at an affordable cost is seriously at risk. In the Southeast, we are facing a steady growth in demand for electricity while at the same time it is becoming more difficult and expensive to produce and transmit that power. For decades, we have relied primarily on abundant and affordable fossil fuels and nuclear energy-fueled power plants to meet growing demand, but federal regulations may change that.

Congress has haggled over details of legislation meant to curb carbon dioxide emissions from sources like cars, factories, and power plants. The inner-workings of the plan are complex, but one thing comes through clear: trimming carbon dioxide emissions will be challenging and expensive.

Developing these policies will alter the way we think about electricity, plain and simple. Electric co-ops are working to make sure these new policies are fair to everyone, while minimizing the impact on your electric bill. And we're already making investments in energy efficiency and renewable, "clean and green" generation as a part of these efforts.

Electric cooperatives are no strangers to renewable energy. Across the nation, co-ops are developing innovative ways to generate electricity from renewable sources, and developing technology to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from traditional fossil fuels like coal and natural gas.

In North Dakota, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, a wholesale power supplier to co-ops in nine states, plans to separate carbon dioxide gas from smokestack emissions at a coal-fired power plant, pump it into underground cavities, and in theory keep it there forever. When the carbon capture and storage facility goes online in 2012, 1 million tons of carbon dioxide will be removed in this fashion.

In Indiana, Wabash Valley Power Association, a wholesale power supplier for 28 electric co-ops in five states, converts coal into a clean-burning synthetic gas stripped of polluting sulfur compounds and mercury, which it then burns to generate electricity. Carbon dioxide emissions from the process are 20 percent lower than those produced by a traditional coal-fired power plant.

And renewable sources of power, which account for 11 percent of all co-op electricity, are as unique and varied as the co-ops using them. In the Southeast, biomass generation—using everything from peanut shells to chicken waste to make electricity—shows great potential. The Northwest remains awash in hydro and wave power; the Midwest boasts lots of wind; and the Southwest sees so few cloudy days that solar power becomes an easy sell.

Of course, the cheapest and cleanest power remains the power that's never generated. As a result, energy efficiency education remains at the forefront of CHEC's efforts to help consumer control costs. By offering appliance rebates, a secondary refrigerator and freezer turn-in program, low interest loans for energy efficient appliances and home energy assessments, CHEC strives to make the transition for members easy and affordable. The

vast majority of all electric co-ops, a full 92 percent, sponsor energy efficiency education programs, and 77 percent offer residential energy audits to their members.

Electric co-ops are hard at work keeping electricity reliable, safe, and affordable—and we can produce it cleaner, too. But we need Congress to make sure electric bills stay affordable. Through the Our Energy, Our Future™ grassroots campaign, you can help out in this effort by asking your U.S. representative and senators to work with co-ops on affordability concerns as they hash out energy legislation. Please join the conversation today by visiting www.ourenergy.coop.