

Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY Cooperative

February 2026 NEWS

OCONTO ELECTRIC
CEC
COOPERATIVE

THE FEMA EMERGENCY

SUPPLY CHAIN STILL A CHALLENGE

COME HAVE A PIECE OF CAKE

KIDS AND CRITTERS





Invest your
spare change
 on the
community you love

A local family loses their home in an early morning fire. A Scout needs supplies to finish an Eagle Scout project. A young couple struggles with the financial strain of their child's medical condition. A local food pantry needs help filling its shelves.

You hear stories like these often. What do they all have in common? Thanks to Oconto Electric Cooperative's Community Change program, the answer is simple: help when it's needed most.

The mission.

How can one person make a difference in their community? By joining the Community Change program. Members can voluntarily "round up" their electric bill and contribute just a few cents each month to support local causes.

How it works.

When you participate, your monthly bill is rounded up to the nearest dollar, and those extra cents go directly into the Community Change fund.

For example:

If your bill is \$71.60, it will round up to \$72.00, with the additional \$0.40 deposited into the fund.

- Average annual donation per member: about \$6
- Maximum annual donation: \$11.88
- Tax-deductible: Yes

Want to do more? You can make a one-time donation or add a specific amount each month—such as rounding up plus an extra \$2.

Small change. Big difference.

Your contribution might be just a penny, but never more than 99 cents. (99501) Every cent is pooled together to help local nonprofit and charitable organizations. Collectively, we can make a big impact.

How are funds used?

The Community Change Board of Directors—seven volunteer Oconto Electric members—meets quarterly to review applications. Grants are awarded based on available funds and alignment with program guidelines.

100% of donations go directly to grants.

2026 Board of Directors:

Mark Higgins (President), Penny Hemle (Vice President), Pam Langlay (Secretary/Treasurer), Virgie Damp, Dick Gilles, Lynn Jones and we are currently filling the last seat.

How do I sign up?

Call 920-846-2816 or check the box on the back of your energy bill.

LIVING THE CO-OP SPIRIT: OEC'S COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

At Oconto Electric Cooperative (OEC), the seventh cooperative principle—Commitment to Community—is more than a guideline; it's a way of life. For over two decades, OEC employees have embraced this principle with passion and purpose, making a lasting impact on the communities they serve.

It all began in 2004, when OEC employees awarded their very first donation to the Community Healthcare Foundation (HSHS St. Clare) to help fund an MRI unit. That single act of generosity sparked a tradition of giving that continues to grow stronger each year. Since then, the OEC Employee Charity has proudly awarded \$226,500 to local charities and organizations—proof that small acts of kindness can create big waves of change.

These grants are made possible through the dedication of OEC employees, creative fundraising efforts, and the support of CoBank, one of OEC's trusted lenders. Through CoBank's Sharing Success Grant Program, employee contributions are matched, doubling the impact and extending the reach of every dollar.

In 2025 alone, OEC's generosity touched lives across the region:



Oconto Area Humane Society received \$5,000, helping provide care and shelter for animals in need.

Lena Volunteer Fire Department was awarded \$4,000 for critical safety equipment used during car accidents—protecting both first responders and the community.

Shawano Menominee Resiliency Coalition received \$5,000 to support individuals struggling with addiction or in recovery, while working to reduce stigma and create safe, supportive resources.

Oconto County School Supply Drive was granted \$6,000, ensuring that children from families facing financial hardship start the school year with the tools they need to succeed.

These stories reflect the heart of OEC: neighbors helping neighbors, building stronger communities together.

As we step into 2026, OEC looks forward to continuing this tradition of giving. Grant applications are now open and can be found at [www.ocontoelectric.com](http://www.ocontolectric.com). The deadline to apply is February 28, 2026.

Because at OEC, we believe that when we invest in our communities, we invest in a brighter future for us all.



Beat the Peak: How Shifting Your Energy Use Helps Everyone

If you look around your home, chances are you have more devices and appliances plugged in than ever before. From smart gadgets to everyday essentials, our connected lives depend on electricity to keep things running smoothly. At the same time, as demand for electricity rises, Oconto Electric Cooperative works hard to deliver reliable power 24/7—no matter what challenges come our way.

So, what can you do to help? It starts with understanding peak demand and how small changes in your routine can make a big difference.

What Does "Beat the Peak" Mean—and Why Should You Care?

"Beat the peak" is a call to action for members to reduce electricity use during times of highest demand. When everyone uses less energy during these peak periods, it eases strain on the electric grid, helps your cooperative manage costs, and can even lower your bill. Check out our load management and time-of-use programs on-line at www.ocontoelectric.com. It's a win-win for you and your community.

When Are Peak Times?

Peak times vary by utility, but they typically occur:

Morning: When we're getting ready for the day—turning

on lights, cooking breakfast, and adjusting thermostats.

Evening: When we return home—running dishwashers, doing laundry, and preparing dinner.

Demand spikes even higher during extreme cold, when heating systems work overtime to keep homes warm.

How Can You Shift Your Load?

The goal is simple: spread out your energy use instead of stacking it all at once. Here are a few easy tips:

Delay the dishwasher: Many models have a "delay start" feature—set it to run after bedtime.

Stagger chores: Avoid washing dishes, doing laundry, and cooking at the same time.

Watch hot water use: Running lots of hot water makes your water heater work harder, increasing energy demand.

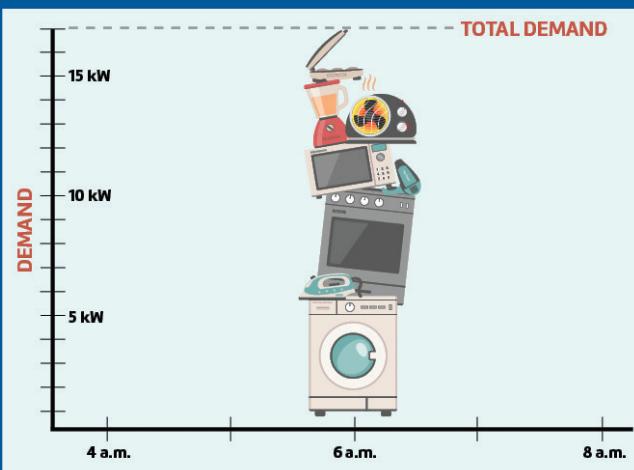
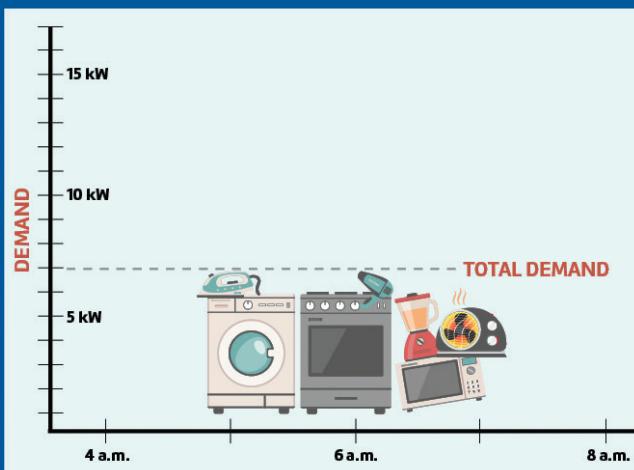
Why Does It Matter?

When demand rises, so does the cost of power. By reducing your use during peak times, you help keep market prices lower for everyone and reduce stress on the grid. It's a simple way to support your cooperative and your neighbors.

Remember: Small changes add up. Shifting energy-intensive tasks to off-peak hours is a smart choice for your wallet—and for the entire community.

WHAT IS DEMAND?

Demand is the amount of power needed to supply every electrical device running in your home or business at a specific point in time.



Using multiple electric appliances at the same time increases the demand for electricity on the grid and, therefore, increases the cost of the wholesale power for everyone.



The instructor demonstrates the correct technique for bandaging an arm wound on a lineman during training.

Safety First at Oconto Electric Cooperative

At Oconto Electric Cooperative, safety isn't just a priority—it's a core value. Recently, our dedicated line crews renewed their CPR and First Aid certifications, ensuring they're prepared to respond in any emergency situation.

Our linemen often work in remote areas where access to emergency services can be challenging. In those critical moments, having the skills to assist a co-worker can make all the difference. This training reinforces our commitment to protecting not only our employees but also our members and the communities we serve.

We're proud of our team for going above and beyond to keep safety at the forefront of everything they do. Their dedication helps ensure that everyone goes home safely at the end of the day. Thank you to our crews for your hard work and commitment to excellence!

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Enrolling in autodraft payments with your utility provider can help prevent certain types of utility bill scams. If a scammer contacts you with fake disconnection threats, you can rest easy knowing your bill is paid automatically through a pre-arranged, secure channel. Autodraft payments also eliminate the risk of exposing checks and personal banking info through the mail. If your utility offers autodraft payments, consider enrolling to stay on track and avoid certain scams. (501300)

Source: AARP



HIDDEN ACCOUNT NUMBERS

Oconto Electric Cooperative hides two account numbers in the local pages of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* each month. If you spot your account number, call our office before you receive the next issue, and OEC will give you a \$15 credit on your electric bill or a \$25 credit if you have a load management receiver. The January account numbers belonged to Greg Virtues, Little Suamico and John and Sue OConnor, Shawano.



Ryan Miller, CEO

Katie Jagiello, Communications and Marketing

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www.ocontolectric.com

Hours of Operation: 7:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Hours of Lobby: 9:00 a.m.– 3 p.m. Friday

Non-emergencies: 920-846-2816

Emergencies & outages: Toll FREE 800-472-8410
24 hours a day, 7 days a week