

# Tideland Topics

REAL PEOPLE. REAL POWER.

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBER-OWNERS OF TIDELAND ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION

## 99 PROBLEMS? Paying your electric bill doesn't have to be one

Truth be told, your odds of selecting the winning Carolina Pick Five lottery numbers are probably on par with guessing the amount of your next electric bill. That has been one of the drawbacks of traditional post-paid utility billing. Imagine for a moment that you drove your car

With the introduction of FlexPay you now have the option of joining more than 20 million consumers worldwide who have embraced pre-paid electric service. Many Tideland members already utilize pre-paid cell phone services and our FlexPay program operates on the same premise.



for an entire month on a seemingly endless tank of gas only to be presented with one cumulative fuel bill weeks later. What were once manageable weekly fillups could quickly become a household budget crisis. Until now you had no choice but to do just that where your electric bill was concerned. And sometimes it isn't until the arrival of the monthly electric bill that runaway energy consumption is detected due to equipment malfunctions or downed ductwork.

Service activation doesn't require a credit check or security deposit. All that's required to participate in FlexPay is a starting \$25 prepaid balance and either a cell phone or email that can receive routine updates regarding your FlexPay balance. While not required, we also recommend that FlexPay participants have a way to make a payment after normal business hours via phone or online service.

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## *E-check is here*

Save time and the cost of postage by paying your bill with an electronic check! Tideland EMC members can now use the online member portal or 24-hour automated phone system to pay by e-Check.

Before using this payment method you will need to create an e-Check profile by entering the routing number and account number associated with your checking or savings account. You can do that online or by calling a member service representative at 1.800.637.1079.

Keep in mind that returned check fees apply to e-Check transactions just like paper checks so make sure funds are available at the time of payment.

e-Check. One more way Tideland EMC is working to meet your needs.



## Right-of-Way Maintenance Update

In November our contractors, Lucas Tree Experts, will be trimming trees in the Dawson Creek and Silverhill areas of Pamlico County.

Mowing crews will be working between the co-op's Five Points substation in Pinetown towards Plymouth. This will include Liverman Heights, Hwy. 32 and Long Ridge Road.

Please lend your full support to our tree trimming efforts. Trees are the number one cause of power outages.

## Message to our Member-Owners: The advent of FlexPay

By Paul Spruill  
General Manager & CEO

Months of teamwork have finally resulted in the rollout of the cooperative's new FlexPay program. This represents an exciting new chapter in Tideland's service history as we seek to evolve to meet the changing needs of a more technologically savvy co-op member who increasingly expects service to be in keeping with his or her lifestyle.

The prepaid service concept has been on our radar for quite sometime. In fact, the ability to provide such a service was factored into our decision to replace our meters systemwide in 2010 and 2011 to provide the type of data and communications needed to implement FlexPay.

Even if you don't personally utilize FlexPay, you can still reap the benefits of that data infrastructure, which allows you to access both your hourly and daily meter readings via our secure online member portal. All Tideland members can also opt-in for service alerts and reminders to notify you when transactions take place or when daily energy consumption has spiked.

Throughout this month's magazine we have feature benefited the perks of FlexPay for individual consumers. We've also outlined some of the condi-

tions that won't make FlexPay a one-size-fits-all program.

But there are advantages to the entire membership from a financial point of view. Increasingly we have found that existing security deposits are not necessarily adequate to cover the potential indebtedness associated with a post-paid account. To the greatest extent possible we want to insulate all members from expenses associated with uncollectible balances, but when we can't recoup those unpaid charges the costs are shared by remaining members. By the same token to increase security deposits with no service plan alternative could potentially dissuade consumers from moving onto our system which would also hurt our co-op which already has some of the lowest meter-per-mile-of-line ratios in the state.

So FlexPay is a win-win for all Tideland EMC members, participants and non-participants alike. The launch of this new service demonstrates our continuing commitment to pursue responsible and innovative business solutions that always put people first.



## Before moving, research energy costs

The excitement of moving into a new home can quickly wear off when the first energy bills arrive. Unfortunately, many folks fail to research the energy cost history of a new residence before signing the lease or going to closing. That's why Tideland EMC recommends you do your homework beforehand. Electric and natural gas utilities maintain records related to a home's average monthly bills. In the case of propane or home heating oil providers you'll want to make sure you request an annual history since those purchases may not be billed monthly. Once satisfied the energy bills will be manageable you can truly say, "Home Sweet Home."



## Quick Fall Tips

### Free Heat Can't Be Beat

Open curtains on your south-facing windows during the day to allow sunlight to naturally heat your home, and close them at night to reduce the chill you may feel from cold windows.

### Windows of Opportunity

Make sure windows, including storm windows, are closed and locked.

Remove window air conditioning units during fall/winter so you can completely close windows.

Still drafty? Use a heavy-duty, clear plastic to cover windows. Most hardware stores sell plastic storm window kits that shrink when heated with a hair dryer to ensure air tightness.

### Put Heat Pumps On Cruise Control

If you have a heat pump it is important not to play with the thermostat during winter. Raising the temperature more than 2° could activate expensive strip heat. So pick the lowest comfortable temperature, then set it and forget it.

### How Low Can You Go?

If you have an electric furnace or baseboard heat we recommend thermostat setback whenever possible and the temperature should never be over 68°.

### Search and Destroy: Air Leaks

Seal air leaks around utility cut-throughs for pipes ("plumbing penetrations") and wires, gaps around chimneys and recessed lights in insulated ceilings, and unfinished spaces behind cupboards and closets.

Add caulk or weatherstripping to seal air leaks around leaky doors and windows.

### Tune Up to Trim Down

It's important to have your heating system routinely inspected to make sure it is in tip-top shape and to prevent premature failure.

Filters should be changed monthly and avoid the use of pleated filters which can restrict air flow and damage the unit.

### Up, Up and Away....Not Ok

Keep your fireplace damper closed unless a fire is burning. An open damper is like a wide open window allowing warm air to go right up the chimney.

When you use the fireplace, reduce heat loss by opening dampers in the bottom of the firebox (if provided) or open the nearest window slightly -- approximately 1 inch -- and close doors leading into the room. Lower the thermostat setting to between 50° and 55°F.

If you do use the fireplace, install tempered glass doors and a heat-air exchange system that blows warmed air back into the room.

Purchase grates made of C-shaped metal tubes to draw cool room air into the fireplace and circulate warm air back into the room.

### Money Down the Drain?

Water heating can account for 14% to 25% of monthly energy costs. Turn down the temperature of your water heater to the warm setting (120°F).

1.

### Energy Star® Lighting

41% return on investment

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By prepaying energy purchases, FlexPay participants are exempt from late payment penalties as well as non-payment disconnect and reconnect fees. Over time those fees can add to the challenge of trying to catch up on household bills.

FlexPay participants do not receive a monthly electric bill. Instead they receive routine text or email alerts and reminders so they know how much energy they've used and when it is time to "recharge" their account. Minimum payment transactions are set at \$10 so if you want to pay once a day, once a week or once a month on your account it's entirely up to you. And we don't charge a transaction fee!

Studies show that prepaid metering programs offer another benefit that can result in significant savings. As FlexPay users begin to learn more about their household energy use and can tie it directly back to costs they generally find ways to improve conservation and energy efficiency efforts. On average, FlexPay users will reduce energy consumption 7 to 12 percent annually. After

all when you realize that a quick shower costs alot less than a long, hot bubble bath you may decide the latter just isn't worth the few extra pennies.

On the other hand, FlexPay is not for everyone. It is only available to residential non-demand billed accountholders. If you participate in the co-op's bank or credit card draft programs or are enrolled in a budget or leveled payment plan you won't be able to utilize Flex-Pay. If you currently have a weatherization loan with Tideland you can't opt in to FlexPay until the loan has been satisfied. If you've ever been assessed a meter tampering fee you won't qualify either.

Want to learn more about FlexPay? You can read the FlexPay member agreement in its entirety by visiting [www.tidelandemc.com](http://www.tidelandemc.com). Or you may visit any Tideland EMC office or call us at 1.800.637.1079 and a member service representative will be happy to answer your questions and get your FlexPay enrollment underway.



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[www.tidelandemc.com](http://www.tidelandemc.com)

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Member Service  
252.943.3046  
800.637.1079

24 Hour Outage Reporting  
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252.944.2400  
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# DON'T BE SCAMMED.

Scam artists are only interested in one thing: taking your money.

Telephone scammers recently convinced a Tideland member to purchase a prepaid debit card in order to make an immediate payment on his account. They threatened to disconnect his electric service in 30 minutes unless he transmitted the funds. However, **Tideland EMC does not demand payment using prepaid debit cards.** These prepaid cards are as good as cash, and have become popular with scam artists.

Consumers are tricked into sending information so predators can load up their own prepaid cards with the victim's cash. The funds are available immediately and no real protection is offered to the victim, as is the case with credit cards. **If you are suspicious of a similar scam, call Tideland at 800.637.1079** to speak with a member service representative anytime day or night.

