

# cooperative **REVIEW**

for members of Southern  
Maryland Electric Cooperative



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*Registration for the fifth annual SMECO 75 Bike Ride is now open. Read more on page 6.*

## SMECO files for rate restructure

In October 2015, we published an article notifying customer-members that SMECO filed a request with the Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) to restructure and increase its Distribution Service rates—the first such request in more than five years. If approved, new rates are expected to take effect in March 2016.

SMECO's Distribution Service rates cover the cost of utility equipment, substations, poles, transformers, and conductor, as well as employees, vehicles, and facilities: all necessary to carry electricity to your home.

In January, when this article was written, the PSC was considering a Distribution Charge of \$0.04336 (4.34 cents) per kWh for residential customers; the current charge is 3.606 cents. The Facilities Charge, which has not changed in more than 20 years, is currently \$8.60. The PSC was considering an increase of just 90 cents per month.

Although the Distribution Charge is increasing, Standard Offer Service (SOS) energy

charges have decreased over the past few years. Because energy charges are lower, a residential customer's overall bill for March 2016 will be just a few dollars higher than March 2015 (only \$3 more for a bill of 1,300 kilowatt-hours).

SMECO has undertaken some major construction projects in the past five years to help strengthen the Cooperative's delivery system and enhance service reliability. The Southern Maryland Reliability Project, which was completed in November 2014 at a cost of \$108 million, epitomizes SMECO's focus on maintaining the highest standard of reliable service for customer-members. The 230-kilovolt loop through our service territory was first proposed in the 1970s, and we expect it to provide enough capacity to see us through the next 50 years.

SMECO's rate change does not affect SOS energy charges, which make up more than 60 percent of the average residential customer bill. That portion of the customer bill has decreased over the past few years, hitting a 10-year low in June 2015. SMECO makes no profit on SOS energy charges. The wholesale price that SMECO pays for power is passed on to customers without any mark-up.

As a non-profit electric cooperative, revenue from our customers' bills generates the working capital required to continue providing the most reliable service possible. Net margins not required for working capital are passed back to our customer-members in the form of Capital Credits.

We know customers are sensitive to cost increases, and SMECO works hard to keep rates low. Coupled with SMECO's efforts to manage distribution and energy charges, customer-members can manage their electric bill by taking advantage of the energy saving programs we offer and reducing their energy use.

SMECO's goal from the beginning has been to bring our customer-members—our owners—reliable electric service at a reasonable rate. As the infrastructure of our electric system is replaced and expanded, SMECO continues to focus on providing that reliability.

# PowerClerk makes solar application paperless

Interest in renewable energy is expanding. More than 1,500 SMECO customer-members have net meters and the interest continues to grow.

Net metering includes solar, wind, or biomass generating systems. Residential or commercial customer members who want to generate their own electricity can participate in SMECO's net metering (generator interconnection) program. All installations must be registered and approved by SMECO to properly interconnect to the Cooperative's electric system.

To participate, customer-members must submit an application to SMECO detailing the proposed interconnection. In January 2016, the co-op launched a new web-based tool, PowerClerk, that makes that application process quicker and easier—the entire process is now electronic.

By putting the process online, SMECO can receive applications more quickly, reduce errors, and reduce the time and costs associated with interconnection completions. In addition, applicants can now track the status of their submission electronically. In order to set up an account, visit **[smecointerconnection.powerclerk.com](http://smecointerconnection.powerclerk.com)**. You will need a valid email address to set up an account and use this feature.

Not sure if solar is for you? Use the online, self-service tool, WattPlan, to receive an estimate for the potential of a rooftop solar array at your home or office.

To use WattPlan, visit **[smeco.wattplan.com](http://smeco.wattplan.com)**. Once there, simply enter your address, input your average monthly bill, and see what you get. WattPlan will suggest the number of solar panels and provide an estimate of annual kWh production and your estimated annual electric bill savings. (The figures shown are estimates only.)

SMECO wants to help you achieve your net metering goals.

# Cook up appliance savings in the kitchen

In the kitchen, the refrigerator is typically the biggest energy user unless the homeowner uses the oven frequently.

Many things you can do to make your refrigerator its most efficient are listed below.

- If the unit is older than 10 years, consider replacing it with an ENERGY STAR® model.

Updating old appliances can save quite a bit of money each month. For instance, a 22-cubic-foot, side-by-side refrigerator that is 20 years old has a typical wattage of 185. Running 24 hours a day, this refrigerator would cost \$17.72 a month on average. That same refrigerator, brand new, would have a typical wattage of 76. Running 24 hours a day, it would only cost \$7.28 per month on average.

- Look for refrigerators with freezers either on top or bottom—they use less electricity than the side-by-side models.
- Avoid through-the-door icemakers and water dispensers; they can increase energy use by 14 to 20 percent.
- Keep refrigerators and freezers set to their recommended temperatures. The recommended temperature for the refrigerator is between 35 to 38 degrees Fahrenheit and it is 0 degrees Fahrenheit for freezers.
- Check the seals on refrigerator doors to make sure they are airtight. To test them, open the door and place a piece of paper halfway in and out. Close the door and pull the paper. If it comes out easily, the seal is not tight enough. Another way to test the seal is to look for light through the door seal with the door closed and the room dark.

If the seal fails the paper test, try cleaning the seal with a clean, damp cloth and then use a dry cloth to wipe the same area. Check the seal for tears while cleaning it. Perform the paper test again. If it fails a second time, it would be advisable to replace the seals to prevent warm outside air from getting into the fridge.

- Cover liquids and keep leftovers wrapped tight to reduce moisture levels in the refrigerator.

Reducing moisture levels will reduce run time.

- Regularly defrost the freezer so that ice does not build up more than a quarter of an inch.
- Clean the coils behind or under the unit annually.
- Do not put the refrigerator near a heat source, such as an oven, dishwasher, or even direct sunlight. If you do, the refrigerator will have to work harder to maintain cool temperatures. If the kitchen design limits you to installing the refrigerator adjacent to a heat source, place a sheet of foam insulation between them.



### **Rebates are available**

ENERGY STAR certified refrigerators are approximately 9 to 10 percent more energy efficient than models that only meet the federal minimum efficiency standard. According to [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov), more than 60 million refrigerators in the United States are over 10 years old, which costs consumers \$4.7 billion a year in energy costs. Replacing your old refrigerator with an ENERGY STAR certified model will not only save on energy use, available rebates may put money back in your pocket.

As part of the EmPOWER Maryland program, SMECO offers \$100 to \$150 in rebates on ENERGY STAR certified appliances.

**Getting the rebate is easy.** Visit [smeco.coop/appliances](http://smeco.coop/appliances) to review the program terms and conditions listed in the rebate form. Once you buy the qualified item from a Maryland retailer, you can submit your rebate form with the product's proof of purchase. You can also visit the online store, [smeco.coop/shop](http://smeco.coop/shop), to find appliances that qualify for rebates. Refrigerators must be larger than 10 cubic feet to qualify for a rebate.

# Registration is now open for the fifth annual SMECO 75 Bike Ride

SMECO is hosting its fifth annual 75-mile bicycle ride beginning at the Cooperative's headquarters building in Hughesville on **June 4, 2016**.

The ride will feature a 75-mile route for experienced cyclists and two shorter routes, as well. Four rest stops will be stocked with appropriate fuel for cyclists, and lunch will be served at the finish. Participating cyclists will also receive event-themed items.

Proceeds from the ride will be donated to Melwood's "Operation: Tohidu." This program is a seven-day holistic retreat designed to help



wounded veterans and active duty military overcome obstacles to their recovery and support their successful reintegration into their homes

and communities. All monies raised will benefit military in Southern Maryland. Sponsors are the backbone of the Bike Ride's success. For any local business interested in supporting the SMECO 75 Bike Ride and Operation: Tohidu, several sponsorship levels are available.

In 2015, SMECO donated \$41,322 to three local shelters— Safe Harbor, Inc. in Calvert County, Lifestyles of Maryland—Martha's Place Transitional Home in Charles County, and Wrapping Arms Round Many (WARM) in St. Mary's County. The money was raised by the SMECO 75 Bike Ride and SMECO's annual charity golf event.

**Mark your calendars!** The SMECO 75 Bike Ride is a perfect opportunity for healthy camaraderie with your fellow customer-members. Registration is now open on [active.com](http://active.com). For more information, visit [smeco.coop/SMECO75](http://smeco.coop/SMECO75).

# High school senior scholarship applications are due by April 1

The deadline to apply for 2016 scholarships is close.

SMECO has four scholarships available to high school seniors who live with parents or guardians who are SMECO customers. Completed scholarship application packages (all items must be submitted as one package) are due by **April 1, 2016**.

They may be taken to a SMECO office or mailed to:

Attention: Bernadette Lewis, SMECO Headquarters  
P.O. Box 1937, Hughesville, MD 20637

For more information, visit [www.smeco.coop](http://www.smeco.coop), see your school career counselor, call SMECO at **1-888-440-3311, ext. 4340**, or visit a customer service desk at the SMECO office in Leonardtown or Hughesville.

## aroundTOWN

### March 8

#### SMART Medicine Presentation

Sponsor: St. Mary's County Department of Aging and Human Services

10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Northern Senior Activity Center, 29655 Charlotte Hall Road. The SMART Medicine presentation is designed for those in the 50 years old and up community. SMART Medicine is a local media campaign designed to generate awareness for the rising issue of opioid misuse and abuse in addition to providing information and resources regarding the safe management and disposal of prescription medications.

301-475-4200  
[stmarysmd.com/aging](http://stmarysmd.com/aging)

### March 17

#### Get Your IRISH On!

Sponsor: St. Mary's County Department of Aging and Human Services

11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Loffler Senior Activity Center. Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with live Irish music by David Norris. Everything green is welcome! Tickets required.

301-737-5670  
[stmarysmd.com/aging](http://stmarysmd.com/aging)

### March 20

#### Seafood Dinner

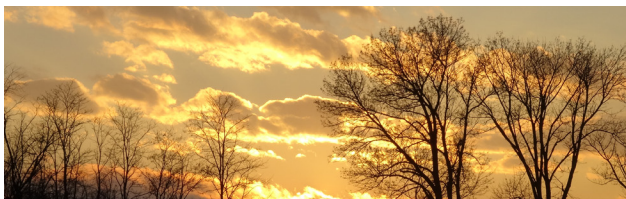
Sponsor: Holy Angels Catholic Church  
11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. 21340 Colton Point Road, Avenue. All-you-can-eat dinner served buffet style. Crab balls, steamed spiced shrimp, fried oysters, fried chicken, parsley potatoes, homemade cole slaw, old-fashioned green beans, pickled beets, rolls, fruited Jello and beverages. Children under age five are free.

### March 25

#### Good Friday

SMECO offices closed. Our Contact Center is available 24/7.

1-888-440-3311  
[smeco.coop](http://smeco.coop)



## Defrost your home

Improve the comfort level of your home and reduce energy use up to 20 percent with SMECO's Home Performance with ENERGY STAR program. Save even more with rebates up to \$4,300 for qualified improvements.

Home Performance with ENERGY STAR takes a whole-house approach to energy efficiency. Here's how it works:

1. Start with a \$100 home energy audit (a \$400 value).
2. Review recommendations and potential savings.
3. Have your participating contractor make the improvements you choose, including adding insulation, sealing air leaks, or upgrading your heating and air conditioning system or water heater.
4. Take advantage of SMECO rebates up to \$4,300 on qualifying upgrades.
5. Cozy up to increased comfort in your energy-efficient home.

### **Book your audit today.**

Visit [SMECO.coop/homeperformance](http://SMECO.coop/homeperformance) or call 877-818-4094 to find a participating contractor. Let's get started making your whole home more comfortable and energy efficient.

*This program supports the EmPOWER Maryland Energy Efficiency Act.*