

cooperative **REVIEW**

for members of Southern
Maryland Electric Cooperative



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SMECO will be installing smart meters in 2017

Throughout 2017, SMECO's contractor, Utility Partners of America (UPA), will be installing smart meters to all customer-members in the service area. All new homes and businesses will get a smart meter beginning in mid-December. If an existing meter needs to be exchanged, the old meter will be replaced with a smart meter.

Smart meters are digital electronic meters capable of two-way communications. Having two-way communications enables SMECO to offer you key benefits, including the ability for SMECO to respond to outages more quickly and effectively so we can do our best to meet our members' needs.



Have questions about smart meters? Read the answers to frequently asked questions on page 4.

Installation

- SMECO currently has 17,000 smart meters installed throughout the service area.
- During 2017, UPA will install approximately 14,000 meters per month.
- You will receive a postcard and brochure prior to your meter exchange.
- It's important that customer-members provide the installer with safe access to the meter.

Clear any obstructions, including bushes that need to be trimmed, items that need to be moved, or gates that need to be unlocked. Also keep pets away from the meter so installers have safe access.

- The day that UPA arrives to install the new meter, they will knock on your door to let you know about the meter exchange. Your power will be out for 5 to 10 minutes.
- SMECO will update its website to show where meter installations are scheduled.

Options

Residential and small commercial customers who would like to opt out of receiving the new smart meters can call SMECO at 1-888-440-3311.

- Those who choose to opt out will be charged an initial fee of \$75 and a monthly fee of \$17.
- Customers who allow SMECO to install a smart meter at their home or business aren't charged an additional fee.
- Even if you opt out of receiving a smart meter, you will still receive a new digital meter. SMECO is in the process of upgrading its technology to better serve all of its customer-members. Many of the existing electric meters are 35 to 40 years old, so the cooperative is using this transition as an opportunity to remove the existing meter, review the condition of the meter base and service conductors, and install a standard digital meter.

Safe, smart, and secure

Smart meters will help SMECO and its members work together toward a smarter energy future. We can work together to reduce energy use, to improve the reliability of our electric system, and to increase the efficiency of our operations. Smart meters communicate by telling SMECO how much energy you use, when your power goes out and when it comes back on, when voltage is too high, and when voltage is too low.

Smart

- Smart meters improve efficiency because they reduce the time it takes to read meters from hours to minutes. Automated capabilities can curtail unnecessary trips, eliminate travel time, save gas, reduce emissions, and provide an immediate response.

- Smart meters save money on operational costs for labor and transportation and they increase employee safety.
- Smart meters increase reliability because they report power problems and outages when they occur, providing SMECO with the data needed to enhance customer service.

Secure

- Smart meters measure the energy use of the whole house, just like a standard meter. Smart meters cannot measure the energy use of individual appliances in your house, and SMECO's smart meters cannot be used to control your appliances.
- Smart meters employ several techniques to enforce security, including data encryption, and they operate on SMECO's secure and private radio network.
- Your privacy is protected. SMECO currently has cyber security plans and privacy policies in place to protect customer data. And, because your privacy is important to us, SMECO's privacy policy prevents customer data from being sold to a third party.

Safe

- SMECO's smart meters use radio waves to communicate with a brief pulse—less than five seconds per day.
- To transmit data, smart meters use very low wattage, much less than a cell phone, cordless phone, or baby monitor.
- When a smart meter transmits data, most of the output is directed away from the house, and as the distance increases, the signal strength decreases.

Questions?

If you have any questions, please call our customer care representatives at 1-888-440-3311 or visit smeco.coop/gettingsmarter. SMECO will also be holding open houses.

- Prince Frederick open house: January 26, 2017
- Leonardtown open house: February 9, 2017
- Hughesville open house: February 23, 2017

For detailed information on the open houses, please see the back cover of this newsletter.

Frequently asked smart meter questions

Why is SMECO installing smart meters?

SMECO is in the process of upgrading its metering technology to better serve customers. Many of our existing electric meters are 35 to 40 years old. Smart meters offer a number of benefits, including more detailed bill information and the ability to respond to outages more quickly and effectively.

When will smart meters be installed?

SMECO will install smart meters at nearly all customer homes and businesses by the end of 2017.

What will change with the new meter?

After smart meters are installed, SMECO will no longer send someone to your home to read the meter. We will read meters remotely from our central office.

What if I don't want a smart meter installed?

If you want to opt out of SMECO's smart meter installation, contact SMECO at 1-888-440-3311. You will then receive a letter confirming your choice to opt out and explaining the cost. You will be charged an initial fee of \$75 and a monthly fee of \$17.

Customers who allow SMECO to install a smart meter at their home or business aren't charged an additional fee.

Only residential and small commercial customers with single-phase service may opt out.

If I opt out, what will SMECO install?

All meters will be exchanged—even if you opt out. SMECO will remove the existing meter, review the condition of the meter base and service conductors, and install a standard digital meter.

Will any of SMECO's meter readers lose their jobs?

No. SMECO has been using a contracted firm, Scope Services, to read meters since 2010. SMECO meter readers have received additional training to perform other duties and have been reassigned to other positions.

For additional information, visit smeco.coop/gettingsmarter.



Tips to save money this winter

One of the key tips to saving energy over the winter months is to know the type of heating system you have and maintain it properly. Try the tips below for more ways to help you save energy and money during the winter months.

- Have an energy audit performed on your home to check for air leaks and to check insulation levels. A tight and well-insulated house will make you feel more comfortable and will reduce energy costs. SMECO offers the discounted Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® program, which takes a comprehensive look at your home to determine opportunities for savings.
- Weatherize your home to keep conditioned air in—air leaks are the biggest culprit in making homes uncomfortable—use weather stripping, caulk, spray foam, and clear plastic to seal drafts in the winter.
- Open curtains and blinds during the day to let the sun shine in. Use cellular blinds and insulated curtains to add to overall comfort and R-value.
- Limit the use of exhaust fans during winter months and prevent the house from becoming too dry.
- Insulate your attic to at least R-38. A clue to know how well insulated your attic is? If snow melts quickly from the roof, you don't have enough insulation. A Quick Home Energy Check-up will assess insulation levels as part of the professional walk-through.

Remember that energy use varies based on many factors, including the amount of insulation and the type of heating system in the home. Adjusting your energy use on cold days can help control winter electric bills. Find more ways to save this winter at smeco.coop/save-energy-and-money.

Prepare for higher electric bills as it gets colder

As temperatures outside drop, electric bills rise. Heating and cooling costs are usually the biggest part of your electric bill, accounting for up to two-thirds of your usage. When it gets cold, energy usage increases. When energy usage increases, electric bills go up.

Knowing the type of heating and cooling system you have, how the system works, and how to properly maintain it will help you get the most efficiency from your system. The most common type of heating system in the local area is an air source heat pump.

A heat pump system transfers heat from one location to another. In the winter, heat from outside is pumped through the unit and distributed through the house.

Heat pump systems need to be serviced annually by an HVAC technician to operate at peak efficiency. Here are some additional tips to get the most efficient service from your system:

- Clean or change filters once a month, or as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Never set thermostat to emergency heat unless the outdoor unit stops working, then call your HVAC technician immediately.
- Keep thermostat heat settings at one temperature. The recommended setting for winter is 68°F.
- Heat pumps need to breathe, so keep all vents open and free from blockages inside the home.
- Keep the outdoor unit free from snow and ice.
- Keep plants, shrubs, and other obstacles at least two feet away from the outside unit.
- Replace older thermostats with programmable models—ask your HVAC technician which will work best.

Other common heating systems include gas or oil systems, which generate heat from a furnace or boiler. A furnace heats the air and blows it through heat ducts to the registers or grilles in the home. A boiler heats water, and the water is circulated through pipes to radiators or baseboards.

Getting the most efficient use out of a gas or oil system requires some maintenance, as well.

- Keep radiators or convectors clean.
- Replace or clean the filter on a forced-air system at least once a month.
- Check flue and chimney for possible obstruction and have cleaned, if necessary.
- Have oil furnaces serviced yearly by a trained technician.
- Have gas furnaces serviced every two years by a trained service technician.

Keep safety in mind, too. A poorly maintained or malfunctioning gas or oil furnace can produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide. It is recommended that any home with a gas or oil system have a carbon monoxide detector.

Electric baseboard heating systems use resistance heating like electric stoves and space heaters. This is the most expensive form of heating, so use it as sparingly as possible. Turn off baseboard heaters in unoccupied rooms.

Knowing the type of heating system you have and maintaining it properly will help you save energy and money as the weather turns cold.

aroundTOWN

January 2

New Year's Day

SMECO offices closed. Our Customer Care Center is available 24/7.

1-888-440-3311
www.smeco.coop

January 15

American Legion Bluegrass Concert Series: Lonesome River Band

Sponsor: Sons of the American Legion

2 to 5 p.m. American Legion Post 238, intersection of Routes 231 and 381, Hughesville. Includes 50/50 raffles and door prizes. Doors open at noon with dinner special. Show begins at 2 p.m.

301-737-3004
americanlegionbluegrass.com

January 16

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

SMECO offices closed. Our Customer Care Center is available 24/7.

1-888-440-3311
www.smeco.coop

January 28

Appraiser's Fair at St. Clement's Island Museum

Sponsor: St. Mary's County Museum Division

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. 38370 Point Breeze Road, Colton's Point. Appraisers for jewelry, furniture, glassware, pottery, artwork, music boxes, and coins will be available to evaluate antiques and collectibles. Cost. Only bring items that can be hand-carried. Space is limited; items viewed on first-come, first-served basis.

301-769-2222



Learn more about smart meters at an open house

Any customer-member who would like to learn more about SMECO's smart meters is invited to stop by an open house. (Events may be rescheduled based on weather.)

Prince Frederick

January 26, 2017

Calvert County Library*
850 Costley Way
Prince Frederick, MD 20678

4 to 7 p.m.

Leonardtown

February 9, 2017

SMECO's Leonardtown Office
23365 Hollywood Road
Leonardtown, MD 20650

4 to 7 p.m.

Hughesville

February 23, 2017

SMECO's Hughesville Office
15035 Burnt Store Road
Hughesville, MD 20637-1937

4 to 7 p.m.

Learn more by calling **1-888-440-3311**
or at **smeco.coop/gettingsmarter**.

**This is not a library-sponsored event.*