
The Impact of Coronavirus on Electric Co-ops

As the coronavirus situation evolves, electric co-ops should be prepared to answer questions from consumer-members, policymakers and media outlets. The questions below are examples that co-ops should expect to answer when engaging in conversations about the evolving COVID-19 situation. Many of these questions are best answered by each co-op, based on your specific circumstances. However, to promote message consistency and support your planning efforts, sample answers are provided on subsequent pages.

1. The electric industry thrives on predictability – knowing where and when electricity is most needed. How are co-ops prepared to maintain reliable service without knowing the full impact, duration and intensity of the coronavirus outbreak?
2. What steps are you taking to make sure that key infrastructure such as hospitals and first responders don't go dark during this outbreak?
3. How can consumers pay their bill if they can't work due to the coronavirus? Will your co-op suspend disconnections for the duration of the Coronavirus outbreak? Why or why not?
4. What steps can consumers take to control their energy usage and their bill as they spend more time at home?
5. What steps have electric co-ops taken to slow the spread of COVID-19 among the workforce and in the communities they serve?
6. What challenges are you seeing as you work to plan ahead for the next 30 – 60 days?
7. What health and safety protocols have you implemented to protect your workforce from the impact of the virus?
8. As engineers, lineworkers and key staff fall ill, self-isolate, or stay at home to care for sick family members, how are co-ops going to address reduced staffing levels, particularly in critical positions?
9. If a storm blows through and causes a significant power outage, how will co-ops respond? How has this situation changed your mutual assistance plans?
10. What additional support do you need from local, state and federal officials?

Sample Messages

1. The electric industry thrives on predictability – knowing where and when electricity is most needed. How are co-ops prepared to maintain reliable service without knowing the full impact, duration and intensity of the coronavirus outbreak?
 - Electric co-ops have a strong track record of preparing for a variety of emergencies that could impact the ability to generate and deliver electricity to one in eight Americans. For weeks, electric co-ops have taken proactive steps to prepare for the evolving coronavirus challenges while maintaining their commitment to the members and communities they serve.
 - This situation is unique from other business continuity planning, but many co-ops have pandemic plans that they are putting into action. Co-ops are working with their business partners to prepare to operate with a smaller workforce, potential disruptions in the supply chain, and limited support services for an extended period of time. They are taking steps to ensure critical staff are available for the duration of this situations.
2. What steps are you taking to make sure that key infrastructure such as hospitals and first responders don't go dark during this outbreak?
 - Ensuring continued power reliability is paramount for electric cooperatives, especially for critical facilities and services and members with specific medical needs. We are working hand-in-hand with the electric cooperative network, local industry and government leaders to ensure energy operations and infrastructure continue to be supported without disruption.
3. How can consumers pay their bill if they can't work due to the coronavirus? Will your co-op suspend disconnections for the duration of the coronavirus outbreak? Why or why not?
 - Co-ops are focused on supporting their local community and are working to help families and businesses have the tools they need over the coming months. In light of the evolving COVID-19 situation, many electric cooperatives have voluntarily suspended disconnections and waived late payment fees as one way to support their members during this time.
4. What steps can consumers take to control their energy usage and their bill as they spend more time at home?
 - Electric co-ops constantly work with consumers to reduce their monthly bill. That hasn't changed. Consumers concerned about increased energy usage during this time should contact their co-op or visit their co-op's website for specific energy efficiency and usage recommendations.
5. What steps have electric co-ops taken to slow the spread of COVID-19 among the workforce and in the communities they serve?

- In response to the coronavirus, many electric cooperatives have implemented their business continuity and pandemic response plans. Additional preparations to promote the health and safety of employees include:
 - Implementing increased hygiene measures.
 - Closing offices to the public or using drive-thru offices to prevent the spread of the disease.
 - Encouraging employees to telework or use video conferencing apps when able and having lineworkers take their rigs home at night and staggering trips to cooperative warehouses to avoid congregating.
 - Purchasing cots, food and supplies for essential employees in the event they need to be sequestered to ensure we are maintaining the excellent reliability of the electric grid.
 - Planning for facility and/or office decontamination if necessary.
 - Reviewing staffing needs to ensure continuity of critical business functions.
 - Implementing temperature screening protocols before entering certain areas.

6. What challenges are you seeing as you work to plan ahead for the next 30-60 days?

- Over the next several weeks, communication will be key. Proactive identification of potential challenges is vital, such as shortages of critical materials and working with electric sector mutual assistance networks to develop solutions.

7. What health and safety protocols have you implemented to protect your workforce from the impact of the virus?

- See answers to question 5.

8. As engineers, lineworkers and key staff fall ill, self-isolate, or stay at home to care for sick family members, how are co-ops going to address reduced staffing levels, particularly in critical positions?

- Many co-ops have already implemented measures to protect essential staff and mitigate any potential disruptions caused by illness, such as sheltering-in-place and increasing hygiene measures. Some co-ops have separated line crews into shifts and are taking measures to ensure there is no physical contact between the shifts.
- Lineworkers at many co-ops are taking their rigs home at night and are staggering trips to warehouses to continue social distancing best practices.

9. If a storm blows through and causes a significant power outage, how will co-ops respond? How has this situation changed your mutual assistance plans?

- Co-ops and others in the electric sector operate with a sophisticated mutual assistance program that enables the sharing of resources and expertise during emergency situations.
- Co-ops will continue to work with this mutual assistance networks to solve challenges that might arise during this time.

10. What additional support do you need from local, state and federal officials?

- Transparency and continued close coordination between co-ops, local, state and federal officials will be essential during the next several weeks. Electric cooperative are coordinating with others in the electric sector and with federal agencies to ensure situational awareness and coordinate resources that may be needed in order to manage the changes prompted by the coronavirus.