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Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

Energy diversity

Satisfying our energy appetite requires a diverse menu

HAVING TROUBLE SORTING through all the media hype? You're not alone.

We're in the middle of a green revolution in America, with towering wind turbines and bright solar arrays dominating headlines as the future of electric generation. No doubt, those technologies will certainly take on a bigger role in 'keeping the lights on.' But, despite all the media hype, they won't totally replace 'conventional' sources for producing electricity such as coal, natural gas, and nuclear power, any time soon.

To meet the growing demand for electricity, electric co-ops will continue to mix and match generation resources, finding the best way to balance environmental concerns while ensuring delivery of affordable and reliable power. And because federal climate change legislation will likely boost the price for every kilowatt generated by fuels that emit carbon dioxide — notably coal and natural gas — nuclear power may very well become an attractive option once again.

Nuclear renaissance

Nuclear power doesn't release carbon dioxide in the air. It's also reliable and steady. Availability is constant. It doesn't depend on breezes or daylight.

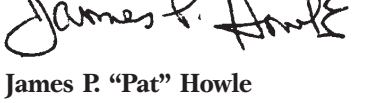
Past opposition to nuclear power was primarily due to waste and safety concerns. However, commercial nuclear reactors have been operating since the 1950s, and most problems have been worked out. In addition, other countries have jumped on the nuclear bandwagon in a big way, and perfected the technology. Over the past 40 years, for example, France has replaced all of its coal-fired power plants with nuclear power stations and in the process recycled the radioactive waste created — using it over and over again as fuel.

Time for diversity

Added construction costs imposed on nuclear plants following the Three Mile Island accident in 1979, basically put an end to that option. Utilities are, however, ready to break ground on 26 nuclear reactors in 16 states, with another 11 reactors in the planning stages. These new reactors, if built, will run much more efficiently, generate more power and boast new safety features.

With more than half of the nation's electricity being generated by coal, there is no doubt it will remain a keystone. The goal is to burn it as cleanly as possible. One of the most promising options involves carbon capture and storage (CCS). It isn't and won't be commercially viable for another decade, but it may become a cost-effective option as your electric cooperative and our sister cooperatives focus on research and development to lower costs.

Our energy future isn't a matter of one thing or another. It's going to be a mix and match of our resources. Nuclear power and clean coal are both good options for us to consider in our search for a balanced and sustainable solution!



James P. "Pat" Howle
Executive Vice President/CEO

Small lights, big savings

Edgewater does the switch to CFLs, 'green' LEDs

BY WALTER ALLREAD

THE ELEVATORS in Barefoot Landing's Edgewater community used to remind Glenn Talley of Easy-Bake Ovens.

The lighting was intense, adding unwanted heat, Talley says. Now things are way cooler, thanks to a switch to energy-efficient lighting in Edgewater, which is served by Horry Electric Cooperative. They've switched from standard incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), similar to the ones the co-op has distributed to members through its Do the Light Switch initiative.

Embracing CFLs and other efficient lighting technologies reduced Edgewater property owners' shared energy costs by an estimated $88,000 a year, according to John Laurents, who serves with Talley on the Edgewater Homeowners Association's board. The men led the charge for change to cut costs, but as Talley adds, they decided, "Edgewater is going to be green!"

Laurents notes that a professional energy audit recommended removing many fluorescent lighting ballasts in the 10 buildings' parking garages. Talley says they were careful to check with the ladies of Edgewater to make sure the garages were still adequately lit. The switch netted 60 percent energy savings, he says.

WALTER ALLREAD

Glenn Talley holds one of the 13-watt CFLs installed in Edgewater halls, replacing 60-watt incandescents.

Edgewater went even greener with special pool floodlights, which use light-emitting diode (LED) technology instead of energy-intensive — and hot! — halogens. The solid-state LEDs aren't just green in color either. LEDs use a fraction of the energy of even the energy-miserly CFLs. However, LEDs are still costly, up front at least: The floods ran about $90 each. However, Talley and Laurents note, they paid for themselves in short order. Access ledtheway.com for information on these specialty bulbs, Laurents says.

Even the CFLs used in Edgewater are not your typical off-the-shelf variety. Laurents notes that a total of 1,220 60-watt incandescent bulbs were replaced with "sophisticated 15,000-hour continuous use" CFLs. Whatever the initial cost, it's hard to argue with the bottom line and, according to Laurents, "We cut our energy costs from $213,000 a year and to about $125,000."

The Edgewater pool at sunset as LED floodlights, inset, come on. All Edgewater outdoor lighting is controlled by astronomical timers, which adjust on-off times gradually to account for seasonal lighting changes.

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