

Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Somerset REC

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Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

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814-445-4106
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Guest Column



Meter technology is like a rolling stone

By Phil Stern, *Manager of Metering*

IN 2008, Pennsylvania Act 129 was passed, requiring all large electric utilities in Pennsylvania to install smart meters. At the same time, our 20-year-old load management system was nearing its end as parts to keep it running were becoming obsolete. It was clear that our metering system needed to be brought into the 21st century.

After extensive research, the first Power Line Carrier (PLC) meter on Somerset Rural Electric lines was installed in 2009. A PLC system communicates directly over the power lines. The current PLC system has been helpful in gathering meter data for members and helps us communicate with our load management equipment. It has also been a fantastic help in locating areas where electricity has not been restored in major outages.

On average, about 96 percent of our meters communicate regularly. That sounds good on the surface, but considering we have about 13,700 of these meters, that means every month we need to drive to and physically read about 550 meters.

Noise is the Achilles' heel of PLC meters. Motor noise and even something as insignificant as a surge protector with a bad resistor inside someone's home can cause meters not to communicate over the power lines. If equipment in the field used to collect readings happens to go down during a billing cycle, that can add hundreds more meters to physically read that month.

In order to find a solution to getting consistent readings, we are starting a pilot program of Radio Frequency (RF) meters. RF meters communicate through the air, similar to those walkie-talkies we played with as kids. By communicating through the air, these meters are not restricted to simply one path of communication, which makes their success rate extremely high. RF is all around us — in the televisions, wireless internet, baby monitors, laptops and cellphones we use. It is also reassuring to note the American Cancer Society (cancer.org) recognizes these meters as harmless.

The updated system has instant outage detection notification and the infrastructure is much cheaper compared to PLC — making the decision to look into this upgraded system a no-brainer.

What was virtually the same for 50 years, the metering industry, today is rapidly changing much like a rolling stone gathers no moss. Here at the co-op, we are determined to make safe and intelligent decisions, while looking into new technology that will benefit our members.

Jack Welch, former General Electric CEO, who increased the value of GE over 4,000 percent under his direction, once said, "Change before you have to." Considering iPads were not even introduced until a year after we started our current metering system, "having to" is probably closer than we think. 

Just breathe

By Carline Mitchell

FOR SOMERSET REC member Joseph A. Hughes Jr., every breath you take is a bit more complex than most people imagine.

Hughes is the president of IAQ Training Institute, LLC (IAQTI), an environmental consulting, training and media corporation located in Central City, Pa. He is passionate about helping create a healthy indoor air environment for the air we breathe. Not only can it create health benefits, but could improve comfort levels through proper maintenance of your heating and cooling system. He has over 25 years of experience as an environmental health/safety consultant and educator. Hughes brings a real-world perspective to his courses and presentations. He has presented for hundreds of associations and organizations interested in learning about indoor environments, health and safety topics. His degree from the University of Pittsburgh, along with years of hands-on experience, ensures audiences the best presentation for their needs.

The focus of his training is in two areas: building science — how the building envelope and mechanical system work together — and industrial hygiene — measuring things, putting together a hypothesis and evaluating the results. Typical class attendees are



HALL OF FAMER: Joseph Hughes is the recipient of the 2016 Indoor Air Quality Association Hall of Fame Award for his dedicated leadership and remarkable contributions to the indoor air quality industry.

industry professionals working with commercial buildings such as hospitals, offices and educational facilities; however, more home performance professionals are getting involved with indoor air quality. They have learned improvements such as air sealing and proper ventilation can also improve indoor air quality and health.

“If one of my students can’t figure something out, I go and help,” Hughes says. “The most important tools I use are my eyes, nose, a flashlight and camera.”

Other key tools are a laser particle counter, temperature and relative humidity gauge, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide gauge, and a moisture meter.

Hughes also produces IAQ Radio, a weekly interactive podcast on disaster restoration and building science issues. Together with his partner and co-host, Cliff Zlotnik, they have produced over 490

audio podcasts in the past 10 years and recently did their first audio/video podcast. You will find them every Friday at noon at www.iaqradio.com.

“We bring top industry experts as guests on the show every week,” Hughes explains. “We started in a studio in Cranberry, Pa., and now with new technology and access to high-speed internet service, I can do the show from right in my home.”

The show is designed to help promote education and communication for industry professionals in need of assistance with indoor air quality and disaster restoration issues.

“If I had to guess, I would say about half of the listeners are environmental professionals and the other half are contractors and facilities managers,” Hughes says. “We’ll get a few consumers/end users, but not that many. ... Unfortunately, very few people are proactively dealing with their air quality in their home.”

Noting that many asthma and allergy-related issues are directly related to indoor air quality, Hughes says some of his work is through referrals from doctors. There is even a healthy hous-



NOT JUST GADGETS AND GIZMOS: These are key tools anyone can use to proactively gauge the air quality in their home.

ing movement in the Midwest, where many children who go to the emergency room with an asthma attack will be assisted with an analysis of their home. A nurse educator will go over the resulting report with suggestions.

This training helps people understand the connection between health and housing, and identifies and resolves problems threatening the health and well-being of the residents.

“Many times, saving a trip to the emergency room will pay for the evaluation,” Hughes adds.

Hughes reports that dampness is the cause of most air quality problems, and mold is the obvious sign of a problem.

“Where there is mold, there is also a soup of other small organisms like insects/mites, bacteria, amoeba, etc.,” he says.

To create a healthy indoor environment for your home, Hughes suggests you follow the self-help tips listed here:

Keep your home:

1. **Dry** — Damp houses provide an environment for mites, roaches, rodents and mold, all of which are associated with asthma.
2. **Clean** — Clean homes help reduce pest infestations and exposure to contaminants.
3. **Pest-free** — Studies show exposure to mice and cockroaches can create asthma episodes in children.
4. **Contaminant-free** — Some exposures include lead, radon, pesticides, tobacco smoke, asbestos particles and carbon monoxide.
5. **Ventilated** — Use your kitchen exhaust fans when cooking, and keep cleaning products, paint and other products that give off fumes in the garage or outdoors.
6. **Maintained** — Poorly maintained homes are at risk for moisture and pest problems.

Hughes recommends a few inexpensive products to help keep your home healthy. A carbon monoxide alarm is first and most important. Another inexpensive tool would be a relative humidity gauge available at most



hardware stores (high humidity keeps air moist and increases the likelihood of mold). Molds are living things that produce spores that float in the air, land on damp surfaces and grow. Hughes recommends keeping indoor humidity between 30 and 50 percent, and never above 60 percent.

There are things you should call a professional to do, including a complete inspection and thorough cleaning of your heating ventilation and air conditioning system (HVAC), not just the duct work. He advises residents to make sure when they have this cleaning that it is done correctly with special collection equipment and a hose that is attached to the return side and supply side that sucks the debris out, not just brushed with a roto brush.

You might wonder how often this needs to be done.

Hughes says, “If you do annual maintenance on your HVAC system, you might never need to have it done. It also depends on how well you filter

AT EASE BEHIND THE MIC: With over 10 years of on-air experience, Joseph Hughes has fun during his weekly podcast on IAQ Radio. He delivers the interactive show from his home/office at Indian Lake. Recently, he included video to the show.

your air. A simple thing you can do is change your air filter on a regular basis and be sure your filter is sealed so the air goes through the filter and not around the edges. This can be an easy fix by using duct tape around the edges.”

Also, good filters help to keep your system clean.

Just because you keep visible areas such as your tabletop or hardwood floors clean, don't forget about the things you can't see. Dust on hidden surfaces of heating/cooling equipment can be allergenic and may even contain mold growth.

If you have any questions or concerns, be sure to consult a professional and just breathe. It's important to care for your air. ☀



MEGASHOW
Home, Garden, & Business Expo
 1736 North Center Ave.
 Lowe's Plaza

DATES & HOURS
 SATURDAY MARCH 24 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.
 SUNDAY MARCH 25 Noon - 5 p.m.

**Come visit
 Somerset REC**

Somerset REC scholarships available

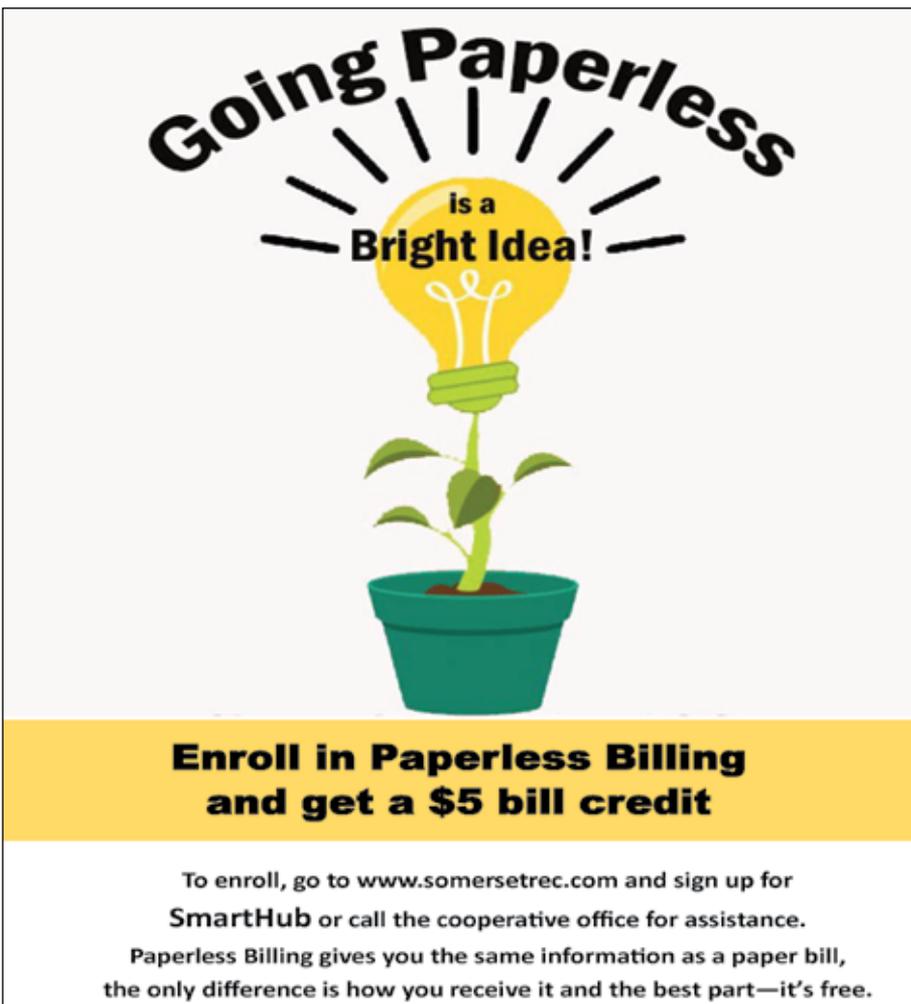
EACH YEAR, Somerset REC awards \$1,000 scholarships to high school seniors.

- ▶ Applicants must be a graduating high school senior whose parents or legal guardians are Somerset REC members.
- ▶ Students who are attending public, private, parochial or home school are eligible to apply.
- ▶ Students must be enrolled in an accredited college or university.
- ▶ The 2018 deadline to apply is Tuesday, April 3.



Applications are available at the co-op's website at www.somersetrec.com. Follow the "Scholarship" link. Applications are also available at Somerset REC and in the guidance offices at local high schools.

The scholarship funds come from unclaimed capital credits refunds that previously had to be turned over to the state. Thanks to the efforts of our political advocates, we can now keep those funds in our local communities. 🌟



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**Enroll in Paperless Billing
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To enroll, go to www.somersetrec.com and sign up for **SmartHub** or call the cooperative office for assistance.

Paperless Billing gives you the same information as a paper bill, the only difference is how you receive it and the best part—it's free.



**DAYLIGHT
 SAVING TIME**

Don't forget to spring forward on **March 11!**
 Set your clocks ahead by one hour.