

# Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
10700 Fairgrounds Road  
P.O. Box 477  
Huntingdon, PA 16652-0477  
814/643-2650  
1-800-432-0680  
www.valleyrec.com

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**OUTAGES & EMERGENCIES**

1-800-432-0680

FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

## What does Electric Choice mean for co-op members?



by Wayne Miller  
President & CEO

**DID YOU KNOW** that Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (along with the other rural electric co-ops in Pennsylvania) has allowed its members to choose their power suppliers since 1999?

The important thing to keep in mind, however, is that in order for power supply choice to work, alternative electric suppliers (also called electric generation suppliers or EGSs) must agree to

serve consumers in co-op territories.

At this point, there are no electric generation suppliers for co-op members to choose, because no EGSs have chosen to serve in Valley's territory or, for that matter, in the territory of any other rural electric cooperative in Pennsylvania.

Given that no EGSs have chosen to sell power in co-op service areas, the likely conclusion would be that there are sound business reasons for that decision. In other words, the "price to compare" or cost per kilowatt-hour between the EGSs' rates and our rates is extremely competitive. So, right now it is difficult for them to beat our price. In addition, the rural areas we serve consist of mostly residential accounts rather than large industrial or commercial accounts that are typically more attractive (and profitable) to EGSs.

Rest assured that if any EGSs decide to serve Valley consumers, we will

immediately notify you and will offer more detailed information and instructions on how you can make the switch to another supplier if that's what you should choose to do.

The good news is that, if you choose an alternate generation supplier, you will still have your power delivered by Valley REC and you will remain a co-op member. So you can continue to enjoy the benefits of membership in a cooperative.

The electric utility market is constantly changing under deregulation. Some electric generation suppliers may wait for the market to mature before investing in new service territories. Initially, most suppliers in our state competed in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, where electricity prices were much higher than elsewhere. More recently, EGSs have been cropping up in other more urban and suburban areas of Pennsylvania, particularly since rate caps have expired for numerous private power companies.

If you'd like more information about electric generation suppliers, deregulation and customer choice, please visit our website at [www.valleyrec.com](http://www.valleyrec.com) and look under the **News** tab. In addition, the following websites may offer helpful information:

PA Power Switch: [www.papower-switch.com](http://www.papower-switch.com)

Office of Consumer Advocate:  
[www.oca.state.pa.us](http://www.oca.state.pa.us) 

**OVERFLOW:** The water reservoir at the Singers Gap treatment facility provides drinking water to the Hill Valley area of Huntingdon County. A typical local household uses about 3,000 gallons of water per month.



## WATER WORKS

BY SUSAN R. PENNING  
*Director of Member Services*

# Delivering clean H<sub>2</sub>O: No game of

**"NEITHER SNOW,** nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

Adapted from the writings of Greek historian and traveler Herodotus (484 BC-430 BC), this statement is commonly referred to as the creed of the U.S. mail carrier. (Actually, it is just the inscription found on the General Post Office building in New York City.)

I argue that it could also, quite appropriately, be deemed the creed of the water treatment plant operator. Let me explain...

I met Phil Stewart Jr., the senior water treatment plant operator at the Mount Union Borough Water Department, on a blustery, snow-covered morning last month. He was performing his regular duties at the Singers Gap Watershed, a surface water treatment facility served by Valley Rural Electric, located in a densely wooded area off Route 747 in Huntingdon County.

As I put the truck in four-wheel drive

and headed up the rocky lane for our interview (I'm glad Phil remembered to leave the reservoir gates open), I couldn't help but notice that the holding tank and small water treatment building in the distance took very little away from the beauty of this place. A shadowy, steep hollow where rows of pines line the perimeter of a deep blue reservoir fed by nearby streams, I imagined flocks of turkey and herds of whitetail moseying through on a regular basis, pausing to get a drink. In fact, I know of hunters who recently claimed black bears nearby. I would venture to guess a healthy population of snapping turtles, frogs and fish call this quiet sanctuary home as well.

I parked the truck and trudged through the cold, white powder, knocking on the steel door of a small, windowless building. Phil greeted me and as I stepped inside, the smell of chlorine reminded me of summer days at the country club pool.

### Diving in

Phil came to work for the Mount Union Borough Water Department in December 1993. At that time, he and his father were integral players in helping to build the water treatment facility at Singers Gap. Once construction on the building was completed, Phil Jr. became responsible for maintaining the new system, which included ensuring proper water quality and flow to area residents, plus keeping up with all the equipment and the 30-plus miles of underground pipes. With potential problems arising at any time, Phil's job turned into a 24-hour-a-day responsibility.

In addition to serving the entire borough of Mount Union, the Mount Union Borough Public Water System currently serves all or

CHANCE





**TESTING THE WATERS:** Phil Stewart Jr. (left), senior water treatment operator for the Mount Union Borough Water Department, takes a water sample from a filtration bed at the Singers Gap facility. Phil's job requires him to be on call to handle potential water issues. Fortunately, he gets help from fellow borough water treatment operator Keith Bollinger.

That's when I got that," he says, pointing to a worn couch beside the water monitoring equipment. "I had to sleep here some nights because there were so many issues."

Phil went on to explain that, as the water levels got low, sediment levels increased, causing a strain on the filtration system and making it work overtime to get rid of all the grit.

"Things used to be simpler," he reflects. "The water treatment process wasn't always this complicated."

### Playing by the rules

As amendments have been made to the SDWA over time, public water treatment guidelines have become more complex, particularly for surface water systems.

Prior to the deployment of the new treatment facility at Singers Gap, water ran through a pipe where it was treated with chlorine gas and immediately delivered to residents.

Filtration became necessary due to SDWA requirements introduced in the mid-1990s.

"Now, water first travels through intake pipes that are injected with a SternPAC pre-treatment solution," Phil explains. (SternPAC is a liquid polyaluminum chloride coagulant that makes sediment clump and settle.) As water continues to flow through filtration beds, it passes through rock and charcoal clarifier screens that help remove

any remaining sediment. After the water is filtered, it is treated with chlorine (to kill potentially dangerous microbes), caustic soda (to adjust the pH), and a corrosive inhibitor (to protect the pipes) before being delivered to consumers.


If any back-flushing of the system is needed, the treated water is discharged into nearby wastewater lagoons, then piped back through the facility.

"Contrary to what some people may think, we don't dump treated water into the streams here," Phil points out. "Our filtration and treatment processes are in line with what's required by the Department of Environmental Protection and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)."

"My family has been drinking this water for years. I don't have reservations," he adds.

Drinking water standards are set by the EPA to control the level of contaminants in the nation's drinking water. Public water systems are then required to meet them. Standards are set for 90 chemical, microbiological, radiological and physical contaminants. According to information from the EPA, drinking water that meets the federal organization's health-based standards is generally considered safe.

With the public's health and the preservation of natural resources at stake, it's comforting to know that dedicated, hard-working Mount Union borough employees like Phil Stewart are doing their best to provide the local community with a healthy supply of water.

To learn more about current drinking water standards or to get information on potential health effects of specific contaminants, call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800/426-4791 or visit [www.epa.gov/safewater](http://www.epa.gov/safewater). 

parts of four municipalities in two counties: Kistler and Newton-Hamilton boroughs and Wayne Township in Mifflin County; and Shirley Township in Huntingdon County.

### Hurting for H<sub>2</sub>O

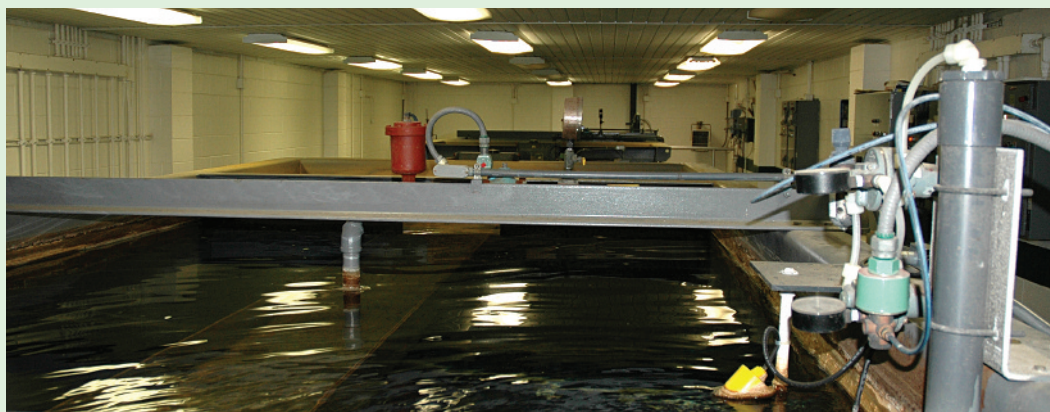
The Singers Gap reservoir (also known as the Amberson Slope or Lake Mount Union Dam) was built in 1927, providing clean, fresh water to area families. It was never intended to be the main water source for Mount Union, although it served in that capacity for a short time.

In the early to mid 1990s, while Singers Gap was in the process of getting a new treatment facility, other nearby surface water reservoirs like it were closing down. It was simply becoming too costly to comply with the tighter regulations required through the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). Plans were made to add ground wells to supplement the Singers Gap system and ensure an adequate water supply for consumers. Phil recalls a time before those wells were completed when it became difficult to keep the town supplied with water:

"We were praying for rain. The water was 19 feet below the breast of the dam and we had all intake pipes open to draw water.

**RIGHT:** Filtration beds work to reduce the amount of sediment as water flows through the system.

**BELOW:** Water monitoring equipment compares the raw condition of the water with the filtered condition. Data shows that the treated water at Singers Gap consistently exceeds EPA quality requirements.



# Looking to cut energy costs?

## Free software program helps answer energy-related questions

BY JOHN H. BOOKWALTER, JR.  
*Special Projects Coordinator*

**"HOW MUCH ENERGY** does my home use, and how can I use it more efficiently? What is the cost to operate a space heater? What can I save by replacing incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs)? How much will that new large-screen TV impact my electric bill? Would replacing single-pane windows with double-pane ones really save energy?"

If you have access to a computer, you can find answers to these questions and more by visiting the HomeEnergySuite™ on Valley Rural Electric Co-op's website at [www.valleyrec.com](http://www.valleyrec.com). (Click on the **Save Energy** link.)

### Interactive House

The Interactive House in the HomeEnergySuite offers energy-saving tips, room by room. You can mouse about the home and click to explore different topics of interest. After clicking on an area of the house, you can view information about that room's energy impact and learn ways to save energy. For example, in the kitchen you'll find tips for refrigerators, dishwashers, ovens, cooktops, range hoods and lighting. In the garage are gasoline-saving tips and a fuel economy calculator.

### Estimate your energy use

More suggestions for saving energy and money are available by using the Calculators section. Available calculators include the Home Energy Calculator and the Appliance Calculator, along with the more specific Lighting, Space Heater and TV calculators.

The Home Energy Calculator functions like a basic energy audit. It allows you to describe your home, specifying the type of house, square footage, number of occupants, types of heating and cooling systems, temperature settings and major appliances.

After supplying your home's data, the **Calculate Your Base House Energy Use** button will estimate your home's

energy use over the past year. The report includes a summary of your input and several charts and graphs that break down your energy consumption and costs. The report also recommends changes that you could make to save money and energy.

You can even experiment by applying the recommendations from the report. Adjust the thermostat settings. Lower the water heater temperature. Switch heating or cooling systems. Replace inefficient windows or appliances. To see how the changes affect your energy consumption and costs, click the **Recalculate** button.



### How much does it cost to run my ...?

The Appliance Calculator helps you delve deeper into the cost of using many household devices. Enter your appliances' data. Click **Calculate**. The monthly and annual costs to operate the devices and their annual consumption are displayed.

The Lighting Calculator compares incandescent lightbulbs with CFLs. Select the wattage and number of incandescent bulbs and the number of hours per day the bulbs are lit. Clicking the **Calculate** button compares their cost of operation with that of CFLs producing the same amount of light. It also shows the monthly and annual savings. For example, replacing a single 100-watt incandescent used eight hours a day with a 27-watt CFL could yield \$19 in annual savings.

With the Space Heater Calculator, you can use slider controls to select the number of heaters and how long you use them. A 1500-watt heater operating eight hours a day would cost about \$32 per month.

Using the TV Calculator, you can approximate the impact of television

viewing on your electric bill. The annual cost and consumption fields update automatically as you enter or change data. Setting the hours used to zero shows how much energy is consumed even when that TV is powered off.

### Learn more about energy

In the comprehensive Library section, you can peruse two energy libraries: Home Energy Systems and Fundamentals of Electricity.

Home Energy Systems includes a collection of articles about energy use in your home. Learn about energy-efficient construction, heating and cooling systems, water heating, lighting, pools, lawn care, solar power, energy audits, home improvements and much more.

To learn about the basics of electricity, examine the Fundamentals of Electricity library. See how electricity is generated and delivered to your home. Read articles dealing with circuits, currents, generation plants, transmission and distribution systems, substations, transformers and safety.

### Have some fun

The HomeEnergySuite isn't just for adults. Clicking on the **Kids Korner** button leads to a site devoted to teaching children about energy, efficiency and safety. Shorter and more simplified articles explain the basics of electricity, sources of energy, energy conservation and safety issues. A glossary defines terms that might be unfamiliar to readers. The Teacher Feature area provides educators with printable worksheets and instruction guides for classroom projects. Lastly, the Fun Factory includes interactive games, coloring pages, quizzes, puzzles, projects and experiments for more hours of fun while learning.

No matter their ages, visitors to Valley's website can discover lots of interesting, informative and fun material in the HomeEnergySuite. They can find ways to use energy more efficiently and reduce energy costs. It's all just a few mouse clicks away. ☀