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# Advanced Metering (AMI) Getting In Gear

*Conversion Underway in August, And Here's What You Should Know*

**T**he planning and preparation stage is nearly over, and Washington Electric Co-op will begin installing new, digital electric meters at members' homes and businesses in August.

First up are members connected to the Maple Corner substation. Those would be Co-op members in parts of Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex, and Worcester. This will be followed by the deployment of the so-called "smart meters" to members connected to the East Montpelier substation, which will include the rest of WEC's East Montpelier members, all of Plainfield and Marshfield, as well as parts of Calais, Cabot, Barre Town, and Orange. Deployment of the Advanced Metering System (AMI) is organized on the basis of substations because the two-way electronic communication between members' meters and the computers at Washington Electric's headquarters requires the installation of sophisticated equipment at the substations. WEC has six other substations (eight in total), and deployment of the AMI infrastructure will proceed through each, with plans to complete the work by the end of 2012.

"Everybody will have their new meters installed by the end of the year," says WEC General Manager Avram Patt. "The installations will be done entirely by our own employees."

One of most important aspects of this system-wide AMI deployment is

keeping Co-op members informed of what's happening, since it will involve a visit by WEC personnel to every meter station (most meters are on the outside of homes and buildings).

WEC will be using a three-stage communication plan:

1. In the coming weeks, all members will receive a two-sided information sheet in the mail or with their bills about WEC's deployment of Advanced Metering Infrastructure. (This information sheet is also available on the Co-op's website.) Among other things, it will remind members that WEC is using a wired (power line carrier, or PLC) technology that will convey digital information over the Co-op's electric lines, rather than by radio frequency (wireless) technology. PLC is well-suited to rural electric systems in mountainous terrain (Vermont's other rural electric co-op, the Vermont Electric Cooperative, is using the same technology). It turns out to be an important distinction because the concerns some people in Vermont have expressed about radiation from wireless meters do not apply to a wired system. The information sheet will also review the many reasons WEC is making this change: primarily, to provide better service and information to members, reduce outage time, and control costs.
2. In advance of the actual installation of the digital meters, members will receive a post card from the Co-op, as well as an e-mail notification if

your e-mail address is on file. This is similar to the notices members receive about planned outages for repairs and upgrades to the system, and right-of-way clearing projects scheduled in their neighborhoods.

3. After their meters have been installed (installation takes only a matter of minutes), the technicians will leave a two-sided door hanger on people's doors. Side A will say the Co-op has been there and changed your meter. Side B will be a brief review of information about AMI.

It's important to note that having your new meter installed will not mean that the Co-op has fully changed to AMI. This will happen only after the entire system has been converted.

"We've been telling our members about the advantages of advanced metering – for example, having access to their hourly electricity usage and billing information on a secure web site. But people won't be able to experience those until all 10,000-plus meters have been installed and we've tested the system to make sure that everything works," says Patt. "That's when we'll go live."

"Until then, meter readers will continue to read people's meters in person on a monthly basis. The door hanger will tell people that their new meter was installed today, but for the full adoption of WEC's Advanced Metering Infrastructure, we'll need to wait until early 2013." 