



BIG FLAT NEWS



March 2025

www.bigflatelectric.com

THE VALUE OF HAVING A BACKUP GENERATOR

Column by **ROGER SOLBERG**
Big Flat Electric Vice President

I was startled to hear the engine of the standby generator suddenly fire up on a recent cold mid-January morning. My wife had to remind me that the generator runs an automatic exercise sequence every Monday morning to perform internal tests and to ensure proper functioning. It was just that I was unfamiliar with this weekly procedure because I would typically be at work by this time of the day. I looked at the temperature gauge and it said 23 degrees below zero. I immediately felt a sense of security and comfort to realize that our standby generator was faithfully ready and able to do its job, if needed, on a cold winter day.

We made the decision to have a standby propane-powered generator installed on our farm a little over two years ago. Prior to that, we had always kept a portable gas-powered generator on hand to temporarily supply our basic electricity needs in the event of an extended power outage. The portable generator was stored back in a far corner of the shop behind several layers of other stored items. On the occasion that I needed to retrieve the generator due to a lengthy outage, it would become quite a production to



put it into service. Once I cleared a path to remove the generator from storage and got it positioned outside, I would soon recognize that I hadn't done a very good job of maintenance since its last usage. Furthermore, my wife has reminded me more than once that I am usually away from home when the big storm hits, and power is out for multiple days.

Whether you have a small portable backup generator or a professionally installed stationary standby generator, an auxiliary source of temporary electricity of some type is important and necessary when you live in rural Montana. Our Big Flat Electric linemen do a fantastic job of maintaining the distribution system that provides reliable power to our members. However, we live in a harsh environment where extreme weather events are common. Whether it's a spring ice storm, extreme winter cold, strong winds or a thunderstorm, outages are going to occur. You can be certain that our Big Flat Electric crew will always work hard to restore power service to our members as quickly as humanly possible. But that winter storm that knocks down a stretch of distribution line is going to happen occasionally, and repairs will take time to complete.

As residents of rural Montana, we

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rely on electricity to supply our basic needs for survival. Our water comes from deep wells, heaters keep water pipes from freezing and freezers store our food supply. There are countless other examples of how electricity makes our lives easier and better. We have very reliable electricity service to keep these necessities and conveniences available to us. Consider a backup generator to be an insurance policy. The best-case scenario for an insurance policy is that we don't ever have to use it. However, we pay the premiums on that policy so that we are covered if a disaster happens.

The purchase of a stationary standby generator for our farm was an expen-

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GENERATOR

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sive investment. But the final installed cost was less than the expense of a year of premiums on our farm insurance policy. So, we decided that the peace of mind that it provided was worth it. I realize that not everyone can afford to make a large purchase like this. But my recommendation is that you determine what your minimum electrical needs would be during an outage and purchase a backup generator that will cover those needs. There are online calculators that can assist you in sizing the right generator to provide essential power. If you choose to purchase a standby generator large enough to supply temporary power for your entire farm or ranch, the professionals at Big Flat Electric can analyze your past electrical usage and recommend the correctly sized generator for your operation.

For those who would like to consider alternative renewable energy sources for backup electrical power generation, solar and wind battery systems have become more affordable in recent years. Solar batteries have higher initial purchase costs but have a low operating cost with minimal maintenance. Wind-powered systems with battery backup are expensive and tend to be higher maintenance. Expect to pay more for renewable generator systems with battery storage. Internal combustion engine-driven generators continue to be the most cost-effective option per kilowatt of power.

Regardless of the type or size of your backup generator, there are important safety issues that must be considered. If you plan to connect your backup generator directly into the service panel, it is required that you have a double throw switch professionally installed at the service panel to prevent back feeding of electricity onto the distribution grid. This is necessary for the safety of the linemen who are working to restore power during an

outage. Also, make sure any fuel-powered generator is run only outdoors and far enough away from your house or shop to keep the exhaust outside. If you are running a generator in heavy rain or snow, it's important to keep the generator dry with an adequate, well-ventilated cover.

I can understand those of you who are still on the fence about the value of having a backup generator. You may be thinking, we've been out of power for a few hours here and there before, or maybe even a day or two, and we've survived just fine without a generator. In the spring, summer and fall, it's no big deal to be without power for a while. We have enough water on hand to get by, we've got candles and flashlights, and we will keep the freezer door shut and the food will stay frozen long enough until the power is back on. In the winter, we fire up the wood stove. It's not ideal, but we will survive. Those multiple-day outages are becoming less and less frequent. Our Big Flat Electric line crew continues to install more pole inserts to shorten spans, replace old poles with new ones and upgrade the system to better withstand weather events. We'll be fine without a backup generator.


But let's look at the bigger picture. The United States is facing a shortage of available electricity. Energy policies that our federal government has put into place over the past several years have focused on green energy mandates. This has resulted in the removal of reliable firm power sources, which are being replaced with less reliable renewable power sources. There is a rising demand for electricity nationwide. Residential, commercial and industrial power demand is increasing at a high rate in the United States. A significant number of new power plants are being built just to supply the electricity needs of artificial intelligence alone. Overall, power demand is increasing faster than new power generation and transmission infrastructure can be built.

Large population states such as

California and Texas lead the way in increased electricity demand. In recent years, California has had numerous rolling blackouts and brownouts due to high energy demand with limited power availability. Texas has had several power crises in recent years as well. Until electricity supply can catch up to the increasing demand, we can expect these high population areas to pull more power from Montana electrical generation sources. This will affect the availability and reliability of our local power supply during times of peak demand.

Electric utilities in the western United States are facing billions of dollars in liability damages over their failure to shut off power during extreme wind events, which have led to several catastrophic wildfires. This has forced utility companies to put new policies into effect that will preemptively shut off power to large service areas when significant wind events are anticipated.

I don't point out these issues to scare anyone. There will always be new challenges affecting the reliability of the electric power industry. Fortunately, you can trust that there are some exceptionally smart and capable people in the electric power industry who are working very hard to meet our nation's power generation needs, and to expand, improve and modernize the transmission grid.

The number one priority of Big Flat Electric Cooperative is to provide reliable and economical power to our members. The many variables and unknowns that exist due to extreme weather and to the complexities of the electrical industry are going to cause occasional outages in the system. Consider investing in the insurance policy of a backup generator to be prepared when these occasional outages occur. Any insurance policy costs money. We hope that the policy never needs to be used. But when that major catastrophe occurs, we are sure glad that we paid those premiums to keep the policy current. 

First Day of Spring: The Spring Equinox

By CATHERINE BOECKMANN

WELCOME, vernal equinox! In 2025, the **first day of spring** is **Thursday, March 20**. Does this date seem early to you? Learn why – and let's celebrate the start of this most glorious season!

In 2025, the Spring equinox happens on March 20 at 5:01 a.m. EDT. This falls on a Thursday and is the astronomical beginning of the spring season in the Northern Hemisphere, and the autumn season in the Southern Hemisphere.

If you thought that the spring equinox only ever occurred on March 21, you may be dating yourself. The civil calendar date of the equinox continues to shift every year.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the spring equinox (also called the March equinox or vernal equinox across the globe) occurs when the sun crosses the celestial equator going south to north. It's called the "celestial" equator

because it's an imaginary line in the sky above Earth's equator. Imagine standing on the equator; the sun would pass directly overhead on its way north.

On the March equinox, the Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere receive roughly equal amounts of sunlight; neither hemisphere is tilted more toward or away from the sun than the other.

In most locations the amount of daylight had been increasing each day after the winter solstice – and after the spring equinox, many places will experience more daylight than darkness in each 24-hour day. The amount of daylight each day will continue to increase until the summer solstice (in June), when the longest period of daylight occurs.

The word *equinox* comes from the Latin words for "equal night"—*aequus* (equal) and *nox* (night). RM

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- **Find us on Facebook** under Big Flat Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- **Visit our website** at www.bigflatelectric.com.
- **Sign up for budget billing** and/or ACH (auto payments) by calling our office.
- **Bills** are generated on the 1st working day of each month and are due on the 20th of each month.
- **Bills that are 60 days in arrears are subject to disconnect.** Once disconnected, a reconnect fee will be charged. The bill will then have to be paid in full to be reconnected.
- **We have a secure, automated toll-free phone number** for members making payments by credit card and/or bank account: 1-844-968-1965. You will need to have your account number and/or phone number that is on file with our office to access the automated system.
- **Take control of your electric account with SmartHub.** You can pay your bills; set up and cancel reoccurring payments; set up notifications; obtain duplicates of your bills; and view your monthly and yearly usage, all at your fingertips. Visit our website: www.bigflatelectric.com or download the SmartHub app from your Play Store on Android or the App Store on Apple devices.
- New service and service change quotes are only **valid for 30 days**.



Big Flat Electric invites you to join them for

AG DAY

March 21st - Malta City Hall

Phillips County Cattle Women in conjunction with Phillips County Extension Agency would like to see you at the 2025 Ag Day.

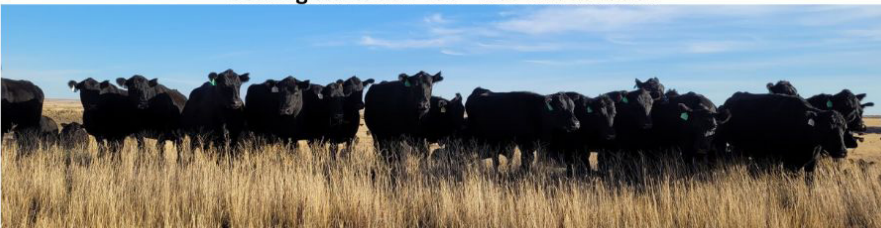
11:00 a.m. - 3:00 pm.

Come on down to the City Hall and see all the booths, visit, have a cup of coffee and a treat. Plus sign up for door prizes that are being offered.

(Ag vendors wishing to set up a booth, please contact Phillips County Extension Office for more information)

Step across the street to the firehall and enjoy a delicious burger or a fish burger with all the fixings along with a serving of baked beans.

Serving starts at 11:00 - free will donation



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Spring is nature's way of saying, "Let's party!"

Robin Williams (1951-2014)



FROM MARCH 1963: *BFEC NEWSLETTER*

Along Our Lines

MARCH 1963 – BFEC Newsletter

- We of the Big Flat Electric would like to extend our deepest sympathy to the John Matovich family of the Regina community. Blanche passed away suddenly on February 21.
- Security lights have recently been installed for Graham Hutton, Turner and two in the town of Hays for Marvin Zitzlesperger.
- Mr. and Mrs. Ralph D. Snider have moved to the Donald McQuire place north of Hogeland.
- Iver Johannesen's new house near Loring is nearly completed and the family will be moving into it soon. This home will be heated electrically.
- Mr. and Mrs. Loyal Boyce of the South Malta community have been remodeling and adding on to their home.
- Bud Johnson of the South Malta community has purchased an airplane and is busy building a hanger. Bud has nearly completed his course in flying and will soon apply for his license.
- Mr. and Mrs. Dan Depuydt of Whitewater are visiting in Minnesota.
- Mr. and Mrs. Guy Riggins of Harlem are vacationing where the climate is warmer.
- The next regular monthly meeting of the board of directors of the Big Flat Electric will be held at the headquarters building in Malta on the afternoon of Thursday, March 21.

POWER OF OBSERVATION

Policeman: Did you get the license number of the car that hit you?

Woman Victim: "No, but the lady driving it wore a black turban trimmed with red and her coat was imitation fur."

4-H Club - March 1963



REGINA GRASSHOPPERS 4-H CLUB — L. to R.: Jimmy Cummings, Mrs. Clarence Blunt, Oline Veseth, Patty Cummings, Margaret Ore, Julie Nesbit, Terry

Nesbit, Mrs. Ray Cummings, Kenneth Blunt and Roger Veseth.

Go Fly A Kite!!!

It's that time of year again when the youngsters, and some of the older "youngsters," decide to try their hand at flying a kite. It can be a lot of fun, and many hours of enjoyment, but there are a few rules that should be followed:

1. Never run across streets or highways while flying kites.
2. Never let a kite go over TV or radio aerials.
3. Never fly a kite near electric lines.
4. Never fly a kite with metal or wire in the frame or tail.
5. Never use tinsel string, wire or any twine that has a metallic substance.
6. If the kite should happen to catch in a power line let go of the string immediately and contact help.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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District 2	Alan Van Voast
District 3	Alan Wasson, President
District 4	Betty Campbell, Sec. /Treas.
District 5	Roger Solberg, Vice President
District 6	Patty Quisno
District 7	Kevin Koss

General Manager: Gretchen Boardman



BIG FLAT ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

SERVING BLAINE, PHILLIPS AND VALLEY COUNTIES

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