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The power surge

Factors driving the rising demand for electricity

Across the United States, the demand for power is climbing at one of the fastest rates in decades. As the economy becomes more reliant on electricity and data centers continue to sprout up in many parts of the country, electric cooperatives are preparing to meet the challenges that skyrocketing demand brings.

The North American Electric Reliability Corp.—the watchdog for the U.S. electric grid—recently released the 2025-26 winter reliability assessment, which echoed other recent reports, including longer-term outlooks that expect sufficient energy resources during normal conditions but potential supply shortfalls and

outages under more intense weather conditions.

Extreme weather, coupled with additional factors that are driving increased demand, creates challenges for electric utilities, including cooperatives, in their mission to provide reliable power around the clock.

Several key factors are driving increased demand, including economic growth, expanded manufacturing, data center development and increased electrification in transportation. Together, these trends are reshaping how much electricity we consume and how quickly utilities like Washington EMC must adapt to meet future needs.

One of the biggest drivers of rising



Wendy Sellers
President/CEO

demand is increased electrification. More homes and businesses are transitioning to electricity for home heating, water heating and transportation. Electric vehicles (EVs) are becoming more common on the road, and many states are offering incentives to help consumers make the switch. Additionally, electric heat pumps are replacing traditional furnaces in many homes due to their efficiency. These transitions mean more energy use and pressure placed on our electric grid.

Data centers are another major contributor to rising demand. As AI, cryptocurrency and cloud computing technologies grow, the need for data processing and storage has skyrocketed. Data centers require huge amounts of power to operate servers and cooling systems 24/7.

Continued on page 18B

Why is the demand for electricity rising?

Demand for electricity in the U.S. is booming. Recent data shows that power consumption nationwide is set to increase by at least 38 gigawatts (enough electricity to power 3,600 homes for one year) between now and 2028. Meeting this new demand will require a combination of new power plants, grid upgrades and energy storage technology advancements. Here are the key factors that are driving increased demand.

- 1 Increased Electrification:** Electric vehicle adoption, electrification of home heating and industrial electrification are increasing overall U.S. energy consumption.
- 2 Data Centers:** Driven by explosions in AI, cryptocurrency and cloud computing, total U.S. data center load is projected to increase by 65% by 2050.
- 3 Economic Growth:** Residential power consumption is expected to increase by 14% to 22% through 2050 due to increases in population and steady economic growth.
- 4 Manufacturing Growth/Onshoring:** New, expanding and “onshored/reshored” manufacturing capacity driven by federal incentives is expected to increase industrial demand by 13,000 GWh per year.



Community news

An electric membership corporation

258 N. Harris St. • P.O. Box 598
Sandersville, GA 31082

Email: wemc@washingtonemc.com
Website: www.washingtonemc.com
Wendy Sellers, President/CEO

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Washington EMC loves to give back and participate in our community.

This year, we once again supported our local toy drives. We are proud of the communities we serve and proud to assist in these worthwhile programs.

Washington EMC Member Services Manager Denise Wombles (left) and Washington County Empty Stocking Fund representative Penny Grice.



The power surge, *Continued from page 18A*

Tech companies are building new facilities nationwide—many of which are in electric cooperative-served areas—and these regions are experiencing multiyear surges in electricity demand as a result.

Economic and manufacturing growth are also contributing to higher electricity use. As businesses expand and new industries take root, especially in rural and suburban areas, the demand for reliable, high-capacity power is increasing. The resurgence of domestic manufacturing has led to major facility construction. These facilities often require substantial energy loads, and many operate continuously to keep production lines running. This growth brings jobs and investment, but it also puts new pressures on the electric grid.

Population growth and housing development are also contributing to rising demand in many regions, and everyday life is becoming more energy dependent. Smart appliances, connected devices, home offices and entertainment systems are adding

to overall consumption, even as efficiency improves.

While increased demand presents new challenges for electric utilities, it also has the potential to create significant opportunities for co-ops and the communities they serve, such as job growth, steady revenue and improved infrastructure. Electric co-ops are responding by planning carefully for the future—investing in grid modernization and offering programs and services to help co-op members conserve energy.

Washington EMC is ready to meet rising demand in our local communities. Through innovation, investment and collaboration, we are preparing for a more reliable and resilient energy future.

Continuous planning is critical to ensuring the grid can support everything from EV charging to large-scale manufacturing plants.

Electricity powers nearly every aspect of today's economy, and its role will only grow stronger. As electrification accelerates, long-term planning becomes more important than ever.

Battery disposal and recycling

By Steph Joven

Batteries are part of everyday life—from the ones in our TV remotes and flashlights to the big ones that power electric vehicles and even energy storage systems used by electric utilities. But when batteries are disposed the wrong way, they can leak harmful chemicals, catch fire and waste valuable materials that we need to recycle.

Globally, electronic waste (also known as “e-waste”) is one of the fastest-growing types of trash. In 2022, people worldwide threw away more than 62 billion kilograms of it. In the U.S. alone, that adds up to 21 kilograms (about 46 pounds) of e-waste per person each year. Yet only about 22% of that waste is recycled properly.

The good news: Safe disposal and recycling options are available, and you can help make a difference.

Battery types and how to dispose of them

Not all batteries are the same, and how you get rid of them depends on their components. Some batteries can be recycled easily, while others can be dangerous if tossed in the wrong place. They may leak toxic chemicals or even start fires. That’s why the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends following local rules or using national collection programs like Call2Recycle, Earth911 or drop-off bins at hardware stores to make sure batteries are handled safely.

Single-use batteries are designed to be used once, then replaced. These include alkaline and zinc-carbon batteries—the common AA, AAA, C, D and 9-volt sizes used in remotes, flashlights and other small devices.



Many areas allow single-use batteries to be disposed in household trash, but recycling is always a better choice.

Some areas allow these batteries to go into household trash, but recycling is a better choice. Button or coin batteries used in watches, hearing aids and car key fobs are often lithium-based. These should never be thrown away in regular trash or recycling bins, because they can spark fires. Instead, cover the battery terminals with tape or seal them in small bags, and take them to a certified recycling facility.

Rechargeable batteries power many of our everyday devices like cordless tools, phones, laptops, cameras and even scooters. Types include nickel-cadmium (Ni-Cd), lithium-ion (Li-ion), nickel-metal hydride (Ni-MH), nickel-zinc (Ni-Zn) and small sealed lead-acid batteries.

While these look different, they all share one rule: Never throw them in the trash. They must go to a recycling facility.



Lithium-based batteries should never be thrown away in regular trash or recycling bins because they can spark fires.

For devices with built-in, nonremovable batteries, recycle the entire device, making sure the battery ends are taped or bagged to prevent sparks.

Automotive and large batteries are more powerful and require special care. Lead-acid batteries found in cars, boats, motorcycles and ATVs contain lead and acid, which are hazardous. These should always be returned to a retailer, repair shop or a local hazardous waste program.

Larger lithium-ion batteries like those in electric vehicles (EVs) and home or utility-scale energy storage systems are even more complex. They should only be handled by dealers, repair shops or the manufacturer. These should never be discarded in curbside waste or recycling.

Proper battery disposal is less about danger and more about opportunity. By recycling, we can recover valuable materials, reduce waste and support reliable energy systems in our communities. With a few simple steps, each of us can do our part—and together, we can keep our homes and community a little cleaner and safer.

If you have questions about battery disposal, visit call2recycle.org or earth911.com for guidance.


Steph Joven writes about consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.



Larger lithium-ion batteries—like those in electric vehicles (EVs) or other e-transportation vehicles—should only be handled by dealers, repair shops or the manufacturer.

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