

Issues Typically Raised at AVEC's Annual Meeting

Every year AVEC member villages hold meetings to conduct cooperative business and elect delegates to represent their community at AVEC's annual meeting. During the Suggestions for Improvement session each delegate is given an opportunity to voice their concerns. The board members hold a work session after the annual meeting to discuss issues raised by the delegates. Improving communications with our members is high on the list of their priorities.

Communications can only be improved if both parties make an effort, so please feel free to contact AVEC if you have any concerns that need to be addressed, especially if you are from one of the communities that did not hold a village meeting. You are our eyes and ears in your communities. For example, we don't know if poles are leaning or street lights are burned out unless somebody notifies us. Then we are able to respond to make required repairs.

A couple comments made by delegates are that AVEC is "all talk and no action" and "they want to see information in writing." We listened and the following is a review of some perennial issues that are shared by our communities. When possible, steps have been taken to address the issues.

Village Meeting Quorums

Every year we used to hear that villages had problems getting enough people to attend their meetings and conduct cooperative business and elect chairmen and delegates to attend AVEC's annual meeting. Delegates suggested we provide more door prizes as an incentive to increase attendance at the meetings.

The board of directors discussed this issue during a post-meeting work session and decided to revise the annual meeting door prize policy. We now send a box full of small give-away items to be used as door prizes to each village when the annual meeting packets are mailed out. We also went through the process to revise quorum requirements, making it easier for villages to meet a quorum and hold a meeting. Another change the board authorized increased the main door prize from a \$75 gift certificate to \$250, which the individual chairmen can divide how they see fit, i.e. one gift certificate worth \$250 or five worth \$50. We heard these changes made it easier to obtain quorums.

Deep Snow and Floods

Sometimes delegates mention strong concerns about flood damage due to heavy snowfall during the past winter. Some communities located along rivers sustain damage nearly every year during spring breakup, when rivers run high. AVEC's staff continually monitors breakup and water conditions and tries to be prepared for floods as much as possible. Sometimes flooding is so bad residents lose their homes and AVEC's facilities suffer major and/or minor damage. AVEC does its best to deal with flooding problems and strives to keep the electric power on, with minimal power outages.

Bill Collections and AMR Meters

Members used to ask about the timing of the collector visits and ask why the traveling collectors couldn't go to the villages during Permanent Fund Dividend time, when money is available to pay bills. It was stressed by staff that electric bills are issued every month and are due every month, not just during October.

A few years ago AVEC made bill paying easier by adding an online bill paying option to our Website. Using the latest technology to improve service to our members gets mentioned more frequently, so we are constantly making improvements to our Website.

AVEC also installed electronic meters with remote connect/disconnect features in every community. Now we do not need to have collectors travel to the communities and do disconnects as staff can perform disconnects, and re-connects, from the office. The electronic meters automatically provide meter reading information to the office so plant operators don't need to read the meters. We are looking at in-home displays our members can purchase to track their in-home electricity usage and make adjustments to reduce their bills.

Bulk Fuel Purchases / High Fuel Costs

Joint fuel purchasing between AVEC and other organizations to reduce costs is another topic that regularly gets mentioned. We join with the school districts to purchase bulk fuel but we aren't able to pursue joint fuel purchases with other entities, like the cities, because of credit and contract issues. A statewide group is trying to help streamline bulk fuel purchases for rural communities to reduce costs.

In order to combat ever-increasing fuel transportation costs, AVEC's board approved the construction of two shallow-draft, tug-and barge sets to deliver fuel to AVEC's communities. The tugs are named Cavek, a Yupik word meaning harpoon and/or metal, and Naniq, an Inupiat word meaning source of light. The vessels, operated and maintained by Vitus Marine, LLC, arrived in Alaska in August and October and will start delivering fuel and freight in the spring.

Streetlights

Streetlights are a perennially famous subject. Villages are not charged for non-working streetlights once AVEC is notified. Call AVEC's operations department and give them the pole number so the light can be fixed. Let us know if a streetlight is faulty or if new streetlights are needed. The city has to request and pay for any new streetlights. PCE pays for much of the cost of streetlights so they are a minimal burden for the community benefits they provide.

AVEC made revisions to the streetlight policy to include an option to install LED streetlights. This information is available by contacting AVEC and will soon be posted on our Website.

Leaning Poles / Low Wires

When wires become loose or too tight due to pole movement caused by shifting permafrost, let the power plant operator or AVEC know as soon as possible so repairs can be made. Leaning poles are a constant problem as the freeze/thaw process moves poles around. If a pole tilts 15 degrees, that's not a problem. But if a sharply leaning pole is detected, call the city office or AVEC office and we'll schedule a lineman to fix it.

Low-hanging wires on poles also get mentioned. Be aware that most of our poles also have phone or TV wires, which are usually the low wires and they aren't AVEC's responsibility. Please call the telephone/TV company to address the issue too.

More Linemen

There has been lots of discussion about having local linemen and electricians to do work in the villages (instead of just having traveling lineman), but it's not practical to have such technicians for each village as there simply isn't enough work to keep them employed full time. Scholarships are available for technical training. It would be great to have linemen and electricians available on a regional basis. Encourage students to get trained in these fields, as the pay is really good and there is plenty of work.

Home Wiring

Home wiring is another important issue mentioned frequently, but AVEC's responsibility ends at the outside of the house. AVEC continues to encourage other agencies to help with interior wiring needs. Contact local and regional agencies to get help with potentially unsafe home electrical systems.

Information about connecting to AVEC's electric service, household wiring, meter tampering and how to operate a portable generator safely gets printed in various issues of the Ruralite Magazine. For a copy of this information, contact AVEC.

PCE Program

The PCE program has been fully funded for the past few years. The cost ceiling was raised to \$1/kWh one year, mainly due to the extremely high cost of fuel, and we worked successfully to have the higher ceiling extended indefinitely, instead of dropping back down to 52 cents. AVEC staff continuously monitors the PCE program and works to ensure adequate funding of this important program.

Removal of Old Tanks

Removing old tanks is another perennial issue, throughout the state. The Denali Commission only provides funding for new facilities, not for removing and restoring the old facilities. There have been numerous work sessions to figure out a solution, as it would cost several million dollars. At one point we submitted a request for \$5 million in federal funds that may be available through the stimulus program for backhauls.

Cleaning up old facilities and tanks is very expensive, but it's a high priority as there are 1,000 derelict tanks throughout the state primarily from Denali Commission-funded projects. A solution has recently been found and seems have worked well in Savoonga and Gambell. We partnered with the local school district, ANICA, the city and other tank owners to jointly cut up the old tanks and dispose of them at the landfill. This process will be tried at other communities too.

Denali Commission Projects

As Denali Commission funding became available, we worked on projects based on the statewide priority list. Unfortunately the Denali Commission program has suffered a tremendous reduction in funding since 2007 and this has had a huge impact on AVEC's ability to plan and build projects. Thankfully we have been able to obtain funding from the Alaska Energy Authority and the Alaska Renewable Energy Grant Fund to replace some of the greatly reduced federal funding assistance. AVEC's staff diligently prepares numerous grant applications throughout the year requesting financial assistance for various projects.

Renewable Energy

Lots of delegates mention their communities would like to have renewable energy installed to help reduce their electric bills. We have installed successful renewable energy projects in several villages and are receiving increased recognition for our wind generation program. Wind turbines were recently installed in Emmonak and Shaktoolik and several villages are being evaluated for potential wind and solar projects.

AVEC monitors current technology to see what might work in our communities and provide the best value. Securing funding is necessary to build renewable-energy projects if they are determined to be feasible.