

## Meter tampering is illegal, neighbors pay

*Energy theft creates criminal record, affects credit scores*

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In an attempt to ...

Sometimes ...

Well, there's no way to justify tampering with a meter. Besides being illegal and endangering the lives of those you live with, as well as those who work on the power lines, members who tamper with their meters also place an extra burden on their neighbors.

Electricity theft creates situations where more power flows through the lines than expected. This creates power surges and system failures due to high loads. Physically and financially, energy theft is dangerous and stopping energy theft is important for all members, as they are the victims.

Energy theft is an issue St. Croix Electric Cooperative takes seriously. The Cooperative seals all meters, which protects the member by making the meter off limits and containing the voltage. Failing to do so could create a dangerous situation for children or other individuals not familiar with the energized meter sockets or wires that could become exposed. The 120/240 voltage within the meter kills more people than any other voltage. Only a trained, authorized serviceman can cut the seal on the meter or remove it. Not even an experienced electrician has permission to remove the meter seal.

Sealing the meter also prevents someone from stealing electricity. Tampered meters mean legal action, a bad credit rating and potential loss of electric

service for the member whose meter shows signs of tampering. Electric meter tampering and diversion of electricity are crimes that can lead to arrest and conviction.

St. Croix Electric Cooperative periodically visits all locations to obtain meter readings and check meter seals. The recent implementation of Project Integration has ensured that every single meter on Cooperatives lines has been (or will soon be) visited and replaced within the last 12 months. During Project Integration, members were notified if their meter socket needed replacing, as well. Attempts to bypass or tamper with electric meters or other electric utility facilities - including substations - can result in serious injuries, electrocution, fire, explosions and death.

Additionally, potential or current power thieves must ask themselves: Is saving a few dollars worth endangering a life?

Power surges due to electricity theft can damage the wiring in homes and lead to electrical fires. The overloads can also harm electrical equipment and appliances. In emergency situations, such as fires, electricity needs to be shut off to permit firefighters and other emergency personnel to do their jobs safely. Power lines that have been compromised by electricity theft can stay energized even when emergency responders think they've been shut off.

St. Croix Electric's line workers and contractors who work on the power lines are at risk from electricity theft. Members can help stop energy theft by reporting



A residential digital meter

suspicious activity to the office: 800-924-3407. If the call is placed after hours, the Cooperative's call center CRC can take a message and notify on-call employees. Calls can be anonymous.

A criminal wanting to save a few dollars adds up for the honest and hard-working members who are served by that line and have to pay for the stolen electricity and/or damaged equipment.

### Know signs of electricity theft

Signs of electricity theft are usually found on electrical wires and electricity meters:

- Is the metal tag on the meter broken?
- Are there cut wires sticking out of the meter?
- Are there numerous wires or cables coming out of the meter?
- Are there strange objects or tools jammed in the meter?
- Is the meter missing?
- Is a meter being worked on by someone who is not a Co-op employee or approved third-party business?
- Are there wires that are cut or hanging off the power line itself?
- Are there lots of extension cords snaking across a property for weeks at a time?

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