

ACEC NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2025 | VOLUME 28 | ISSUE 08



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A MESSAGE FROM *Your General Manager*

Hollie McCormick
EVP/General Manager

AI TOOLS FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an increasingly popular tool for many industries and even in our daily lives. AI is a hot topic—sometimes exciting, sometimes a little scary. It has the potential to bring many opportunities—and a few challenges—to the electric utility sector. But machine learning takes time, and we're still in the process of determining how AI can really be utilized.

Many electric cooperatives, including ACEC, are already exploring emerging technologies like AI, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Most of AI's current applications are task-specific—like using chatbots to answer common questions from co-op members or analyzing data to better understand members' needs.

Contrary to what Hollywood would have you believe, AI can't think for itself. Its abilities depend on how it's programmed, the quality of its training and the data it receives. AI is essentially about learning from patterns and making decisions based on that input—not about having thoughts or opinions of its own.

We are fortunate to have Dairyland Power Cooperative as our G&T (General & Transmission) because they are at the forefront of AI technology for electric cooperatives. In 2023, the team at Dairyland began talking about the rise of AI and how it could be used at the co-op level. Dairyland used its partnership with Microsoft to build VoltWrite, its own in-house AI program. According to Nate Melby, Dairyland's vice president and chief information officer,

VoltWrite provides benefits of AI without the cybersecurity risks that can be found with public models of AI such as ChatGPT.

After extensive testing, VoltWrite was opened to Dairyland member co-ops in May 2024. Here at ACEC, we began experimenting with VoltWrite right away to see how it could create more efficiencies. I can honestly say it's been a beneficial tool in many ways, from having a letter writing template to having a more secure way to "Google" questions.

One of the biggest benefits to having VoltWrite available to us is added cybersecurity. Because it is only available to co-ops, there is a higher amount of data privacy.

Of course, we continue to use all the cybersecurity tips and tricks. We never add member data into searches and continue to do our own training to stay aware of the newest threats. As ACEC looks to adopt more tools powered by AI and other tech, we will ensure our systems are safe from potential cyber threats. Strong digital defenses are essential to using any new technology safely.

Other trends

As we consider emerging AI tools, our focus won't be so much on the technology itself as on solving real problems. If AI can streamline a process, predict an issue or improve

service for our members, it's worth considering. As technology evolves, AI may eventually be built into smart meters to help members track their energy use more effectively. It could even help our staff better manage the local grid or predict storm damage to deploy crews more efficiently.

Another exciting area is AR and VR. Many electric utilities are currently testing AR for training, giving lineworkers a hands-on experience to prepare for dangerous situations before facing them in real life. In the future, smart glasses may help crews instantly identify and troubleshoot equipment in the field.

Ultimately, AI, AR and VR are tools that can help utilities like ACEC serve their communities better—making energy more reliable, services faster and operations more efficient.

The Challenges AI Brings

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence, particularly energy-intensive technologies like generative AI and large language models, is presenting several challenges for electric utilities. One of the biggest concerns is the dramatic increase in energy demand. AI relies heavily on data centers, which require massive amounts of electricity to operate. As these technologies expand, power consumption is expected to rise significantly.



AI PUT INTO ACTION

Electric cooperatives are already using artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) for key tasks and activities. Looking ahead, co-ops see great potential for AI and AR as helpful tools for improving grid reliability and the services they provide to consumer-members.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

AI tools like chatbots can enhance member interactions and provide a tailored experience based on energy use data.

WEATHER FORECASTING

With the help of AI, weather forecasts will become more accurate, pinpointing areas to station utility crews.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Through augmented reality, or AR, lineworkers can experience interactive, lifelike trainings, rather than watching a video or webinar.

This growing demand is also creating a strain on our nation's electric grid, which can lead to instability and a higher risk of outages, especially in areas that are already dealing with high energy use or aging infrastructure.

While AI tools offer great potential in improving utility operations, these challenges highlight the growing tension between AI advancement and the long-term capability of the grid.

Rest assured, while utilizing new, cutting-edge technology is exciting, it can't be at the risk of creating a strain on our electric grid. Our focus is and remains to be providing safe, reliable and affordable electricity.

BOARD BRIEFS July 25 Meeting

- Reviewed and revised Board Policy 406 Board Meetings
- Approved an upgrade to Echo Valley Substation
- Approved an RLF for The Pit Stop in Elkader, IA
- Previewed Annual Meeting information
- Dairyland Power staff and CEO presented on future capacity & transmission plans, rates and 15-year financial forecast

Employee changes at ACEC

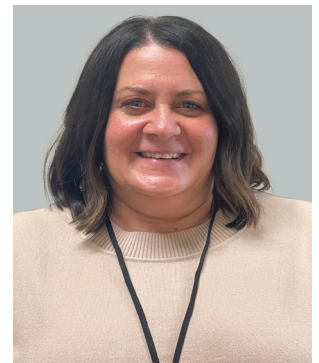
If you ever step into our lobby, you'll see a new smiling face greeting you. Robin Palmer recently started at the Co-op as our Member Accounts and FirstCall Representative. Robin is a graduate of Prairie du Chien High School and has a certificate as an accounting specialist from NICC. She worked as a department manager at Cabela's for 10 years, spent 13 years as an office manager and most recently worked for Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation. She has three children and one grandson.

With Robin taking over FirstCall responsibilities, ACEC's Kim Kloke has taken the position of Member Accounts Representative – Collections. Don't worry, you'll still see Kim when you come into our office, she's just moved across the hall. #6105

We are so happy to have Kim and Robin on the ACEC team and wish them the best in their roles.



Kim Kloke



Robin Palmer

Co-ops supporting co-ops

One of our core principles is Cooperation Among Cooperatives. This principle was put into play when we sent four lineworkers into neighbor MiEnergy territory following vicious wind and rain in late July. ACEC's Andrew Henderson, Jeff Cox, Ryan Jaster and Ben Grangaard spent two days assisting the MiEnergy crews by replacing sections of poles that were snapped during the storms. A crew from Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative also assisted the MiEnergy crews with the over 3,000 outages.



SHOWING CONCERN FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

ACEC staff recently donated school supplies to the Postville School District to help students start the school year strong. We wish all students, teachers, staff and parents in our school districts the best year!

Pictured are, from left, - Marissa Davis, fourth grade teacher; Ryan Wagner, ACEC manager of member services; Heather Staley, PBIS Coordinator; Caitlin Friederich, fifth grade teacher; LaRae Schutte, Title I teacher; Karen Hertges, elementary principal; Brenda Hackman, ACEC manager of economic development and community relations; Brennen Gunderson, ACEC engineering coordinator.

ACEC ASSISTS EVENT VENUE WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, FIBER INTERNET

Nestled in the valley north of Waukon sits White Haus Social, a new event venue in Northeast Iowa.

Boasting a large open space set on a tree lined lane near Green Valley Getaway, the venue is ideal for weddings, showers, meetings and other large gatherings. It's a dream come true for co-owners Jess and John Jennerjohn, along with fellow business partners Michael and Erica Steinberg and event coordinator Sydney Ross.

Allamakee-Clayton REC and AC Skyways have assisted along the journey by providing economic development expertise and reliable fiber internet connection.

A new idea

Jess and John Jennerjohn met in college in Cedar Rapids and spent the early part of their marriage in the Solon, Cascade and Peosta areas for John's career. About three years ago, they decided to relocate to Waukon for John to purchase Iron Hill Harley-Davidson. He also is an owner of Great River Harley Davidson in Onalaska.

After being a stay-at-home mom for a while Jess was ready for a change. She and Sydney were talking about careers and ambitions one evening in January 2024 when Jess asked Sydney about her goal. Sydney mentioned that she'd like to do something with wedding coordinating. That sparked an idea for Jess and John.

"John and I just looked at each other and were like, let's do it," she said. "It's very random. Never in a million years did I think I would own my own wedding venue but it's been so much fun."

Immediately the Jennerjohns began looking at available locations. After viewing a few options, they found the perfect spot at 76 16th Avenue Northwest, located just in front of Green Valley Getaway, headed north out of Waukon off Highway 9. They purchased the nearly 9 acres of land in mid-2024 and began construction in August.

When it came to planning, Jess knew she wanted everything to be white, with a clean, simple aesthetic. She also knew she wanted a lot of windows to allow for natural light throughout the day. She said she spent copious amounts of time researching different layouts and ceiling designs. She also wanted to make the space versatile depending on the seasons so she wanted to incorporate garage doors to open the space to the outdoors.



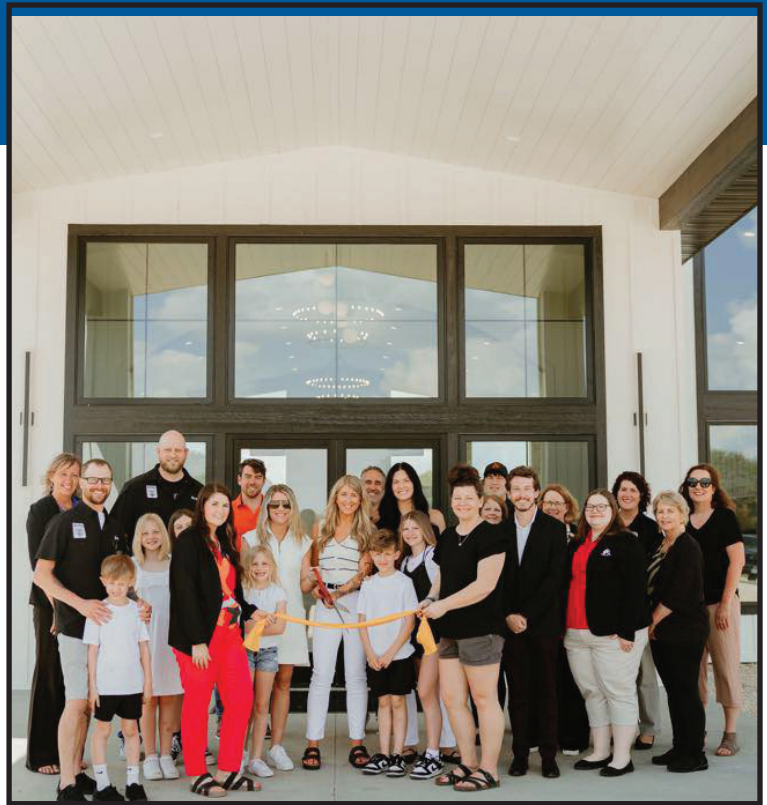
The final design was a 60 foot by 80 foot facility. The middle is wide-open to allow for a variety of seating options. To one side are the bridal suite and groom's den. To the other are the office, restrooms and service area.

The Jennerjohns and Steinbergs worked with several local contractors and businesses on the project, including: Sweeney Builders, Kruger Landscaping, Johanningmeier Stone, Kurth Plumbing & Heating, Christensen Electric, Custom Alarm Co., Freedom Bank, JW Kitchens, Ray's Excavating, West Side Lumber, Northeast Iowa Spray Foam, Alliant Energy and Benzing Surveying.

Working with ACEC and Dairyland

White Haus Social was another business in our footprint that worked with ACEC on a USDA Rural Economic Development Revolving Loan (RLF). The business partners worked with Brenda Hackman, ACEC's manager of economic development and community relations, to secure the loan to help with construction costs and furnishing the new venue. They also worked with Jenny Radcliffe of Dairyland Power on another RLF loan application.





John Jennerjohn said he learned about the economic development assistance with Brenda at ACEC through Barb Shull of Freedom Bank. “Barb mentioned the partnership with Allamakee-Clayton and the favorable terms that it could have,” said John. “We met with Brenda and were off to the races. Brenda was fantastic! We very quickly got her all of the documentation that she requested and she went right to work. I would say that the approval process was extremely fast compared to other approval timelines. The opportunity was fantastic for us as the low interest rate really allows us to pay off debt quickly. As well as being able to extend the first payment terms saved us as we were building a business from the ground up.

“I would say that both Brenda and Jenny were fantastic. They were both very excited to be a part of this adventure and supportive that the local area needed a beautiful event center. They felt like they just wanted to be a part of the team, which is a breath of fresh air because that isn't always the feeling people get when trying to start a new business. All in all, a great experience in working with them both!”

An AC Skyways customer

When it came to the final details, having consistent internet was a must. They gave AC Skyways, a division of Allamakee-Clayton REC, a call to schedule their fiber internet installation. They were already customers of fiber at their home and knew the value of a locally-owned internet company.

“We use Square with the POS (Point of Sale) system. We have TVs in the bridal suite and groom's den. Eventually I will be here using the office space more frequently,” Jess said. “It's vital we have consistently functioning internet to run things smoothly.”

Opening the doors

The building process went quickly, with the doors opening for the first event in early May. The grand opening was held the end of May, with the first wedding in June.

Anyone who rents the space for the weekend can come in Friday to do any decorating or host the rehearsal dinner. Parties need to end by midnight Saturday night. There is plenty of on-site parking, as well as outdoor space if couples want to get married outside. They've also accommodated indoor wedding ceremonies, and then flipped the space for dinner seating during cocktail hour. They can seat just over 400 people inside, and have additional space on the outside covered patio.

“It's all a learning process. Every bride and couple is different and we want to accommodate what they want for their day,” said Jess. **#4023-14-XX**

White Haus Social is more than a wedding reception venue. So far, Jess said they've hosted graduation parties, speakers such as Tara Thomas and Amanda Goodman from Faith & Four Letter Words, Bat Mitzvahs, bridal showers and more.

One upside to the venue is it's available year-round. This winter, Jess would like to host a “friendsgiving,” as well as potentially host markets or other events. She also still is accepting bookings for 2025 weddings and has the calendar opened to 2026 events.

To learn more about the venue, visit <https://whitehaussocial.com/> or email Jess at jess@whitehaussocial.com . ■

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY!

High schoolers who attend Zoom sessions have a chance to win a \$1,000 college scholarship

Iowa's electric cooperatives are offering a virtual opportunity for rural students to learn more about advocacy, electric cooperative opportunities and the cooperative business model with a three-part webinar series in October. The Iowa Youth Leadership Academy is open to any high school student in our service area. They are invited to register at <http://www.IowaYouthTour.com>.

"This program is perfect for rural Iowa students who have a passion for public service, leadership or government," said ACEC General Manager Hollee McCormick. "We want to raise students' awareness of how local electric co-ops power people's lives and empower communities. We also want to talk about exciting cooperative career paths that are available."

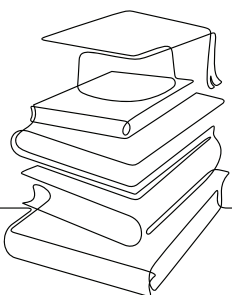
Once students register online for the academy, they can attend the webinars from their own computer or mobile device. Each Zoom session begins at 7 p.m., lasts about 45-60 minutes and focuses on a specific topic:

- Thursday, Oct. 2 – Cooperative Business Model
- Tuesday, Oct. 14 – Advocacy
- Thursday, Oct. 23 – Leadership

At the end of each live session, one attendee will be selected at random to win a pair of Apple AirPods. Students who attend all three sessions will be entered into a random drawing for a \$1,000 college scholarship. All students who register online by Sept. 30 will receive a special box of co-op goodies in the mail.

During the Zoom sessions, students will learn how to advocate for issues that are important to them and build leadership skills from a dynamic speaker. Attendees will also hear about Iowa Youth Tour. Students with an interest in government and public service are encouraged to apply for this weeklong complimentary trip to Washington D.C. The 2026 Youth Tour is slated for June 14-20, 2026.

Learn more at <https://acrec.com/iowa-youth-leadership-academy> or contact Jennifer Achenbach at 563-864-7611 or jachenbach@acrec.coop for more information. ■ #1841-2A



WANTED:
Rural Iowa
high school
students
who have a
passion for
leadership





Attend our webinar series in October for a chance to win Apple AirPods and a \$1,000 college scholarship! Learn more at IowaYouthTour.com



A USDA Rural Economic Development Loan (REDLG) application written by Dairyland Power Cooperative and submitted by ACEC provided a \$2 million loan (along with \$2 million from MiEnergy) to WinnMed Hospital in Decorah for their remodel and expansion. This program is designed to promote economic development and job creation projects in rural areas. By providing this pass-through loan to WinnMed Hospital, Dairyland Power, ACEC and MiEnergy are contributing to healthcare infrastructure and services in the region. Pictured at the check presentation are, from left – John Schroeder, business & ag banker, SVP – Decorah Bank & Trust Co.; Justin Gullekson, WinnMed Board of Directors; Cole Phillips, loan portfolio manager, Decorah Bank & Trust Co.; Ben Stevens, CFO of WinnMed; Brenda Hackman, ACEC manager of economic development and community relations; Clark Goltz, Chair, WinnMed Board of Directors.

MEMBER RECIPES

Send your favorite recipes and/or recipe topics to Jennifer Achenbach, ACEC, PO Box 715, Postville, IA 52162 or email jachenbach@acrec.coop.

You'll receive a \$5 bill credit if your recipe is printed. Please note – recipes must be received by the 25th day of the month before the intended publication.

OCTOBER – **ANYTHING WITH PUMPKIN**

NOVEMBER – **THANKSGIVING FAVORITES**

DECEMBER – **HOLIDAY APPETIZERS**

SARAH'S HOMEMADE APPLESAUCE

- 4 apples – peeled, cored and chopped
- $\frac{3}{4}$ c. water
- $\frac{1}{4}$ c. white sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cinnamon

Directions

Combine apples, water, sugar and cinnamon in a saucepan; cover and cook over medium heat until apples are soft, stirring occasionally, about 15 to 20 minutes. Allow apple mixture to cool, then mash with a fork or potato masher until it is the consistency you like.

SLOW COOKER STUFFING

- 1 c. butter
- 2 c. chopped onion
- 2 c. chopped celery
- 12 oz. sliced mushrooms
- $\frac{1}{4}$ c. chopped fresh parsley
- 12 c. dry bread cubes
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. dried sage
- 1 tsp. poultry seasoning
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. dried marjoram
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground black pepper
- 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ c. chicken broth
- 2 large eggs, beaten

Directions

Melt butter in a skillet over medium heat. Cook and stir onion, celery, mushroom and parsley in butter until slightly softened, 5 to 8 minutes. Place bread cubes in a very large mixing bowl. Spoon cooked vegetables over bread cubes.

Season with salt, sage, poultry seasoning, thyme, marjoram and pepper. Pour in enough broth to moisten, then mix in eggs. Transfer mixture to a slow cooker. Cover and cook on high for 45 minutes, then reduce heat to low and cook for 4 to 8 hours.

CORNBREAD CASSEROLE

- $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. butter, melted
- 1 (15 oz.) can whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 (15 oz.) can creamed corn
- 1 (8.5 oz.) package corn bread mix
- 2 Tbsp. sour cream

Directions

Preheat oven to 350° F. Combine butter, whole corn, creamed corn, cornbread mix and sour cream in a mixing bowl. Fold the ingredients together and pour into a 2-quart casserole dish. Bake in the preheated oven for 1 hour.

FRIED BRUSSEL SPROUTS

- 6 slices bacon, cut into bite-size pieces
- $\frac{1}{2}$ onion, diced
- 1 (12 oz.) package fresh Brussel sprouts, trimmed and sliced
- 2 Tbsp. white sugar
- Salt and ground black pepper (to taste)

Directions

Place bacon pieces in a large skillet until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add Brussel sprouts and toss to coat in the bacon grease. Cook and stir until browned and tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in sugar, salt and black pepper; sprinkle in bacon pieces.

■ ~ All recipes courtesy of allrecipes.com

CYBER SECURITY Tip of the MONTH

Avoid charity scams

When a hurricane, flood, wildfire, or other tragic disaster strikes, many people respond with generosity. Unfortunately, cybercriminals respond just as quickly, launching scams that exploit our desire to help. With some precautions, you can reduce the chance of falling victim. When in doubt, trust your gut and donate to established, trusted organizations – and only donate through official websites. ■

~ Courtesy of staysafeonline.org

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FIND YOUR SERVICE NUMBER

Congratulations to Lynn Heins! Lynn found his service number in a recent ACEC Newsletter and was awarded a \$5.00 bill credit.

ACEC has hidden three Service Location numbers within this newsletter. The numbers are from different regions of our service area – one is worth \$17.50 and two are worth \$5.00. The service location number must be yours to claim the credit, and you need to notify us when you find it.



CONTACT ACEC

HEADQUARTERS

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PHONE NUMBERS

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TOLL-FREE 888-788-1551

PAYMENT LINE 24/7 833-284-5051

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811

SKYWAYS INTERNET SOLUTIONS

800-864-1611

WEBSITE

acrec.com

OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

OUTAGES

888-788-1551 or 563-864-7611

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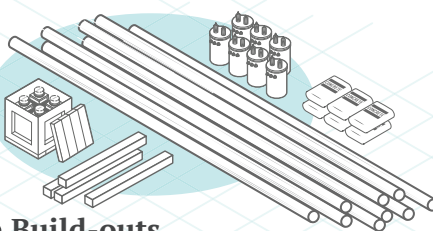
DPC

Cost Increases

The past five years have been a period of exploding costs for the electric utility industry and for broadband providers, pushed by soaring demand, supply chain challenges, raw materials shortages, increased labor costs and tariffs. The impact has been rapid increases in the cost of producing power, longer and more unpredictable project timelines and the need for more financing, all of which have driven electric rates up for residences, businesses and other end-users. Here's a look at what's contributing to the trend. **Percent increase since 2020:**

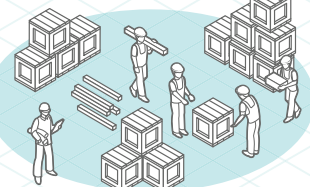
Infrastructure

| | |
|--|----------|
| Utility poles (wood, steel, composite) | +25-40% |
| Crossarms & braces (steel/wood) | +20-35% |
| Conductor wire (aluminum/copper) | +30-50% |
| Transformers | +70-100% |
| Grain-oriented electrical steel | +80-100% |
| Oil/dielectric fluids | +25-40% |
| Copper wiring | +50% |
| Concrete | +25-35% |
| Smart meters | +20-35% |
| Pad-mounted switchgear | +25-40% |
| Circuit breakers/reclosers | +20-35% |



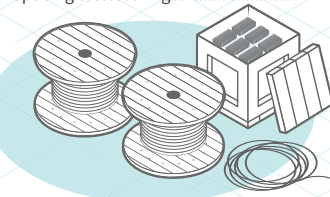
Build-outs

| | |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Utility construction labor | +20-40% |
| Freight/logistics | +30-60% |



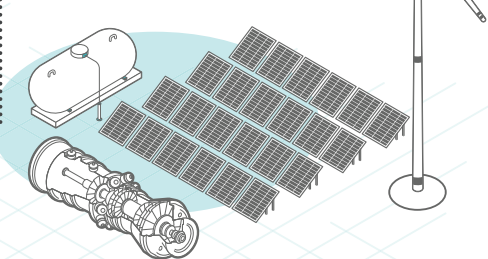
Broadband

| | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Fiber-optic cable | +25-40% |
| Splicing & telecom gear | +20-30% |



Generation

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Diesel gensets | +20-40% |
| Gas turbines | +20-30% |
| Solar PV systems | +25-35% |
| Wind turbines | +25-35% |
| Hydropower components | +20-30% |
| Battery storage | +25-40% |
| SCADA/EMS systems | +20-30% |
| Inverters | +20-30% |
| Relays & switchgear | +25-40% |
| Natural Gas | +20-120% |
| Coal | +30-60% |
| Diesel/fuel oil | +40-70% |



Fleets

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| Light trucks | +25-40% |
| Bucket trucks, digger derricks | +20-50% |
| Fuel costs (especially diesel) | +20-30% |
| Maintenance | +15-25% |
| Insurance premiums | +20% |

