



NEWSWIRE

Update of
MAEC Activities

February, 2004

Officers for 2004

The Council elected new officers back at the December meeting. The Chairman for the next year is Steve Wallenwine who is Agricultural Services Director for Consumers Energy. Vice-Chair is Dan Nelson, Great Lakes Energy Coop, Boyne City, MI. Truman Surbrook continues as recording secretary. Thanks to Mike Krause, Manager of Thumb Electric Coop and for doing an outstanding job as Chair of the Council for the past two years.

Council Staff Changes

Truman Surbrook has been appointed Managing Director of the MAEC effective January 1, 2004. He replaces Keith Tinsey who resigned to take a position with Walther Farms, Inc. Of Three Rivers, MI. Truman has been recording secretary of the Council since its beginning in 1994. Truman's teaching load was reduced to allow him time to perform Council duties.

Also joining the Council as Staff Engineer on a part time basis is Jim Schrandt. Jim, a Registered Professional Engineer, retired from Consumers Energy in 2001, where he served as Director of Agricultural Services. Jim played a key role in establishing the MAEC back in 1993 and 94.

MPSC Dismisses Complaint

The Michigan Public Service Commission issued an Opinion and Order on November 25, 2003 dismissing a complaint brought by the MI Attorney General against Consumers Energy Company. In the complaint, (Case No. U-11684), the Attorney General had alleged that stray voltage in rural areas of Michigan has been adversely affecting the health and milk production of dairy cattle.

The MPSC determined that the scientific evidence and expert testimony presented by the parties was inconclusive on factual issues, so that it could not make findings as to whether the Utility's electric distribution facilities are causing stray voltage to be present in quantities sufficient to impair farm livestock.

New MPSC Stray Voltage Docket

In a new proceeding (Case No. U-13934), the Michigan Public Service Commission opened a new docket on November 25, 2003 to solicit comments that would enable the MPSC to decide if and how to proceed effectively in devising and implementing stray voltage standards or solutions that would be applicable to all regulated electric utilities operating in Michigan. The MPSC encouraged interested persons to enter into discussions and to collaborate on joint positions. The comments are due to be filed at the MPSC by April 1, 2004.

Dairy Farm Electrical Safety Checks

Michigan Department of Agriculture Dairy Inspectors, in cooperation with the Council, made electrical safety checks on over 30% of Michigan's dairy farms during their routine farm visits from August 1, 2003 through September 30, 2003.

The electrical safety check is a free service to farmers as part of the normal milk safety inspections performed by MDA staff, and continues a program that began in 1996. In addition to regular dairy farm inspections, the dairy inspectors take a simple voltage measurement from the milk bulk tank to the floor that may reveal electrical safety problems, such as ground faults for elevated neutral-to-earth voltage that could be harmful to livestock or humans.

If a steady reading of two or more volts AC is found, the inspector notifies the milk producer, encouraging the producer to contact the electrical power supplier serving the farm to schedule a free electrical evaluation. In any case, the inspector leaves the producer an informational brochure containing a record of the voltage check, along with contact information for the dairy's power supplier.

Out of a total of 913 safety checks made during August and September, 2003, thirteen, or 1.4%, were measured greater than 2.0 volts. After being notified by the Dairy Inspector, most producers were very interested in working with the power supplier to quickly solve any potential problems. The voltage source is sometimes due to conditions on the farm, and sometimes conditions off the farm.

State Adopts 2002 Electrical Code

Amended Michigan Public Act 230 of 1972 goes into effect on Sunday, February 29, 2004. On that date electrical installations in Michigan will be required to meet the 2002 National Electrical Code except for one-

family and two-family dwellings. They will be required to have wiring installed to meet the 2003 Michigan Residential Code. Here are some significant changes for Michigan resulting from newly amended PA 230.

(1) All 15 and 20 ampere, 120 volt circuits serving outlets in dwelling bedrooms will be required to be protected by arc-fault interrupter type circuit breakers. Living units in any type of facility is now included.

(2) PA 230 as amended does not include Article 547 of the National Electrical Code which specifies special rules for wiring in agricultural buildings. Wiring in agricultural buildings is only required to be installed in accordance with rules in the first four chapters of the 2002 NEC the same as ordinary commercial and industrial buildings.

(3) It is not certain whether licensed electricians will be required to complete a 15 hour Code up-date course for the 2005 license renewal, but to be on the safe side, it is suggested electricians complete a course before the end of this year.

Agricultural Grounding Short Course

A two-day short course covering details of agricultural grounding, wiring techniques, equipotential plane installation, and service to outbuildings will be offered by the Council this spring. The course is for electricians. Locations are Cass City, Cadillac, and East Lansing. For details and a registration form visit our web site at www.egr.msu.edu/age/

Events of Interest

ANR Week at MSU will be March 8 to 13, 2004. Highlights include the Michigan FFA 76th State Convention. The ANR Luncheon, partially sponsored by the Michigan Electric Power Suppliers, is held on Thursday, March 11 at Kellogg Center.