




Weather
Corner



Tonight...Partly cloudy in the evening then becoming mostly clear. Lows in the mid 30s. Northeast winds around 10 mph.

Tuesday...Mostly sunny. Highs in the upper 60s. East winds 10 to 15 mph. Tuesday night... Partly cloudy in the evening... Then mostly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of thunderstorms after midnight. Lows in the mid 40s. Southeast winds 10 to 20 mph.

Wednesday...Partly sunny. Windy. A slight chance of thunderstorms in the morning...Then a chance of thunderstorms in the afternoon. Highs in the mid 70s. Southeast winds 15 to 25 mph shifting to the south 25 to 30 mph in the afternoon. Chance of thunderstorms 30 percent. Wednesday night...Mostly cloudy with a 30 percent chance of thunderstorms. Lows around 50.

Thursday...Partly sunny. Highs in the upper 70s. Thursday night...Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of thunderstorms. Lows in the lower 40s.

Sunday's low, high: 39, 86.
Saturday's low, high: 45, 80.
Friday's low, high: 33, 65

Midwest Energy: Dealing with disasters

HOXIE (AP) — When it comes to dealing with disasters of late, a scorecard would be nice.

That way, it would be easier to tell which disaster is being talked about.

Luckily, there's only four such disasters affecting Midwest Energy, but they date back to November 2005, and involve millions of dollars to pay for hundreds of miles of power line repair work.

And there's plenty of government paperwork, given most of the money for the repairs is coming from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Already, Midwest Energy has at least two people in-house working solely on FEMA-related projects.

They soon will have three warehouse workers who will have the task of maintaining inventory for the repairs that are being made. The Hays-based utility also is looking at hiring someone to simply manage all the paperwork that comes from the four big projects, according to Midwest spokesman Bob Helm.

All of that is in addition to the independent contractors who can be found working on power lines throughout much of northwest Kansas.

Crews from Par Electrical Contractors can be seen in several areas across the region, notably on a line running from Hill City to Colby.

It also is a line that crosses the boundary between FEMA 1 and FEMA 2, distinguishable where the power line crosses U.S. Highway 24 east of Colby.

To the west of where that line jogs, contractors said, is work that will be part of FEMA 2. To the east, all the way to Hill City, the work is part of FEMA 1.

Incidentally, most of the work has been done on what is called FEMA 3 -- damage done to Midwest Energy lines in the town of Greensburg -- and the process is just getting started on FEMA 4, damage caused by a late 2007 ice storm.

Helm said 98 percent of the FEMA 1 project has been completed, leaving just a few miles of that U.S. 24 line to be finished.

Work on FEMA 2 -- the remnants of the New Year's Eve 2006 storm that left 3 to 5 inches of ice in its wake -- will begin in earnest this month.

That storm is the big one.

Damage estimates from that storm, for Midwest Energy alone, was \$60 million. FEMA's share of the losses would amount to \$49 million, with the state kicking in an additional 10 percent.

FEMA 1 caused \$16 million in damages; FEMA 3 about \$7 million; and FEMA 4 still is being determined, with meetings with FEMA and state emergency officials just taking place.

That 2006 storm also took down power lines operated by Western Cooperative in WaKeeney and Prairie Land, based in Norton.

At Western, \$18 million has been obligated for its reconstruction efforts, including rebuilding 430 miles of lines. Prairie Land had \$39.8 million in damages from the New Year's storm.

Helm said the December 2007 ice storm doesn't look like it will be more expensive than the storm of a year earlier.

"But we're not sure," he said. "It was also a big one. We continue to find problems."

As for FEMA 2, work will soon begin on a transmission line in Pawnee County, followed in later weeks by work on a 34,500 volt transmission line from Quinter into Thomas County. The U.S. 24 line also will be completed.

"FEMA 2 is going to take a long time," Helm said.

Most of the line rebuilding work is being done by outside contractors.

That's because in-house linemen have plenty of other work to do, including a series of new hookups that have resulted from oil drilling.

Some of the rebuilding efforts also are taking steps to help prevent other problems should weather conditions deteriorate.

That includes locating power poles closer together and using a more ice-resistant variety of wire.

On the line between Hill City and Colby, poles are being located about 250 feet apart, slightly closer than the 300 feet than the old ones.

And a different cable is being used, a "ribbon" type cable that is expected to shed ice easier, in the hope of preventing lines from breaking.

Norton County employees denied compensation time

By CYNTHIA HAYNES
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Norton County employees can not longer work overtime and take extra time off later instead of getting paid for it.

At their Monday meeting the county commissioners said they have talked about eliminating the practice of compensation (or comp) time, which allows workers to take time instead of money when they work extra.

The idea sounded good when it was put into effect several year ago, Commissioner John Miller said, but has turned into a book-keeping nightmare and has not helped the county finances like it was hoped.

The commissioners decided to pay out any accrued time, which has not already been used.

The accrued time will be paid as overtime, the commissioners said, which means employees will be paid at time and a half.

County Clerk Robert Wyatt estimated that paying the comp time out all at once will cost the county a little under \$3,000.

"That way this thing is cleaned up and done," said Commissioner Miller. "It was supposed to save money but people started using the system."

"It really cost money in book-keeping," said Commission Leroy Lang.

"We have an overtime policy and that's what you get. I guarantee we'll pay out a lot less time and a half now." Mr. Miller agreed.

Department heads had been notified in early February of the expected change, the commissioners said.

Road and Bridge Supervisor Tom Brannan said his crew has been using their time up since then.

The bad news, Mr. Brannan said, is he found a contract signed on July 11, 1962, that says the county will take care of the road over the spillway. The road needs some work, he said, and many of the posts will have to be replaced.

"If we had had any idea that this contract existed we could have bought posts during the state sales," Commissioner Miller said.

Mr. Brannan said that he would ask to see if the state will help the county with the problem because there are a lot of posts on the road.

Commissioner Miller asked him to do so.

"Go ahead and make a request," he said. "We don't have to do anything today or tomorrow. Make the request and see what we will need to do."

Mr. Brannan said he would also start checking to see what the cost of replacement posts would be.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Heard that Mr. Brannan had talked to Rich Meyers, who wants to close a road on his mother's farm property. Mr. Brannan said that she owns the land on both sides of the road, which deadends on her property, and he sees no problem with the closure as long as the proper procedures are followed
- Heard that prairie dogs are moving into the landfill area and Solid Waste Supervisor Curt Archibald wants to get rid of them before they cause any damage to the pits.
- Asked Mr. Archibald to get either hard tires or foam-filled tires for the machines that only work at the landfill because the work is so hard on the tires they wear out quickly.
- Learned that Sheriff Troy Thomsson will not be getting a new light bar for his vehicle because of the cost.

Comedian
laughs with
a message

From "LOWRY," Page 1

"I don't know anything about them. I like Jerry Seinfeld. He's funny. But I don't know anything about him. How do they come to their conclusions?"

"Life can't bother you too much if you take too much interest in it. It's not all about you. I look at life like watching a movie, observing it. What are you hear to learn."

But like he said about his jokes, Lowry said his message is not overdone.

"It's not a preachy thing. We don't need one more," he said. "I like it when a story takes a turn and teaches you something you never thought and it's obvious."

Opening for Lowry are music performances by Stan Whitmire and LordSong.

Lowry, from Houston, is brought to Colby by J-R Marketing. Tickets are available in Colby at F&M Bank; New Life Christian Books in McCook, Neb.; Good Book Store in Hays and all Peoples State Bank locations.

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Joe Mildrexler

2008 Honorary Associate Degree Recipient

Thursday, April 24

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Student Union, Room 108

Beginning at 3:00 p.m.

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