President Reagan once said, “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the government, and I’m here to help.” Well, SECO Energy recently found out that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is coming to Florida to “help” with the final, published version of the “Clean Power Plan.” This plan could raise electric rates, harm the reliability of Florida’s grid, damage our fragile economy, and do virtually nothing to reduce the global quantity of CO₂.

If you read our monthly publications and/or attend our Annual Meeting, you know that I’m not shy about sounding the alarm on EPA overreach and consequences to affordable electric service. In partnership with our wholesale power provider, Seminole Electric Cooperative, SECO Energy has attempted to ward off the Clean Power Plan’s devastating effects on Florida. We participated in public forums, submitted comments to the EPA, testified in Congress, met with the head of the EPA, and even met with the President’s Office of Management of Budget. Despite our best efforts, it appears that most of our concerns with the plan, and its potential to raise electric bills, went unheeded.

Rest assured that SECO Energy and Seminole are not giving up our continued efforts to fight for reliable, affordable electricity. We believe, as do many others, that the Clean Power Plan, a massive regulatory overreach that was never approved by our elected officials, is vulnerable.

Laurence Tribe, a professor at Harvard Law School and a world-renowned academic, said, “The Clean Power Plan is Unconstitutional. The EPA acts as though it has the legislative authority to re-engineer the nation’s electric generating system and power grid. It does not.”

Accordingly, Seminole filed suit against the Clean Power Plan, asking that the federal court determine if it is legal. Seminole also asked the court to delay compliance with the rule until the lawsuit could be resolved. This delay is referred to as a “stay.” If granted, this “stay” would prevent electric cooperatives like Seminole from having to make decisions that might raise electric rates prematurely.

Federal courts have shown a recent willingness to put a damper on the EPA’s “help.” Earlier this summer, the Supreme Court overturned EPA’s “MATS” rule after years of legal fighting. A federal court also recently delayed enforcement of the much-maligned EPA “Waters of the United States” (WOTUS) rule.

In addition to monitoring Seminole’s legal challenge, SECO Energy members who are concerned about the effects of the Clean Power Plan on electric rates should contact their elected officials. Ronald Reagan also once said, “The federal government is too big and it spends too much money.” That’s right – too much of YOUR money. Get involved – preserve your rights and speak up for affordable, reliable electricity at www.action.coop.

“SECO Energy and Seminole are not giving up our continued efforts to fight for reliable, affordable electricity.

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Liars, Scammers, and Thieves — Oh My!

Phone scams are rampant. Con artists constantly come up with new ways to steal from you under the guise that your electric service will be disconnected if you don’t immediately purchase a Green Dot MoneyPak, a preloaded debit card, or a Western Union wire – the list goes on. Don’t fall for fraudulent nonsense. Hang up and call SECO.

Stanford University’s Financial Fraud Research Center estimates the cost of U.S. fraud at $40 to $50 billion a year. That’s because energy-related scammers have moved up to bigger-ticket items like solar systems. These folks may pose as utility impostors or independent “energy auditors.” They arrive at your door offering a free HVAC inspection or an evaluation of your home’s energy leakage. SECO does offer free energy audits, but they are strictly scheduled by appointment. Unless you’ve heard from us in advance and you’ve invited us over, don’t let anyone in. Call the police if you’re in doubt.

Some unsolicited “energy auditors” are actually solar marketers who may be combining energy-efficiency packages with a few solar panels and claiming that the homeowner qualifies for the tax credits based on an overinflated cost of the entire package. That’s called tax fraud, folks.

Per Consumer Reports, a new scam targets residents who want to cut their energy bills with rooftop solar. Solar energy can reduce your electric bill – with a big enough system and long enough payback period. But making the big up-front investment can be the equivalent of paying for 30 to 40 years of electricity in advance. Consumers unfamiliar with pros and cons of a home’s solar conduciveness give double-dealers an opportunity to talk up savings. The promised best-case scenario (or tax credit ploy) can lure you into paying a big deposit to a contractor who disappears or the system doesn’t produce the promised savings. Victims have been burned for thousands.

Protect yourself: Let SECO Energy help you determine if solar makes sense for you. Our consultation is free. If you move forward, work only with licensed contractors specializing in solar installations. Conduct a free SECO energy audit to identify energy wasters, and get solar installation bids from at least three companies. Check Better Business Bureau ratings and get references. Never pay the full price up front or a large deposit. Don’t turn over final payment until your system has been inspected by SECO to ensure that it’s safely connected with our system and installed correctly. Contact us at energyservices@secoenergy.com.

SECO Energy.com is getting a makeover. Navigating through our pages for energy-efficiency advice, energy audit requests, safety information, bill payment options and more will be easier. Watch for upcoming announcements of the roll-out date.

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Florida’s Anhinga

Often called “water turkey” or “snake bird,” the Anhinga (Anhinga anhinga) is a large water bird with a long snake-like neck found throughout Florida. Its unique feather structure is designed to allow it to swim completely underwater for long distances. Long, fluted twelve-inch tail feathers are thick and serve as both a propeller and a rudder when swimming. This diving wonder can disappear quickly, making no noise or ripple, swim a long distance and reappear often in the opposite direction than expected. When floating, only the neck and head can be seen sticking up out of the water giving it the appearance of a snake in the water.

Since it does not have oil glands to waterproof its feathers, Anhingas will perch on a limb holding wings outstretched to air dry feathers before being able to fly. It is a graceful flier, can travel long distances without flapping its wings and can easily soar to great heights. Flying birds have air sacs in their bodies that make them lighter. When the Anhinga wants to swim under water, it presses its feathers tight against its body to squeeze the air out. Fish, frogs, insects, water snakes, even small alligators are skewered underwater and, if too large to swallow, brought to the top where they’re tossed into the air for alignment and swallowed whole.

When asleep, the bird stands with its body almost erect. In rainy weather it stands, perfectly motionless, with its neck and head stretched upward so the water glides off. Although web footed, its feet are strong enough to tightly grasp a limb.

Anhingas nest in trees that hang over the water. The male collects sticks and twigs which the female weaves into a nest where three to six dark greenish-white eggs are laid. Both parents incubate the eggs for about a month. Chicks are born blind and naked. At two weeks of age, they know to drop into the water and swim to a hiding place if danger threatens. Once the danger has passed, they climb back up to the nest. If they can’t get back to the nest, their parents feed them where they are. At six to eight weeks, they are on their own.
Heat pumps are the energy-efficient choice to heat Florida homes (when operated properly). In winter, they pump warm air from the outside into the home. Their operation is based upon the premise that all air contains some heat, even when temperatures drop down to 32 degrees. This is why the heat from the vents doesn't feel so warm. Those unfamiliar often think the lukewarm air is an indicator of the unit not working properly – just the opposite is true.

When the heat coming from the vents is extremely warm, most likely the back-up heat strips are operating. This may indicate a problem. The back-up heat strips are automatically activated when it is extremely cold but their operation can also be induced through an improper thermostat setting or adjustment. Unfortunately, these back-up strips can cost five times more than the heat pump's normal mode.

Helpful tips to heat efficiently during winter:

1. For heating, set the thermostat to “heat” and the fan to the “auto” setting.
2. Check your thermostat. Does it show auxiliary or emergency on the display? Auxiliary indicates the heat pump and the back-up heat strips are on simultaneously, and emergency indicates only the back-up heat strips are running.
3. Only use emergency heat if there is a problem with your compressor. If you suspect a problem, make sure to have your system checked by a licensed heating contractor as soon as possible.
4. Don't raise the temperature on your thermostat too quickly, this can turn on the back-up heat strips. Instead raise the temperature one-to-two degrees at a time.
5. Ideally, aim to heat your home between 68 to 70 degrees or lower. Every degree above this range will increase heating costs approximately three to five percent per degree.

Don't forget to change your air filters during the winter months. Visit SECOEnergy.com and click on FilterChange to order discounted air filters and to receive email reminders when it's time to change them.

Don't forget to look for the last six digits of your account number 802010 in this month's SECO News. You can email us at customerservice@secoenergy.com (or call) if your number appears. Six winners will be drawn at random from all submissions.