



Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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Prioritize safety all year-round

MAY is designated as Electrical Safety Month. For Vigilante Electric Cooperative, safety is our number one priority year-round. Whether it is our line crews, office staff or members, we recognize that everyone has a part to play in making safety a priority.

Electricity is a necessity that should be respected, but not feared. We understand the potential dangers of electricity because it is our industry and our line crews work around it every day, but too often electricity is taken for granted. According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, thousands of people in the U.S. are critically injured or electrocuted as a result of electrical fires and accidents in their own homes. Many of these accidents are preventable.

Safety is more than a catchphrase. It takes a team effort to keep co-op employees safe. Additionally, we want to help keep you and all members of our community safe. That's why you'll see Vigilante Electric hosting safety demonstrations at community events and in schools throughout the year to demonstrate the potential dangers of electricity. We discuss emergency scenarios, such as what to do in a car accident involving a utility pole and downed powerlines. We also use these pages to inform our members about electrical safety related topics such as farm/ranch safety and generator safety.

"General Manager Rollie Miller added "the safety of the men and women working at Vigilante has been and continues to



VEC Lineman Cody Tarter puts on an electrical safety demonstration. | **VEC PHOTO**

be my number 1 priority. We take it very seriously from the top of the organization throughout. The employee safety awareness has been enhanced and it shows. We simply need to not become complacent and continue to make progress. I am very proud of the team effort put forth by all of us. Because it takes all of us to keep us all safe"

Electricity is an integral part of modern life. Given the prevalence of electrical devices, tools and appliances, we would like to pass along a few practical electrical safety tips:

See SAFETY, next page

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE

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President

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Wise River/Silver Bow/Melrose

Andy Johnson,

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Rollie Miller,

General Manager

It's that time of year: Call before you dig

AT Vigilante Electric, safety is at the forefront of how we operate. Safe work practices are something that we review every day, and we want to help our members and community be safe in their practices as well. As we transition into spring and summer, one of the most important things to remember is to call before you dig.

Whether you are a contractor or a do-it-yourselfer, spring and summer are when we turn the most dirt. Whether you are turning it with a backhoe or a hand spade, there is always the possibility of danger lurking just below the surface. Digging into an electric powerline, natural gas line, water line or telephone line has consequences. Depending on what you dig into, the consequences could be physical and will be financial.

In terms of bodily harm, contacting an underground powerline is every bit as dangerous as contacting overhead lines. They can carry the same voltage as overhead lines and are much harder to identify. Don't take a chance; one wrong decision could be your last.

From a financial standpoint, the statistics are startling. The Common Ground Alliance (CGA) is an organization dedicated to preventing damage to underground utility infrastructure and protecting those who live and work near them. They collect and publish data regarding utility infrastruc-



structure damage, and estimate the annual cost at \$30 billion.

Much of this can be avoided with one simple call. The Call Before You Dig campaign has been around for years. 811 is the national phone number designated to help protect individuals from unintentionally hitting underground utility lines while working on digging projects, and is more than a clever marketing slogan: It is the law.

Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 2021- 69-4-501 (12)(a) states: "Excavation" means an operation in which earth, rock or other material in the ground is moved, removed or otherwise displaced by means or use of any tools, equipment or explosives. The term includes, but is not limited to, grading, trenching, digging, ditching, drilling, augering, tunneling, scraping, and cable or pipe plowing and driving.

MCA 2021 - 69-4-501 (13) states: "Excavator" means a person conduct-

ing the excavation activities

Montana Code Annotated 2021, 69-4-502 (2) states: an excavator may not make or begin an excavation without first obtaining information concerning the possible location of an underground facility from each underground facility owner.

MCA 2021, 69-4-503 (1): Before beginning an excavation, the excavator shall notify, through a notification center, all owners of underground facilities in the area of the proposed excavation.

MCA 2021, 69-4-523 (1)(b); an excavator who damages an underground facility is liable for the entire cost of the repair of the underground facility.

Contacting 811 at least two business days prior to digging, either by phone or online (callbeforeyoudig.org), starts the process of getting your underground utility lines marked for free. Then 811 will notify the utility companies in your area, who then will send a professional locator to mark the approximate location of your lines.

Please note that Vigilante Electric Cooperative will only locate the power line between the transformer and the meter. We will not locate wire between the meter and your home, as this is a private line that was not installed by our cooperative. This is the responsibility of the member and will require an electrician. RM

SAFETY

Continued from page 6

- Frayed wires pose a serious safety hazard. *Power cords* can become *damaged or frayed* from age, heavy use, or excessive current flow through the wiring. If *cords* become *frayed* or cut, replace them, as they could cause a shock when handled.

- Avoid overloading circuits. Circuits can only cope with a limited amount of electricity. Overload happens when you

draw more electricity than a circuit can safely handle.

- Use extension cords properly. Never plug an extension cord into another extension cord. If you "daisy chain" them together, it could lead to overheating, creating a potential fire hazard. Don't exceed the wattage of the cord. Doing so also creates a risk of overloading the cord and creating a fire hazard. Extension cords should not be used as permanent solutions. If you need additional outlets, contact a licensed electrician to help.

We encourage you to talk with your kids about playing it safe and smart around electricity. Help them be aware of overhead powerlines near where they play outdoors.

Our mission is to provide reliable power at the lowest possible cost without undermining our commitment to safety for our employees and our community. If you have safety-related questions, or if you would like to schedule a safety demonstration, please contact us at 683-2327, 800-221-8271, or at contact@vec.coop. RM

CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

IT'S THE COOPERATIVE WAY

COOPERATIVES adhere to seven cooperative principles that guide all of our decisions, from how we run the cooperative to how we engage with our local communities. At Vigilante Electric, we live these principles every day. While all the principles are of equal importance, Principle #7 - Concern for Community, is more than just how we operate as a business; it is a reflection of who we are as an organization.

Vigilante Electric Cooperative and its employees have a proud record of giving and working with our communities to make them strong. Our trustees and staff are dedicated stewards donating countless hours of their time, and our philanthropy serves a wide range of organizations. As an organization there are several financial ways we give back to our communities. In 2021, we donated more than \$14,000 to the organizations listed at the end of this article.

In August of 2016, we implemented a program that provides our members with the opportunity to contribute to making our communities safer. Vigilante Safety Roundup is a voluntary program where members allow us to round their monthly bill up to the next whole dollar. Funds are awarded to organizations within our service territory for safety related projects. To date, seven awards have been granted to very deserving organization, for a wide variety of projects.

At the end of March, we had 679 members participate, with total contributions of more than \$13,000. If you have a safety-related project in need of funding or if you would like to contribute, please contact us at 683-2327 or 800-221-8271.

Since 1998, Vigilante Electric has helped members with their winter heating needs through our low-income assistance program. In 2021, we credited back more than \$15,000



Kassidy Broere and Sarah Welborn were Vigilante Electric Youth Tour participants in 2019. | VEC PHOTO

to members meeting low-income guidelines. Since the inception of this program, we have credited back approximately \$340,000.

Vigilante Electric has a long-standing commitment to providing scholarship opportunities to the dependents of our members. The Vigilante Electric Leadership Award is designed to help deserving students offset part of the cost for a post-secondary education.

Our Youth Tour award provides a one-of-a-kind learning opportunity by sending participants to Washington, D.C. During this week-long event, participants tour Washington, D.C. and experience the history enshrined there. They visit with their state's congressional delegation, and participate in youth rallies and socials.

Vigilante Electric serves nine counties in Montana, and one in Idaho, and over the course of a year we get a lot of requests for donations. Rest assured we will continue to do what we can for the communities that we serve. We are members of these communities and want our communities to thrive. It is the cooperative way.

RM

DONATIONS

GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHO HAVE RECEIVED AID FROM VIGILANTE ELECTRIC

Beaverhead Co. High School Senior Party
 Beaver Booster Club
 Beaverhead Chamber of Commerce
 Beaverhead Co. Fair
 Big Hole Watershed Committee
 Broadwater Rodeo Association
 Cardwell School Dist.
 Clancy Volunteer Fire Dept.
 Dillon Concert Association
 Dillon Fire District #2
 Dillon Jaycees
 Divide School Dist.
 Duck Creek Rural Fire Dept.
 Grant Rural Fire Dept.
 Grant School Dist.
 Grasshopper Valley Fire Dept.
 HWY 437 Rural Fire Dept.
 Jackson Rural Fire Dept.
 Jackson School Dist.
 Jefferson Valley Museum
 Jefferson Valley Rural Fire Dept.
 Lima Rural Fire Dept.
 Lima School Dist.
 Melrose Rural Fire Dept.
 Melrose School Dist.
 Montana 4-H Foundation
 Montana Historical Society
 Montana Lineman's Rodeo Association
 Polaris School Dist.
 Reichle School Dist.
 Sheridan Volunteer Fire Dept.
 Southwestern MT Family YMCA
 Toston Rural Fire Dept.
 Twin Bridges Rural Fire Dept.
 University of Montana – Western Foundation
 Wisdom Rural Fire Dept.
 Wisdom School Dist.
 Wise River School Dist.
 Wise River Volunteer Fire Company

PROACTIVE FIRE MITIGATION



Trees that grow into powerlines can be very dangerous. It could bring the line down and potentially start a fire. | VEC FILE PHOTO



VEC line crew rebuild power line in the aftermath of the Deep Creek Fire. | VEC FILE PHOTO

Preparing for the worst, hoping for the best

VIGILANTE Electric Cooperative's service territory covers several areas of heavily timbered land. Due to the dry conditions we are experiencing, we will be taking steps to reduce fire potential caused by downed powerlines.

We use protective devices called reclosers throughout our service territory. A recloser is used to section off portions of a circuit to avoid having the entire circuit go down in the event of a fault, such as a fallen tree in the powerline.

Reclosers detect a problem on a line and interrupt the flow of electricity in an attempt to clear a temporary fault, after which the recloser will reset. If the fault has cleared, the electricity stays on; if it doesn't, then this cycle will happen again. Under normal operation, this cycle will happen up to four times. After the fourth time, the recloser will lock out, shutting down the power. At this point the linemen dispatched to the outage investigate the situation, remove or repair the cause of the fault and reset the recloser manually.

If a tree were to fall into a line or bring the line to the ground, the repeated cycling of the recloser could potentially start a fire. This is why, starting June 1st, we will be setting reclosers protecting circuits in heavily wooded areas to operate just once before locking out, limiting the potential for ignition.

While these areas may experience more short-term outages, we believe it is our best option for avoiding something catastrophic. We would like to thank the members in these areas for their ongoing patience, and as soon as it is warranted, we will place these reclosers back to normal operations.

Another thing we will be doing to minimize fire potential in these areas is to identify and remove problem trees. This work will be conducted by both our line crews and a logging contractor that we have working in our service territory.

"We take enhanced measures to protect the corridors where are equipment crosses," said General Manger Rollie Miller. "Sometimes this is in very steep, rugged, timbered terrain. For instance for the past few years we have instituted our "one shot" campaign. This year I have directed that June 1st is the date to implement this program. We have also enhanced our danger tree removal program in these areas. In addition, our statewide association is working with all Montana electric cooperatives in preparing fire mitigation plans that we all can adhere to."

Fire potential is only getting worse in our region and, as last summer proved, a wildland fire can have a dramatic impact on our ability to deliver energy to our members. This is why we are taking proactive steps to mitigate fire potential. RM