



Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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PHOTO BY ROD SIRING

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND GENERAL MANAGER

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FARM/RANCH SAFETY

HAZARD ASSESSMENT IS A GREAT PLACE TO START

ANNUALLY, agriculture ranks in the top ten for the number of fatalities and serious injuries that occur, and an alarming number of these deaths and injuries are caused by an electrical contact. At Vigilante Electric Cooperative, the safety of our employees and members is our highest priority. With growing season in full swing, we would like to take this opportunity to raise the awareness of electrical hazards on today's farms and ranches. We recommend starting with a hazard assessment around your property.

According to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), one of the "root causes" of workplace injuries, illnesses and incidents is the failure to identify or recognize hazards that are

present, or that could have been anticipated. A critical element of any effective safety and health program is a proactive, ongoing process to identify and assess such hazards.

The best place to start is a review of where overhead powerlines are on your property, and where they intersect with aspects of your operation. Here are some items to consider when doing your hazard assessment:

Consider where powerlines run in relation to where haystacks are placed and irrigation pipes are stored. While we understand that the areas directly under powerlines are unproductive and

See SAFETY, next page

Cooperative 101: Capital Credits

All business organizations need capital to operate, which is usually supplied by a combination of equity and debt. Investor-owned utilities raise equity by selling shares of stock, or ownership, in the company to the general public. Stockholders invest in the stock willingly with the expectation of earning a return on the investment through dividends and capital appreciation. Electric cooperatives such as Vigilante Electric do not issue stock or pay dividends to the general public; however, we still need to maintain an adequate level of equity to ensure financial health and stability.

The most significant source of equity for electric cooperatives is the retention of margins from the sale of electricity. These margins are allo-


cated to members as capital credits based on their purchase of electricity from the cooperative, or patronage. A cooperative's capital credit practices are grounded in cooperative principles and governed by federal laws and regulations, state laws and regulations, articles of incorporation, bylaws and board policies.

The term "capital credits" is used because the actual money, which is classified as net margins, is invested in cooperative capital such as reserves or equipment. This money belongs to the members, but they have agreed to its use for capital purposes by accepting the capital credit provisions in the bylaws.

How well does this system work? Since adopting the capital credit system at the 1947 annual meeting,

Vigilante Electric has retired more than \$19.5 million to its members, and over the past two years, we have retired more than \$1.8 million.

A capital credit statement is sent to members annually notifying them of the allocation of margins for the previous year. When financial conditions permit, a general retirement (or refund) of capital can be made. These retired capital credits are then paid back to the individual members. It is our policy to retire the oldest capital credits first.

One challenge of distributing retired capital credits is keeping track of every member we owe. Life is dynamic and people move. If you do have capital credits and leave our system, please keep us informed of your current address. 

SAFETY

Continued from page 6

convenient for this purpose, a powerline coming down on a haystack or an irrigation pipe that has inadvertently tipped into a line can have dire consequences.


Consider where your pivots are located in relation to your powerlines. When the pivot is parked, is any part of it under the powerlines? If a powerline were to come down, it could potentially energize the pivot. Also, if the pivot is parked under the powerline, it makes working on one of the towers very dangerous.

Electrical dangers are not limited to the hazards of contacting a primary distribution line. Many center pivot systems use a 480-volt power supply to pump water and/or to run several electrical motors at the towers used to move the system. Take time to review the condition of this wiring to see if there are any visible issues.

What is the condition of your electric service panels? What condition is the wiring in? Rodents can wreak havoc inside an electric control panel. During the irrigation season, routinely check your equipment to make sure everything is in proper working order. Is the area around your service panels covered in debris, or is there pooling water around it? Take some time to ensure that you can access and operate your panels safely.

Also, never assume that everybody knows the location

of powerlines just because you do. If you or others will be handling pipe, or moving tall equipment, take the time to remind your staff of the location of powerlines and the dangers of contacting them or the structures that support them.

Most of us know somebody or have heard of somebody whose life was changed permanently because he or she came into contact with a powerline. Please note that if we see something that we believe is a hazard, we will do what we can to notify the owner of the affected equipment and, if the hazard is deemed eminently dangerous, we will de-energize the service in an effort to protect our members, employees and the general public. If you have any questions, please contact us at our Dillon office. 



Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker

Participating members: 703
Total Contributions: \$13,952.33

To apply, contact our office at
(800) 221-8271 or 683-2327

An online application is available at www.vec.coop.

Programs and services offered to you by Vigilante Electric

COOPERATIVES are different than most organizations. We are not motivated by profit, nor do we operate to benefit shareholders. Because of this, customer service takes on a different meaning. While maintaining the lowest possible electrical rates, Vigilante Electric Cooperative has programs available to educate, help reduce energy consumption and keep you safe. Below is a summary of our programs:

HOME ENERGY AUDITS AND ENERGY ADVICE - As a special service to our members, we offer free home energy audits. Upon request, a trained employee will audit your home and offer advice on ways to improve the efficiency of your energy usage.

LOW INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE - In the fall, Vigilante Electric offers assistance to households meeting low-income guidelines. This program is designed to help qualified individuals with their winter electrical needs. Applications are usually available between October 1 through November each year.

PAYMENT OPTIONS - With SmartHub, managing your account has never been easier. Whether you are at home or on the road, SmartHub allows you to access your account(s) online on your mobile device. Through SmartHub, you can pay your bill, view your electrical usage and stay in contact with us. VEC offers a direct payment plan where payment is made automatically for your checking or savings account. You also use our pay-by-phone system. Here you can pay your bill, check balances and update your account information over the phone, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

RADIO HELP - Radio Help is a community service program designed to increase public awareness that radio-equipped vehicles can provide



The 2019 Youth Tour delegation from Montana included two representatives from Vigilante Electric Cooperative. | **VIGILANTE ELECTRIC FILE PHOTO**

an instant link between emergency assistance and the scene of an accident, fire or life-threatening situation.

SAFETY PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOLS AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS - We will provide electrical safety demonstrations for schools, civic organizations and emergency services personnel upon request.

SAFETY ROUNDUP - This voluntary program provides our members with a way to donate to organizations in our communities that keep us safe.

TREE TRIMMING - If you have a tree(s) growing up near or into our powerlines, we will work with you to mitigate the problem.

UNDERGROUND LINE LOCATIONS - Vigilante Electric belongs to Utilities Underground Location Center, UULC. Before starting any project that requires digging, call (800) 424-5555. This is a free service; however, *you need to make your request two full business days before you plan to dig.* Please note that Vigilante Electric only locates the wire between our distribution facilities and the service meter.

Locating wire between the service meter and the member's service panel is the responsibility of the owner and will require an electrician.

YOUTH TRAVEL AND SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES - Each year Vigilante Electric selects a student(s) who is in their sophomore or junior year in high school to represent us on the Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. During this week-long event, participants tour the city and many of its historical treasures, visit with their state's congressional delegation, and participate in youth rallies and socials.

We also recognize the value of a good education and the need for financial assistance. Each year Vigilante Electric offers scholarship opportunities to help qualified students with post-secondary expenses.

As you can see we provide much more to our members and our communities than just electricity. If you have a question regarding any of these programs please contact our Dillon office at 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271.

RM

How security deposits work

AT Vigilante Electric our motto “Owned by Those We Serve” is more than a clever play on words, it is a true indication of our circle of existence. In simplest terms, our members rely on us to provide reliable service at the lowest possible cost, and we rely on them to pay the electric bills in a timely manner. In a perfect world, this would be a very harmonious situation. However, we all know we do not live in a perfect world.

To bring fairness and equity into our rate classes, each member must pay their share based on how they use the system. While we are very blessed with how our system works, we understand there are a variety of reasons members fall behind on their bills, and it is for these reasons that we have safeguards built into our rate structure.

When a customer applies for membership with Vigilante Electric these safeguards come in the form of a security deposit. Security deposits have been tied to membership, in some form, for a long time.

Today, the security deposits are assessed on a per-meter basis, and are equal to two times the average of the previous 12 months usage, with a minimum of \$150. Deposits can be reduced to the minimum of \$150 if a letter of credit is provided and approved.

We are currently working on a process to refund deposits to our members who consistently pay their bill on time. After 12 months of consecutive, on-time payments, security deposits will be credited back to member’s active electricity accounts. We will begin running this process on a monthly basis in June. Deposits for accounts that don’t meet the above requirements will be held until they achieve this or terminate their membership with us. At termination of membership, any security deposits will be credited to the outstanding balance, with any remainder refunded.

When members fall behind on their account, their service will become subject to potential disconnect. For those services that do get disconnected, the security deposit will be credited toward the past-due balance. Then prior to the service being reconnected, a new, possibly larger security deposit will be charged.

For members who find themselves behind on their bills, it is in your best interest to contact us and work with us to rectify the situation.

For members who are truly in need, we can guide you to help with not only paying your bills, but potentially help lower your energy usage as well. RM

VEC MEMBER PHOTO

SUBMITTED BY LOREN LAKNAR

HOLY COW, IT'S COLD!



2022 LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE



The Montana cooperative contingent, including Vigilante Electric Manager Rollie Miller, seated rear left, meets with Sen. Steve Daines as part of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. in early May. | **PHOTO BY RYAN HALL**

HAPPY DAY
FATHER'S DAY
SUNDAY, JUNE 19