



Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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A MESSAGE FROM YOUR GENERAL MANAGER
ROLLIE MILLER



Bannack-Jackson line rebuild, fire season and energy sales

As you may know, we are in the process of rebuilding the 69 kilovolt transmission line between our Bannack and Wisdom substations. This is approximately 42 miles of line that we own that was built when power was first delivered to the Big Hole Valley. Obviously, that was several decades ago, and it is in need of replacement.

We started on the section over the top of Butch Hill, which is the worst section of line both in condition and our ability to patrol it. This year, we are completing seven miles, and will continue replacing sections in the coming years. Our plan is to have the entire line rebuilt in about five or six years.

Western Line Builders, our contract crew that we have used for the last few years on distribution projects, has been doing most of the work up there since the middle of July.

We are very grateful to the landowners in that area for granting us the necessary easements to replace this line. We hope to be finished with this section by mid-September, but Mother Nature will most likely have the last word on that. The next section planned to be completed is the section from the Polaris turnoff on Highway 278 to the beginning of the section on the east end of Butch Hill.

Fire Season

As I write this, we have had a relatively slow fire season. With the exception of the

Bear Creek Fire southwest of Grant that is being fought now, no other fires are in our service territory. (I hope I don't jinx it with these comments.) During this fire season, we have been proactive in ensuring our powerlines and equipment do not cause any fires.

One significant thing we have done is to put our protective devices in timbered areas on what is called "one shot." Normally, these protective devices operate in what is called a "reclose mode" for temporary outages, such as a little branch breaking off the tree and falling into the powerline. They "blink" the line, allowing for the temporary fault to clear, and then automatically re-energize the line.

On one shot, these protective devices simply shut off, even for a temporary fault. This practice will create more nuisance outages for the membership, but we believe that the benefits of not reclosing back into a fallen tree and potentially causing a fire outweigh the small number of nuisance outages.

Our plan is to return the protective devices to normal operation after the fire danger is over for the year. So far, we are happy with the results, and will most likely continue this practice during subsequent fire seasons.

Another measure we take as a company to mitigate the fire danger is to carry fire extinguishers and small water

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See *MANAGER* on page 7



Pictured is Vigilante Electric Cooperative's line crew changing a pole north of Dillon. This pole change was done "hot," so the power was never interrupted to the members off this circuit. | PHOTO BY ROD SIRING

Hazards on the Highway

Distracted, impatient drivers a major concern

By **ROD SIRING** | *Member Services*

IF you were to ask a journeyman lineman what their biggest concern is and what the most dangerous part of their job is, you might be surprised by the answer. You would think that working on high-voltage electricity would be scary enough; however, one of their biggest concerns while on the job is dealing with distracted and/or impatient drivers.

At Vigilante Electric Cooperative, our first priority is the safety of our employees. Our linemen are highly trained and educated on how to do their jobs safely.

We provide them with the safety equipment they need, and our linemen look out for each other to create a safe work environment.

Journeymen linemen are comfortable with their work because they can control the conditions.

Dealing with the driving public is a completely different matter. We are all capable of distracted or impatient

driving, and the majority of drivers on the road are doing what they should be safe, but one distracted driver at the wrong place and at the wrong time can lead to a dangerous situation. Rarely does one of our safety meetings go by without a discussion about a near miss between one of our vehicles and another car.

Regardless of why we are on the road, we all need to remain alert. You never know when another driver is going to cut you off, pass when they shouldn't or abruptly stop. Additionally, emergency braking or driving maneuvers can be challenging in any vehicle, but in our big trucks, especially when they are towing a heavy load, the room for error is very limited.

Even on the jobsite, the potential hazards of a distracted or impatient driver remain because we have a lot of facilities that parallel or cross some type of roadway. Whether our crews are working off the Interstate, a county highway or a gravel road, they need to account for traffic to keep their work zone safe. The following are excerpts of a story

“ One distracted driver at the wrong place, wrong time can lead to a dangerous situation. ”

that ran in the *RE Magazine* describing an incident that happened to one electric cooperative in Minnesota:

It was a routine two-hour job. The crew discussed it at the shop and went over the details again at the site before setting up the work zone. The morning was typical mid-summer Minnesota: overcast but dry. Traffic on that stretch of county road might total six to eight vehicles passing in either direction every hour.

“We were building a three-phase line for new construction,” says crew chief Dan Houselog, a journeyman line technician and 30-year veteran with Tyler-based Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative. “We were going to swing it across two spans, so we had six guys in the crew.

“We set up ‘Utility Work Ahead’ signs north and south, and ‘Be Prepared to Stop’ signs a half mile up the highway on either side, and we had orange cones across the road.”

With three basket trucks up, lights flashing, and two flaggers working the road, two phases were pulled into position and the third was going up. Things were going well, until they weren’t.

“A gravel truck was coming, and it wasn’t slowing down,” Houselog recalls. “I hollered out a warning.”

Journeyman Line Technician Ross Birath had just enough time to let go.

“It happened fast. I saw the truck coming, and we all knew he was going to hit the wire,” Birath says. “It was time to duck and cover.”

The men aloft tucked in, dropping the line which was snagged by the truck and pulled tight until it snapped, whipsawing into a flagger, who dropped his stop sign and fell onto the asphalt roadway as the truck continued up the road.

“We saw the brake lights come on. He slowed down, but he kept going,” says Birath, who estimates the vehicle was traveling about 40 mph. “He might have heard something hit the truck, but it wasn’t enough for him to stop.”

The shaken men descended to check on their fallen coworker, Houselog recalls. “By the time I got to the ground and ran over to him, he was standing up. Luckily, the line just caught his leg.”

There were seven co-op vehicles in the intersection when the incident occurred: three bucket trucks, a digger-derrick, a utility trailer and a pickup. The work zone was about a mile long, with ample signage and flashing lights.

And still it wasn’t enough.

Our linemen are trained and certified on how to setup roadway work zones, and recertify this training every few years. Work zones are designed to slow motorists down and provide visual information on what is going on ahead. Yet, as the Minnesota example proves, you can train to manage a work zone, plan a work zone, execute the plan properly and still have something go wrong due to some factor outside your control.

Work zones near roadways can be dangerous for everybody. However, if we work together, remain attentive and slow down through work zones, we can all reach our destinations safely. ^{RM}

MANAGER

Continued from page 5

tanks on each of the vehicles. In addition, we have a 300-gallon water tank with pumping facilities that we take with us on specific projects that may have enhanced fire dangers associated with them.

Energy sales, load growth

Through the month of July, we have seen strong sales of electricity to our membership, with a very strong year so far for irrigation sales. Water is available, and it has been dry enough to necessitate irrigation of crops. We are pleased to provide this service to you. Sales are up about five percent over last year at this time.

We have also been busy with new services throughout our service territory, which are up approximately 10 percent over last year. We can control costs better if we can spread out our fixed costs over more members, so new member growth is better for the co-op and all its members from a financial perspective.

We hope you are enjoying your summer and looking forward to fall. If you need to contact me for anything, please feel free to reach me in the office or on my mobile phone at (406) 925-1085. You can also reach me via email at rollie@vec.coop. We are here to serve you, the members of Vigilante Electric Cooperative. ^{RM}



**Know what's below.
Call before you dig.**

Capital Credit Refunds

Vigilante Electric Cooperative is currently trying to locate the following individuals for payment of capital credits. If you have any information regarding names on this list please contact us at 800-221-8271 or 683-2327, or by email at contact@vec.coop.

CONTINUED FROM LAST MONTH

Parke, Mason Seattle, WA	Rosselott, M C & Debbie Miles City, MT	Smith, Gregg Shady Springs, WV	W I M Corp Helena, MT
Parker, Jeff S Conrad, MT	Roulston, Scott & Laurie Cleveland, OH	Smith, Michael Salmon, ID	Walker, Stephen & Linda Townsend, MT
Parks, Steve Bozeman, MT	Rousseau, Fred Coeur d'Alene, ID	Smith, Tiffine Lynnwood, WA	Waltner, Ryan Dillon, MT
Patton, Shawn Whitehall, MT	Sagissor, Julie Townsend, MT	Sollberger, Peter Bozeman, MT	Warmoth Prairie Whitehall, MT
Patton, Troy Victor, MT	Sarnow, Holly Belgrade, MT	Squires, James & Sheila Coeur d'Alene, ID	Watson, Kim Townsend, MT
Perry, Robert & Cindi Helena, MT	Schaaff, Pat Apple Valley, CA	Stack, Kenneth & Laura Helena, MT	Webb, Kelly Toston, MT
Peters, Norm Lewistown, MT	Schilling, Charlie & Bonnie Whitehall, MT	Steele, Allison Laurel, MT	Welch, Pam Ten Sleep, WY
Petersen, Pete Ryegate, MT	Schmith, Howard & Barbara Helena, MT	Stocker, Mike & Justin Dillon, MT	Welch, Ross Three Forks, MT
Petersen, Teresa Anaconda, MT	Schwanes, Heather Corvallis, OR	Stone, Cline Anchorage, AK	Werle, Bill & Darlene Whitehall, MT
Phillips, J R Helena, MT	Scoffield, Pat Three Forks, MT	Street, Henry & Annette Butte, MT	Wilke, Megan Dillon, MT
Phillips, Laura Lakeland, FL	Seiller, Wayne E Helena, MT	Swanson, Michael J Butte, MT	Willis, Gina Pagosa Springs, CO
Phillips, Michael & Stacy Lewistown, MT	Severance, Francis Dillon, MT	Tash, Tim & Robyn Dillon, MT	Wilson, Ted & Mary Silver Springs, NV
Pierce, Joseph & Kelly Helena, MT	Severson, Ryan & Nancy Pablo, MT	Taylor, Syndia Kila, MT	Wing, Shauna Helena, MT
Podgorski, Clint Dillon, MT	Shanafelt, Jeff & Christen Wise River, MT	Thomason, L D Dillon, MT	Witherell, Mike Whitehall, MT
Powell, Tom Butte, MT	Siewert, John Helena, MT	Thompson, Gary R & Raylene Salmon, ID	Wolfe, Mary Maple Grove, MN
Rathie, Monty Baker, MT	Smith, Aaron Bozeman, MT	Thompson, Jake Dillon, MT	Woodcock, Larry & Arlon Petoskey, MI
Reed, Ernest Pueblo West, CO	Smith, Albert Dillon, MT	Tisdell, Steve Dillon, MT	World Carp Inc Ossining, NY
Revier, Jack Plains, MT	Smith, Cade & Chelsea Fairbanks, AK	Torgerson, Heidi Bozeman, MT	Wright, Nina Shepherd, MT
Riddle, William & Janet Vancouver, WA	Smith, Eddy D Portland, OR	Trythall, Mary Crown Point, IN	Yeager, Rob & Shelly Cody, WY
Robinson, Skip & Sue Tucson, AZ		Vasina, Patrick Whitehall, MT	Young, Barbara White House, TN
Rock Chuck Ranch, Gerald Leavitt McCamon, ID			Yunger, Cole Townsend, MT
Ross, Desiree Bozeman, MT			



Vigilante Electric Cooperative

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Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker

Participating members: 361
Total Contributions: \$5,713.14

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

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

SAFETY ROUNDUP

It's a work in progress

By **ROD SIRING** | Member Services

WHEN we started our Safety Roundup program in 2017, the goal was to use the collective power of membership to build a funding source for grants that would be used for safety projects. However, being an “opt-in” program meant starting at zero and growing the funds to a point where we could make meaningful donations. If you have been following the progress tracker in these pages, you’ll notice that we continue to make progress.

To date we have made three awards to organizations that keep our communities safe. The first went to the Beaverhead Ski Patrol for a new medical-grade digital pulse oximeter and a rescue toboggan. The second to the Broadwater Sheriff’s Office for educational materials on topics that include safety, drug prevention, bullying, identity theft, Internet safety and safety for seniors. The last, which was awarded at our annual meeting in March, was to the Jefferson Valley Rural Ambulance toward the purchase of community automatic external defibrillators (AED).

Vigilante Electric Cooperative is still looking for safety projects to help fund within our service territory. If your organization is nonprofit and has a need that we can help meet, send us a letter detailing your request. We want to know specifics regarding the equipment or project that the funds are being requested for, the time frame the funds will be used and contact information.

Vigilante Electric’s Safety Roundup has enormous potential for helping the organizations that keep our communities safe. For those that are already participating thank you. For those of you who think this is something you can get behind, call us for more details or to sign up. 