



Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND GENERAL MANAGER

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Wise River/Silver Bow/Melrose

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General Manager

FARM AND RANCH SAFETY

BE AWARE AROUND POWERLINES

WE work extremely hard to keep our employees, membership and the general public safe around our distribution lines. To aid in our efforts, we need everybody to be aware of potential hazards when it comes to electricity. Nowhere is this more important than on the farms and ranches we serve.

Year in and year out, farming/ranching ranks not only as one of the most dangerous occupations, but one of the most stressful. Annually, this industry ranks in the top ten when it comes to the number of fatalities and serious injuries, and an alarming rate of these deaths and injuries are from an electrical contact.

With the beginning of growing season upon us, we would like to take this opportunity to raise the awareness of electrical hazards on today's farms and ranches. One

of our biggest concerns is when aluminum pipe is in the same proximity as an overhead powerline. Handline, wheel lines, and pivot pipes are excellent conductors of electricity, and contact between them and an overhead line can be fatal.

To keep you, your family, and your workers safe, we ask that you follow these recommendations when working around powerlines:

- Never set up your pivot to where any part can be parked directly under our distribution lines. If a powerline were to come down on the pivot, it may become energized.
- Do not work on a tower or pipe of a pivot while it is parked under a powerline. Doing so could put workers dangerously

See SAFETY, page 7

Regular tree trimming improves service for all

ONE of the best things about living in Montana is the natural beauty that surrounds us. Part of what makes Western Montana scenic is the plentitude and diversity of trees. Trees not only offer shade and habitat; they are also an important part of commerce in our state. At Vigilante Electric Cooperative, we recognize and appreciate the beauty and importance of trees; however, trees are a major source of many of our power outages.

We strive to balance maintaining the integrity of our surroundings and ensuring a reliable power supply by keeping the rights-of-way (ROW) for power lines clear. A right of way is the land we use to construct, maintain, replace or repair underground and overhead power lines. Maintaining these rights-of-way is vital and requires a management plan that provides tangible benefits.

First and foremost, we care about our members and put their safety and that of our lineworkers above all else. Overgrown vegetation and trees can become a safety issue. For example, a limb contacting a power line can conduct electricity. If trees are touching power lines, they create a dangerous situation for the property owner and our line crew.

Strategic tree trimming can reduce the frequency of downed lines causing power outages. Vigilante Electric's service territory is heavily wooded, so tree trimming is a vital and ongoing process. Working in conjunction with private landowners and government agencies, we can improve our system reliability and reduce that potential impact on our lines from storm events. A proactive approach reduces the danger of tree limbs contacting power lines or falling on them during



a storm. Also, tree damage during weather events makes recovery more complicated and dangerous for line workers to restore power.

Finally, Vigilante Electric is a not-for-profit cooperative: that means we strive to keep our costs in check in order to keep our rates affordable. This extends to our approach to tree trimming. If trees grow too close to powerlines, the potential for expensive repairs also increases. Effective tree trimming and other vegetation-management efforts keep costs down for everyone.

Our tree-trimming and vegetation-management program is consistent with our mission statement: to provide reliable energy at the lowest possible cost to our members and to protect our stunning natural surroundings. REM

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Every digging project requires a call to 811

WHETHER you are a contractor or a do-it-yourselfer, summer is when the most dirt is turned. When digging, there is always the possibility of danger lurking just below the surface. The most important safety tip to remember is **CALL BEFORE YOU DIG.**

Contacting an underground power line 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.

The Call Before You Dig campaign has been around for years. 811 is the national number designated to help protect individuals from unintentionally hitting underground utility lines while working on digging projects. Digging into underground utilities is extremely dangerous; there can be serious financial repercussions if you do, and it is the law to call.

Montana Law, Annotated Code 2011, 69-4-501(12)(a) states: "Excavation" means an operation in which earth, rock, or other material in the ground is



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

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."

Montana Law, Annotated Code 2019, 69-4-501(13) states: "Excavator" means a person conducting the excavation activities."

Montana Law, Annotated Code 2019, 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:"

Montana Law, Annotated Code 2019, 69-4-503(1) states: "Before beginning an

excavation, the excavator shall notify, through a notification center, all owners of underground facilities in the area of the proposed excavation."

Montana Law, Annotated Code 2019, 69-4-523 (1)(b) states: "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, 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 from the high voltage source underground wires to 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 5

close to energized lines.

- 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.

- Never store irrigation pipe under or near overhead powerlines, and if small animals make a home out of the pipe, do not tip the pipe on end.

One of the worst habits we see is the placement of haystacks under our powerlines. By law, we cannot place our electrical lines over existing buildings and structures. There are too

many risks involved in such a practice. Placing a haystack under a utility line is no different. The higher the stack gets, the closer to the powerline it gets, increasing the potential for fire and contact if someone is working off the stack.

The electrical danger in irrigation operation is about more than just contacting a primary distribution line. Many center pivot systems use a high-voltage (480 volt) power supply to pump water and/or run several electrical motors at the towers used to move the system. If not properly wired and grounded, the combination of the metal structure and a wet environment can create a very dangerous situation.

Another problem we see is when electric service panels are not prop-

erly maintained. Rodents can wreak havoc inside an electric or control panel. During the irrigation season, routinely look over your equipment to make sure everything is in proper working order. Please note that if we see something that we feel is a hazard, we will de-energize the service and leave it de-energized until the situation is corrected.

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. Within our service area, the combination of haystacks and powerlines have caused many close calls and a few serious injuries. The threat is real and it can kill. If you have any questions, contact us at our Dillon office. RM

SAFETY ROUNDUP: Supporting a greater good

In early 2017, Vigilante Electric Cooperative introduced our Safety Roundup program, providing our members a simple way to donate to organizations in our communities that keep us safe. Since its inception we have awarded grants to five very deserving organizations.

Beaverhead Ski Patrol was the first organization to receive a grant through our Safety Roundup program. They are responsible for on-mountain safety at Maverick Mountain Ski Area. Their funding request was for a medical-grade digital pulse oximeter and rescue toboggan.

An award was given to the Broadwater County Sheriff's office for a community safety program that they were developing. Their plan was to provide educational material to children, age preschool and older. Topics include safety, drug prevention, bullying, identity theft, Internet safety and safety for seniors.

The Jefferson Valley Rural Ambulance was awarded their funding at last year's annual meeting. They used our grant to supplement their budget to buy AEDs for their communities and to train people in CPR.

Beaverhead County Search and Rescue identified a very specific need within their organization that we were excited to contribute to. Our grant went for the development and purchase of supplies for first responder wilderness kits.

Finally, at this year's annual meeting we proudly awarded Broadwater Search and Rescue with our biggest grant to date, \$1,000. They will use the funds to purchase first-aid kit supplies for their members' packs.

Programs such as Safety Roundup have great potential for good. This program is member driven. Participants donate simply by allowing us to round their bill up to the next whole dollar, or they can choose to add a few extra

dollars to their bill each month. One-hundred percent of the funds from the roundup is presented to worthy organizations for safety related projects.

Safety Roundup embodies the cooperative spirit and is a shining example of us living out one of our core principles, concern for community. Vigilante Electric is proud to be associated with and contribute to organizations such as our five grant recipients. Their dedication to our communities is inspiring, and we look forward to working with additional deserving organizations.

If you are part of a group or civic organization and have an idea on how to improve safety in our community, we would like to hear from you. Send us a letter to provide us information about your organization and details about your projects and how it will improve community safety. Please send all information to General Manager Rollie Miller.



**Vigilante Electric
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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker

Participating members: 562
Total Contributions: \$8,320.09

To apply, contact our office at
(800) 221-8271 or 683-2327
An online application is available at www.vec.coop.

Welcome new Trustee Colt High to Vigilante Electric

AS reported last month, at this year's annual meeting a new trustee was elected to serve District #4 - Twin Bridges/Point of Rocks. The following is a brief bio on Colt High.

Colt was born and raised on his family's ranch near Twin Bridges. When not participating in high-school sports, free time during his youth was spent working on the ranch. A college football scholarship took Colt to Montana State University - Northern (MSU-N) in Havre, MT.

Upon graduating from MSU-N with honors and degrees in civil engineering and industrial technology, Colt accepted an engineering position with a heavy civil contractor in Anchorage, Alaska. He worked on numerous



Colt High

bridge and utilities projects in both urban and rural parts of Alaska for six years. After another three years of experience working in engineering design and construction management in Montana, Colt moved back to the family ranch in 2016.

Guy D. George Sr., great grandfather to Colt, helped organize the cooperative in 1936. Colt is a fourth-generation member of Vigilante Electric Cooperative. When not working cattle, haying or irrigating, Colt is a part-time civil engineer, secretary/treasurer for the Twin Bridges Volunteer Fire Department and Elks Lodge member, and holds a state of Montana license as a professional engineer.

We would like to welcome Colt to our organization. RM