



Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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PRIORITY ONE: SAFETY

Column by **ROLLIE MILLER** |
General Manager

THE following column is dedicated solely to the word “safety,” and what it means to us here at Vigilante Electric Cooperative (VEC).

To be successful, a safety program needs to start at the top of the organization and flow throughout. Everybody, from the board of trustees down to the newest entry-level hire, has a stake in the well-being and safety of the employee group. At VEC, we have quarterly safety committee meetings. The Safety Committee consists of board members, management personnel and a cross-section of employees representing all areas of the organization. They discuss safety close calls (or near misses, as they are referred to in our meetings), along with other safety-considered items of interest. Clint Begger, a lineman out of our Townsend outpost, is the chairman of the Safety Committee. He handles the meetings professionally, and the entire committee challenges and engages each other to remain productive. Some very good safety protocols have been the result of those meetings.

We also participate in the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (or RESAP, as it is known) through our Montana statewide association (MECA) and our national association (NRECA). It is a framework for continuous improvement of our safety performance and culture. It



involves a declaration of commitment to following safety protocols by me, as general manager, which I am very dedicated to and happy to follow. It also involves a safety health check to review where we are now and a peer review in which other co-ops’ staff travel

to our properties and provide constructive criticisms of our operations. Finally, duties and responsibilities for annual performance measures are prepared and outlined, and a safety improvement plan is prepared. RESAP is a large part of our safety program.

Another important part of the success of our safety program centers around the monthly safety meetings. In the last few years, we have combined the outposts and the Dillon staff during these meetings, and it has garnered a much more cohesive effort by the employees. MECA’s safety and loss program has two safety instructors that guide these safety meetings for the most part. In addition, we hold special safety meetings occasionally to address our specific concerns. For instance, we recently dedicated one entire safety meeting to learning about bear and snake safety in our working environments, an idea that was originally brainstormed in a Safety Committee meeting.

I have been associated with high-voltage safety demo trailers for more than half of my career. We did not have one here at

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SAFETY

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VEC, but decided the need to acquire one was clear. Our safety demo trailer was built in a collaborative effort with the Beaverhead County High School shop class. These portable safety demonstration trailers allow for controlled demonstrations using the same voltage as the overhead high-voltage lines you see every day. We do these safety demonstrations for any group that requests them. To date, we have done them for grade school and high school kids in our service territory, for first responders in various regional communities, for county fairs and for irrigation company outings. The message we want to demonstrate to everyone is this: electric lines may appear benign, but they contain a very large force ready to do serious damage if contacted. If your group has an interest in a high-voltage safety demonstration, please contact us. As I write this, we have one scheduled next week for the kids at the YMCA in Dillon. We are happy to get electric power safety awareness out there. Maybe we will help save a life along the way.

Prior to the last six years, it has taken since 1984 for us as a company to string together even two years without a lost-time accident. The last six years without a lost-time accident has been a phenomenal turnaround, and I am so proud of the employees for their actions related to this. We quite simply cannot cut corners and sacrifice safe working practices for productivity. It just doesn't work without severe consequences in the dangerous occupation of being a lineman.

My primary goal has been and continues to be that our employees come home safely each and every night. A secondary benefit has been the significant reduction in our insurance premiums for workers' compensation. In 2012, our workers' compensation premiums were more than



Pictured is lineman Cody Tarter during a demonstration using our high voltage safety trailer. | **VEC PHOTO**

\$80,000 per year. This year, they were just under \$33,000 per year, and are expected to be even lower next year. Lost-time accidents can be very expensive from a medical cost standpoint. The indirect costs, such as lost productivity, reduced workforce, etc., can also be very expensive.

Recently, I took a proposal to the board of trustees to award the employees for their efforts in putting safety first. The board deliberated on the proposal and approved it. The cost of the award was a fraction of what has been saved in primary and secondary benefits.

Again, my goal has always been to facilitate a work environment that allows employees to work safely without accidents. It takes all of us to have each other's backs and work together to protect everyone. The guys and gals at VEC have done a phenomenal job with that, and I couldn't be more proud of each and every one of them. **RM**

Save a life: avoid distractions while driving

By **ANNE PRINCE** | For Vigilante Electric

SOME temptations are hard to resist. For me, it can be especially challenging to turn down that last piece of chocolate cake.

While driving, we typically hear that “ding” on our phone, alerting us to a text or call coming through, and we sometimes feel the urgent need to check it. We know we shouldn't, but we reason that we're going to make an exception — just this once.

So, why do we indulge in behavior we know to be wrong, dangerous and, in many states, illegal? Call it hubris. According to AAA research, most people feel they are better-than-average drivers. After all, we have busy lives and are accustomed to multi-tasking. But mounds of research and thousands of deaths every year prove otherwise.

August is Back to School Safety Month. As a new school year begins with young drivers and school buses

back on the road, I thought it would be a good time to remind folks, including myself, of the dangers of distracted driving.

The reality is that using a phone while driving creates enormous potential for injuries and fatalities. Distractions take a motorist's attention off driving, which can make a driver miss critical events, objects and cues, potentially leading to a crash.

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SAFETY ROUNDUP

THE GROWTH OF A LEGACY

ESTABLISHED in 2017, the Vigilante Safety Roundup program was started to help organizations within our service territory fund projects that promote safety and make our communities safer. When introducing any new program, it takes time to assess how successful it will be, especially one like this. We are just scratching the surface of this program's potential; however, we believe that this program will prove to be a great achievement for our organization.

As you will recall, the program is driven through voluntary member participation. Members allow Vigilante Electric Cooperative to round their monthly bill up to the next whole dollar. They can also add a few extra dollars each month, or make a one-time donation.

Regardless of how the donations are made, 100 percent of the money will be presented to worthy organizations through grants. Grants will be awarded through an application process reviewed by the Vigilante Electric board of trustees.

Being an "opt-in" program, we started with a zero balance, so watching the growth of this program has been remarkable. To date, we have had more than 730 members take part, and we have collected over \$15,000. This dollar value may not seem like much after five-plus years, but considering that the average monthly donation per member is approximately 50 cents, we are doing pretty well.

So far, we have awarded grants to six outstanding organizations within our service territory. Grants were awarded to diverse entities, which included one ski patrol, one law enforcement, two search and rescue teams, and one school.

Funding was used to buy essential equipment and educational materials.

When we started this program, we thought that the toughest part would be building the funding to a level where we could make meaningful contributions. The fact is the participation and funding for our safety roundup is going very well. What we really need are more organizations to apply for grants. This is where our members can help continue to move this program forward.

If you are part of a community organization within our service territory that needs some funding for a project, but you're not sure if it would qualify, let's talk! We would love to hear about what you are looking to do, assess that situation, and guide you through the application process. 



Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker

Participating members: 733

Total Contributions: \$15,415.79

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

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

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According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one of every 10 fatal crashes in the U.S. involves distracted driving, resulting in more than 3,000 deaths annually. I find this statistic heartbreaking considering so many of these accidents could easily be avoided if we'd simply put down our phones while driving.

Distracted driving is considered any activity that diverts our attention, including texting or talking on the phone, and adjusting the navigation

or entertainment system. Texting is by far one of the most dangerous distractions. Sending or reading one text takes your eyes off the road for an average of five seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed.

In addition to refraining from texting while driving, we can help keep the roads safe by moving over for first responders and other emergency vehicles. Additionally, if you see utility crews conducting work near the roadside, I'd encourage you to move over when possible and give them extra

space to perform their work safely.

At Vigilante Electric Cooperative, safety is foremost in everything we do – for our employees and the members of the communities we serve. We routinely remind our crews of the dangers of distracted driving, and we hope you'll have similar conversations with your teens who may be new to the roadways and are especially susceptible to the lure of technology.

Let's work together to keep everyone safe on the roads. Remember: that text can wait and waiting just might save a life. 

Comfort through insulation

REGARDLESS of the age of your home, there is a correlation between energy bills, comfort and how well your home is insulated. Is there an easy way to tell if a home is properly insulated? While not very scientific, if it seems to be a struggle to keep your home warm in the winter and cool in the summer, a contributing factor is probably insulation levels.

To understand how insulation works, it helps to understand heat flow. Heat flow involves three basic mechanisms – conduction, convection and radiation. Conduction is the way heat moves through materials, such as when a spoon placed in a hot cup of coffee conducts heat through its handle to your hand. Convection is the way heat circulates through liquids and gases, and is why lighter, warmer air rises, and cooler, denser air sinks in your home. Radiant heat travels in a straight line and heats anything solid in its path that absorbs its energy.

Regardless of the mechanism, heat flows from warmer to cooler areas until there is no longer a temperature difference. In your home, this means that in winter, heat flows directly from all heated living spaces to adjacent



unheated attics, garages and basements, as well as to the outdoors. Heat flow can also move indirectly through interior ceilings, walls, and floors – wherever there is a difference in temperature. During the cooling season, heat flows from the outdoors to the interior of a house.

There are several types of insulation that come in different forms, costs and R-values. What is R-value? Insulation resistance value is the capacity or measure of the insulation materials to resist heat transfer from one side of an object to another. The higher the R-value of the material, the more effective it is at insulating the area.

Insulation materials run the gamut

from bulky fiber materials (such as fiberglass, rockwool, cellulose and natural fibers), to rigid (such as foam boards), to sleek (such as foils). Bulky materials resist conductive heat flow in a building cavity. Rigid foam boards trap air or another gas in their cells to resist conductive heat flow. Highly reflective foils in radiant barriers and reflective insulation systems reflect radiant heat away from living spaces, making them particularly useful in cooling climates.

With certain types of insulation materials, installing your own insulation is definitely doable – and you can save money by not hiring a professional. Installing fiberglass or mineral wool insulation is a simple DIY project. Other insulation types, such as spray-foam insulation, require installation by a professional.

When it comes to spending money on insulation for your home, view it as an investment. Take some time to research potential projects; there are countless resources available online. Some of our favorites are Touchstone Energy's *Energy Solutions* and the Department of Energy's *Energy Savers*.

RM

Lower your energy use with weatherization

WOULD you like to increase the comfort of your home and reduce your energy bills? Of course, we all do, but the problem is where to start. Vigilante Electric Cooperative wants to help you make more informed decisions, and the best place to start is with some basics of weatherization.

Weatherization refers to a set of or individual actions a homeowner can take to reduce the loss of conditioned air to the outside. Simply put, these are actions that help keep your home warm in the winter and cool in the summer. The most basic action in

weatherization is air sealing.

Air sealing helps prevent conditioned air escaping our homes through gaps in the foundation, ducts or building cavities. Some of these actions can be done as a DIY project, such as caulking and weather stripping around the house.

You can use a caulking compound to seal leaks in a variety of places throughout your home, including around windows and door frames. Weatherstripping can seal leaks around the movable joints of windows or doors. More advanced actions would be installing efficient windows

and doors, insulating and sealing ductwork, and adding insulation.

These actions are proven to improve comfort and lower energy bills. In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates homeowners can save an average of 15 percent on heating and cooling costs by air sealing their homes and adding insulation to attics, floors above crawl spaces and accessible basement rim joists.

Do some research, watch videos on YouTube, ask handy friends for some help, but don't do more than your skill set will allow because mistakes can be costly. RM