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Vigilante Electric Cooperative

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

AG SAFETY

A little thought and planning could just save your life

ACCORDING to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 368 farmers and agricultural workers died from a work-related injury in 2020. Approximately 30 to 40 people a year are electrocuted, and each day, agricultural workers experience 100 non-fatal lost-work-time injuries. We find these numbers alarming, especially the number of electrical contacts.

When the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) looked at the root causes of these numbers, their findings were not entirely surprising. Other than unforeseen acts of nature, the contributing factors to these fatalities could have been avoided.

Sometimes we can learn valuable lessons from other industries. There are a few practices from our industry that can be particularly beneficial, including job-hazard analysis, work plans and job briefings.

According to OSHA, job-hazard analysis is a technique that focuses on job tasks to identify hazards before they occur. It focuses on the relationship between the worker, the task, the tools and the work environment. This does not have to be complicated when it comes to electricity.

Assess your tasks and the work area where these tasks are conducted. Identify where the tasks and work area could potentially intersect with powerlines and why there could be a safety issue. Examples of safety issues include: Are there topography



issues with the location? What happens when inclement weather arises? Could this task be done somewhere safer? Think it through.

See SAFETY, page 7

JULY 2024

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE

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Dillon North/Glen

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FIRE MITIGATION

Dealing with the challenges

OUR mission is, and will always be, to provide reliable service at the lowest possible cost. At Vigilante Electric Cooperative (VEC), the safety of the public, our communities and the land we enjoy are a priority and responsibility. VEC and our transmission providers have strategies, programs and procedures to mitigate the threat of electrical-equipment-ignited wildfires. During fire season, these actions may cause temporary outages and affect reliability that you are accustomed to.

From a logistical standpoint, our service territory presents some challenges. Our service territory extends into nine counties, and we maintain more than 2,800 miles of powerlines. In certain areas, our powerlines intersect heavily wooded areas. In fact, trees in powerlines are one of our leading causes of outages.

Our commitment to safety and community responsibilities does not

stop on our side of the meter, however; part of our responsibility is equipping our members with methods to be proactive at home.

We encourage you to evaluate fire risks on your property. Could any of your trees impact a powerline? If the answer is yes, give us a call. We will work with you to remove or trim trees or vegetation progressing toward or leaning on our lines.

On the other hand, it is crucial to understand that if you receive a notification about a tree on your property that needs trimming or removal, it is because these trees have been identified as potential threats to service reliability and, in some cases, could even spark wildfires.

Another proactive step is that if you choose to plant large, fast-growing trees, please ensure that they will be at least 10 feet away from powerlines when fully grown. Lastly, if you are



in an area with dense vegetation, consider creating a defensible space around your property by trimming trees and clearing debris.

One of the seven cooperative principles is concern for community. The more we collaborate on these issues, the more we can enhance our system's reliability and the safety of those in our communities. RM

Net Metering: Finding the right place to start

NET metering is the interconnection of member-owned generation from a renewable source to an electric utility's facilities, in which the generation output of energy that is not used at the service is netted against the energy delivered by the utility.

At Vigilante Electric Cooperative (VEC), we support net metering and want to help you make a fully informed decision on whether it is right for you.

There are two documents on our website (vec.coop/net-metering) that will provide you with a good starting point. Our interconnection agreement details the legal and engineering aspects of these requirements. Our net-metering contract provides a comprehensive overview of the process and explains

the financial aspects of a qualifying installation. Please download them, share them with potential installers and call us with any questions.

Once you commit to a project, we require that your installer submit project specifications for review prior to installation. This allows our system engineer the opportunity to review the project plan and equipment to ensure there is nothing that would adversely impact our system. A qualified installer can assist you with this process.

After the installation is completed and the state of Montana does its inspection, we do our own on-site visit. For our inspection, we are there to determine two things: (1) if the equipment and sizing match the specifica-

tions of the preinstall review; and more importantly (2) we need to ensure that the system will not back-feed onto our system when grid power is lost.

As you educate yourself on this kind of investment, you should ask potential installers several questions: What is the system's life expectancy? Does the output degrade over time? Based on our requirements, what is the basic payback period? (This is the period needed to cover the cost of the system from the energy savings from the generation.) As you consider net metering, please also remember that VEC has one of the lowest residential energy rates in the state, and in the country. RM

Reliable electricity matters

FOR some time, we have been communicating information on the attempts to remove four hydroelectric dams on the lower Snake River, a move that would compromise electric reliability for millions of people in the western United States.

For years, our national and statewide organizations have

been battling this and other attempts to destabilize our nation's electric supply.

The following is an article from our national association about an issue we have been monitoring. At the time of this article, legislation has been drafted to overturn this ruling.

New EPA power plant rules threaten grid reliability

On April 25, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released four major new regulations for the electric industry, including a much-anticipated rule to cut emissions from power plants, a sweeping move that will aggravate reliability concerns for electric cooperatives and other utilities nationwide.

"The path outlined by the EPA is unlawful, unrealistic and unachievable," said Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. "It undermines electric reliability and poses grave consequences for an already stressed electric grid."

The power plant rule constrains existing coal and new natural gas plants by requiring them to install carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology that is not yet reliable or

commercially available.

"The new EPA rules ignore our nation's ongoing electric reliability challenges and are the wrong approach at a critical time for our nation's energy future," Matheson said.

The power plant rule will force the early closure of electricity generation sources that are available 24/7, and will also impede the construction of new natural gas plants. The timing of these sweeping new rules is particularly troubling as electric utilities face a surge in demand for electricity from factors such as transportation electrification and the rapid expansion of data centers to support artificial intelligence, e-commerce and cryptocurrency.

Under the new rule, existing coal-fired power plants that plan to operate past the start of 2039 must install CCS to capture 90 percent of emissions by

2032. The rule also requires new natural gas plants that operate more than 40 percent of the time to install CCS and capture 90 percent of their carbon emissions by 2032. These standards, and their reliance on unproven CCS technology, will undermine electric reliability.

Electric cooperatives understand the need to keep the lights on at a cost local families and businesses can afford. Clean energy technologies must be balanced with always-available generation sources to ensure a reliable electric grid.

Electric cooperatives such as Vigilante Electric Cooperative deliver power to 42 million Americans. Our top priority is to meet our members' energy needs, and we must have reliable electricity available to do that. RM

SAFETY

Continued from page 5

Keep in mind, we are talking about all forms of electrical delivery, not just the high voltage overhead powerlines; more workers are injured and/or killed by contacting lines carrying 500 volts or less. For the safety of our linemen, it is a practice at Vigilante Electric Cooperative not to work on 480-volt services while energized. Also, contacting an underground line can be just as dangerous as contacting an overhead

line, which is why any form of excavation requires a dig-line notification. This simple process can be performed by calling 811.

Work plans look at things that need to be accomplished over time. At the start of every irrigation season, inspect your equipment. Ensure that your system breakers operate properly. Check the seals on enclosures to ensure water is not getting to the electrical wiring and important electronic controls. Check for damaged or improper wiring. If you find issues, have them repaired.

We also use job briefings. Start each day by outlining the work for that day, taking time to discuss all potential hazards. The location of powerlines is particularly important if you are working around, or moving implements under, them. Do not assume that everybody knows where all the power lines are located. Make sure that everybody is on the same page.

Again, this does not have to be complicated. By working together and learning from each other, we can ensure that everybody goes home safely at the end of the day. RM

Helping keep our communities safe

IN 2017, Vigilante Electric Cooperative introduced our Safety RoundUp program. Recently, we received a grant proposal from the city of Dillon. This grant proposal was unique and hopefully helps broaden the scope of what can be done with Safety Roundup funds.


The city of Dillon, working with BeTheChange406 Youth Coalition, proposed installing lights and security cameras at the local skate park. The project's goal is to decrease the amount of vandalism and drug use that occurs at one of our city's best parks. The project requires the installation of two power poles, each with security lighting and security cameras.

At our May board of trustees meeting, the board approved the use of Safety Roundup funding for material and labor for this project. Vigilante Electric will provide the two poles and the equipment and personnel needed to install them.

Safety Roundup is a member-driven fund. Participants who wish to participate can donate by either allowing us to round their bill up to the next whole dollar, or opting to add a few extra dollars to their bill each month. Then, 100 percent of the funds from the roundup will be 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. We are incredibly happy with this program's growth and the type of organizations we have helped, but there is so much more we can do.

If you are a participant, thank you for your support. If you would like to donate or have an idea for a safety-related project, we have a new option for contacting us. On our website, go to vec.coop/safety-round. There you will find links where you can enroll in the roundup program or apply for a safety grant. 



Vigilante Electric Cooperative
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 
Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker

Participating members: 870
Total Contributions: \$28,094.23

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

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



WHITEHALL

MEMBER APPRECIATION BBQ

BRATS & KILOWATTS

7.25.24

11 AM - 1 PM

LEGION PARK WHITEHALL

JOIN THE VIGILANTE ELECTRIC CREW ON JULY 25TH FOR A FREE BRATWURST LUNCH AND A CHANCE TO WIN A PRIZE!