

Tri-County
Rural Electric
Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Tri-County REC
22 North Main Street • P.O. Box 526
Mansfield, PA 16933
Mansfield — 570/662-2175
Coudersport — 814/274-8740
Web site:
www.tri-countyrec.com
E-mail:
trico@tri-countyrec.com
For Emergencies Call:
1-800-343-2559

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- James R. Davis**
Chairman
- Gerald A. Kite**
Vice Chairman
- Alston A. Teeter**
Secretary/Treasurer
- Donald H. Blackwell**
- Alfred G. Calkins**
- Jay E. Haldeman**
- Ferd W. Irish**
- Nicholas Reitter**
- Barbara J. Seeley**

Craig Echer
President & CEO

STAFF

- Annette Bender**, Executive Assistant
- John Lykens**, Director,
Engineering & Operations
- Barbara Johnson**, Director,
Financial Services
- Bryan Berguson**, Director,
Member Services

OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

GUEST COLUMN

A culture of safety



by **Jamie Hull**
Director of Safety & Compliance

WE'VE ALL HEARD the buzz phrases, "Safety is our number one priority," or "Safety first." But how many companies actually make safety a priority?

I know Tri-County Rural Electric does.

As director of safety and compliance for Tri-County and its affiliated companies, it's my responsibility to monitor and interpret the

ever-changing safety procedures and regulations that govern the workplace. It's my job to not only ensure we are complying with the rules that apply to us, but to make sure each employee goes home safely at the end of the work day.

Staying abreast of changes to safety and compliance regulations can be a challenge. Just when we think we are following everything correctly, the rules change. It's my responsibility to be aware of those changes and understand why they are being made so I can relay that information to employees. Fortunately, I can tap into a network of colleagues from electric cooperatives throughout the United States to get assistance when necessary; this group of safety professionals shares information on a daily basis, so no one misses any changes.

One of the first things a safety professional is taught is that safety must be practiced from the top down. That means all employees — from the chief executive officer down through the ranks — must commit to following safety rules and regulations, helping each other when needed, and generally working together to complete a job and keep everyone safe while doing so.

During my career I've seen plenty of utilities whose top officials viewed safety with indifference. Those utilities' safety


records usually reflected that lack of commitment. If management refuses to set the example, the entire company suffers.

Fortunately, this is not the case at Tri-County, where a culture of safety exists among the entire workforce. That commitment to safety is critical in our industry, which is among the nation's most hazardous.

We take safety seriously, training all employees to learn and maintain a safety-minded attitude. Employees attend safety meetings, participate on safety committees, consider safety issues when planning work projects, and follow safety policies and regulations to prevent injuries or worse. We have an emergency plan in place to assist employees in dealing with all types of emergencies, including actions to take if someone gets hurt.

Our outside employees work in crews, and each member of the crew watches out for the others. It may be something as simple as reminding someone to wear a hard hat, but the watch is always there. That same team-oriented approach to safety is also at play on the inside, and it certainly makes my job easier.

Safety is such an important focus of the rural electric program that our national association has developed an accreditation program that helps electric cooperatives achieve and maintain a comprehensive safety and loss-control program. The accreditation process takes an intensive look at a cooperative's safety culture and practices using three trained professionals from outside cooperatives.

Tri-County is getting prepared to go through the accreditation process later this year. It's another sign that the cooperative and its employees' commitment to safety extends far beyond memorizing the latest safety catch phrase. 

Co-op steps up safety message with high-voltage display

BY JEFF FETZER

IT'S EASY to take electricity for granted. You flip a switch, and a light goes on; hit the power button on your remote, and your television jumps to life.

But along with the many benefits and conveniences electricity provides, it also possesses a dangerous side that should never be ignored.

Electricity kills nearly 400 people annually and injures thousands more, according to the National Electrical Safety Foundation. Power line contact — with construction equipment, ladders or gardening tools — is among the leading causes of electrocutions.

Most electrical contact incidents could be avoided with an increased awareness of electrical safety, such as noting the location of power lines when working or playing outside.

To draw attention to outdoor electrical hazards, Tri-County has been conducting high-voltage safety demonstrations at its annual meetings for the past two years using a mobile safety display borrowed from Penelec.

Sometime this month, which also happens to be National Electrical Safety Month, Tri-County's partner cooperative, Claverack REC, will be finalizing construction of a high-voltage safety trailer that will be available for use year-round by both cooperatives and their affiliated electric companies, Wellsboro Electric Co. and Citizens' Electric Co. of Lewisburg.

"One of the reasons we have been doing high-voltage safety demonstrations at the annual meeting is to educate members of the hazards associated with high-voltage electric lines," says John Lykens, Tri-County's director of engineering and operations. "But those demonstrations only reach a small percentage of our membership. We wanted to be able to educate people in all of the communities we serve about the dangers of electrical contact, so we really needed a safety trailer of our own."

The safety trailer was modeled after the Penelec display, with a few improvements and modifications added. Lykens took photos of the Penelec trailer, drew up a wiring blueprint and turned the project over to



SAFETY CREW: Tri-County's director of engineering and operations, John Lykens, at left, and members of Claverack REC's Tunkhannock line crew display the high-voltage safety trailer that the co-ops will be using to heighten public awareness of the dangers of electricity.

Claverack's Tunkhannock line crew, which had volunteered to fabricate and wire the display after hours and as time permitted throughout the winter and spring.

The mobile safety trailer replicates an electrical distribution system from the substation to a member's home and incorporates many of the devices that can be found on an electric system.

During safety demonstrations, line workers demonstrate a variety of electrical contact scenarios involving animals, trees, ladders and equipment.

"You can see the arc flash when the ladder contacts the lines," says Lykens, "so you have a visual of what electricity is capable of."

The demonstration also features a hot dog coming into contact with an energized car door and getting cooked instantly; the display is meant to illustrate the effect of electricity on the human body. In another scenario, geared toward children, a kite string makes electrical contact with a high-voltage electric line.

"It's amazing how much impact this has on kids," said Lykens. "It registers with them that a kite string has the potential to conduct electricity when they can

see a fuse blow and big ball of fire."

While arc flashes and blown fuses are a dramatic component of the display, the safety trailer also incorporates demonstrations of automatic circuit reclosers, to illustrate how blinks occur, and generator back-feed, to show how an improperly installed back-up generator can energize an entire neighborhood.

Lykens said safety demonstrations, which last about 45 minutes, will be offered at cooperative annual meetings, county fairs and other large public gatherings. In addition, he anticipates the safety trailer will travel to fire departments and schools for demonstrations geared to emergency medical responders, teachers and school children. The safety trailer can be used anywhere there is standard (120/240 volt) electrical service.

"This is a great way for Tri-County to educate the public about the dangers of electricity and demonstrate its commitment to the community," said Lykens, noting community involvement and education are guiding principals of the cooperative program. "The idea is to save lives. If we can save one life, it's going to be worth it." ☀

Trees near power lines – leave them alone

MOST PEOPLE know that trees and power lines aren't supposed to mix. But when they do, be sure to keep your distance.

Strong winds and storms can topple trees or break branches, pulling power lines down from poles or supporting structures. Just because a line is down, doesn't mean there can't be electricity flowing through it. It is possible for a line to remain energized when it's down, potentially electrifying the tree, the ground and nearby objects.

Arcing or flashovers between power lines and trees can also cause potential damage or danger. Additional weight from snow and ice can bend or break tree branches, bringing them close enough to power lines to cause an arc or flashover and become energized.

A voltage surge on a power line from a nearby lightning strike can cause a tree to become "electrified" as well. During warm weather or when power lines are carrying heavy electrical loads, they can heat up and stretch, making the lines longer. Thus, power lines can sag as much as 15 or 20 feet, bringing them even closer to trees.

The electric current caused by arcing or flashovers between power lines

and trees can injure or kill an individual caught nearby. It is important to pay attention to power lines when felling trees, or using equipment near electric lines. In recognition of May's designation as National Electrical Safety Month, we offer the following power line safety tips for you to consider:

- ▶ Make sure to always look for nearby power lines before you begin to cut down any trees or trim branches. If a tree falls into a power line, contact Tri-County.
- ▶ Treat all power lines as energized. Never climb or attempt to handle a tree that has a limb in contact with a power line. You may not see any visible evidence that the tree is "electrified" or dangerous.
- ▶ Teach your children that they should never climb trees near power lines.
- ▶ Make sure to maintain required clearances between equipment and power lines.
- ▶ If a fire starts from a fallen power line, notify 9-1-1 and Tri-County. Stay away from the site of the electrical hazard. Make sure others stay clear of the line and treat it as energized.
- ▶ Do not use water on or near a fallen power line. ⚡

Planting in the right place

You can help reduce Tri-County's right-of-way maintenance costs by selecting trees for your property based on their mature height and proximity to electric lines.



Above are examples of different species of trees you can plant around your home and the proper distance to maintain between trees and electric lines. If you have questions regarding planting trees in the vicinity of electric lines, please contact the co-op office.

- ▶ Plant tall trees well away from overhead lines, and make sure the roots will have room to grow and won't interfere with underground lines.
- ▶ Plant small trees near any power lines.
- ▶ Make sure there are no underground power lines where you plan to dig. To check, call Pennsylvania One Call at 8-1-1.
- ▶ Trees planted too close to electric lines must be trimmed. Your cooperation is appreciated when your trees require pruning.

Call 8-1-1 before digging into spring projects

With the arrival of spring, many members are gearing up for outdoor construction projects. If you are planning excavation work, get your project off to a safe start by calling 8-1-1 before you dig.

8-1-1 is the new, abbreviated national telephone number homeowners and professional excavators can call to contact their state's One Call center. How



owners and contractors can still call the long-standing Pennsylvania One Call number, 1-800-242-1776, if they wish.

State law requires that anyone doing excavation work moving earth with power equipment is required to notify the Pennsylvania One Call System three days before digging begins.

The purpose of the PA One Call System is to prevent damage to underground facilities such as electric, cable, telephone, gas, water and sewer lines during excavation projects.

Digging by an uninformed homeowner or contractor not only has the potential to damage utility lines, it can also be extremely dangerous when underground electric or gas lines are involved.

By calling 8-1-1 at least three working days before you plan to begin your project, you or your contractor will know exactly what lies beneath the surface – safeguarding everyone involved.

State law requires that the person performing the excavation be responsible for notifying the PA One Call System. There is no charge involved when a homeowner is doing work on his or her own residential property.

If you are a homeowner who has hired a contractor to work on your property, the contractor is required by law to make the call to the system to have underground lines located.

Additional information about the PA One Call System is available on the Web by visiting www.pa1call.org.

HELP available for energy-efficiency projects

Tri-County members seeking to improve the energy efficiency of their homes may be eligible for special financing rates through the Keystone Home Energy Loan Program (HELP).

Keystone HELP is a preferred monthly payment plan designed to promote energy-efficient home improvements. The program, designed by the Pennsylvania Treasury Department, the Sustainable Energy Fund and AFC First Financial, offers homeowners making qualifying improvements lower interest rates and longer payment terms than other types of unsecured financing.

The program provides special financing rates for Pennsylvania customers for most Energy Star home improvements

and other qualifying high efficiency projects.

Any Pennsylvania homeowner making qualifying improvements to a one- to two-unit owner-occupied primary residence or second home is eligible to apply for a Keystone HELP loan for projects from \$1,000 to \$10,000 or more. There are no minimum and maximum income requirements to secure a loan, nor are there any application fees or closing costs.

Keystone HELP loans are unsecured loans, which means there is no lien filed on the borrower's property. The special financing rates are available for the following improvements:

► Heating and air conditioning, includ-

ing oil (83 percent or great efficiency), and Energy Star gas and heat pump systems

- Energy Star windows, doors and siding
- Energy Star insulation
- Solar, geothermal and wind systems
- Energy Star water heaters (electric and solar)
- Energy Star lighting and fans

Only approved contractors or dealers who meet AFC First and Fannie Mae standards may perform the work. Tri-County Rural Electric, a Keystone HELP sponsoring utility, can provide you with the names of local contractors participating in the program. Call the member services department at 1-800-343-2559 for more information.

Penalty for cutting meter seals increased

Tri-County recently increased the penalty it assesses members whose meter seal has been cut.

If Tri-County personnel discover a cut meter seal, the member will be assessed a fee of \$200 for the first offense and \$500 for a second offense.

A meter seal serves as a protection against theft of electrical service. It should never be

cut without prior authorization from Tri-County.

Any member who discovers that their meter seal has been cut is asked to contact the cooperative to discuss the matter.

We appreciate members' help in maintaining a fair and financially sound cooperative. Proper maintenance of meter seals is one way members can be of assistance.



Humorist to speak at Tri-County Annual Meeting

Tri-County Rural Electric's 2007 annual meeting returns to the Couder-sport Consistory Saturday, July 14.

Bob Farmer, a humorist, motivator and publicist for *Farmers' Almanac*, will be the guest speaker for the meeting.

A native of Louisville, Ky., Farmer travels the nation entertaining, educating and motivating all types of audiences with his down-home anecdotes and facts about *Farmers' Almanac*. Copies of *Farmers' Almanac* will be distributed to members who attend the meeting.

Co-op members will receive notices inviting them to attend the annual meeting in mid-June.

As in years past, the meeting will feature entertainment, children's activities, bucket truck rides, electrical safety demonstrations, door prizes and a

chicken dinner.

A mini-health fair is also planned, and displays featuring Cutler Hammer generators, Marathon water heaters, geothermal heat pumps and compact fluorescent lights will be



Bob Farmer

available for members to view.

Mark your calendars for this great opportunity to meet your Tri-County representatives, view the displays and enjoy the fellowship of your co-op neighbors.

Please verify your contact information

Please be sure to verify that the telephone number and address that appears on your electric bill are correct.

If either is incorrect, please write the correct number and address on your payment stub and return with payment or call the office at 1-800-343-2559.

Tri-County uses your phone number when dispatching outages, and also to notify you about planned outages, so it is important for us to have your correct number on file.

