

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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OFFICE HOURS

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

GUEST COLUMN

Battling blinks: Pardon the interruption



By Gary Dunn
Manager of Field Operations

TRI-COUNTY owns and maintains over 3,100 miles of electric line in seven counties. For operational purposes, we divide the lines into sections, and each section is protected by a device that performs the same function as the breakers or fuses in your electrical panel box.

Any section of any one of these lines can experience a blink, or momentary power

outage, at any time. When a blink occurs, the line is operating as designed.

Why? The underlying principle is that a blink is more desirable than an extended power outage. All of our circuit-protection devices are coordinated to allow an incidental event, a short-lived fault, to clear with a momentary outage to prevent it from becoming a permanent outage.

While an occasional blink is not an indicator of a problem, regular blinks can indicate trouble.

What are the most common causes of blinks?

- ▶ **Something contacts the line but doesn't stay there:** A tree branch brushes the line as it falls, or a bird or squirrel contacts the line while sitting on a piece of grounded equipment.
- ▶ **Insulators:** Every pole has at least one insulator. If an insulator develops a hairline crack, it can cause blinks.
- ▶ **Birds:** Birds like to gather on the wires in certain areas. If they all take flight at once, it can cause the wires to bounce and slap together, causing a blink. This occurs like clockwork in certain areas each year. When the birds move on, the blinks end.
- ▶ **Transmission issues:** Our transmission suppliers' electrical lines experience the same issues as the co-op lines. Small animals, insulator issues, lightning and momentary contact plague

them as well. If we are connected to a transmission line that is blinking, we experience the blink, too.

What does Tri-County do when blinks are reported?


Our first step is to inspect the connections at the service entrance. If that's not the cause, we check with the neighbors. This helps to determine how widespread the problem might be. Next, we check the trip counters on our circuit-protection devices in the area. Each blink will register as a trip on the counter. This helps the crews know where to start looking for the problem.

If we cannot visually diagnose the cause of the blinks, we install fault indicators on the lines in the general area of the problems to help us to further narrow down the problem area.

If we still can't track down the trouble, we use an infrared camera to look at the line. The camera identifies a rise in heat, which typically occurs when an insulator or piece of equipment is breaking down.

What can you do when experiencing blinks?

- ▶ Report blinks when they occur on more than an occasional basis so we can begin monitoring the line in your area.
- ▶ Because blinks affect sensitive electronic equipment equipped with digital clocks, when replacing these devices, try to purchase ones with battery backup. The battery will outlast a blink so you won't have to reset clocks when a blink occurs.
- ▶ If you use a computer in your home for your livelihood, install a battery backup system for it.

Blinks can occur anytime for a myriad of reasons. Because of their transient nature, trying to track down the cause of a blink can be like chasing a mirage. Once you get to where you thought it was, it's gone. Fixing the cause of a blink usually doesn't take long. But finding the cause of the blink can sometimes be a lengthy process. 

Students capitalize on opportunity to explore D.C.

MORE THAN 1,500 high school students from around the country converged in the nation's capital earlier this summer for the chance to make connections with the nation's proud past and advance its promising future.

Bringing all these young people together was the 2008 Rural Electric Youth Tour, organized annually by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the service arm for the nation's 900 electric cooperatives.

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative sponsored seven students from its service territory on the tour, held June 15-20. Participants were: Deprise Faivre, daughter of Jeff and Trudy Faivre of Liberty; Kristen Hayman, son of Barry Hayman and Deborah Rutkowski of Genesee; Nathaniel Kosa, son of Kurt and Laurel Kosa of Ulysses; Aric Root, son of Todd and Penny Root of Wellsboro; Brayden Sickler, daughter of Jamie-Jo and Scot Sickler of Westfield; Trevor Sickler, son of Randy and Cheryl Sickler of Coudersport; and Levi Torrey, son of Karl and Gay Torrey of Coudersport.

The Tri-County delegates, who will be entering their senior year of high school, boarded the motor coach at the co-op's Coudersport and Mansfield offices Sunday morning, June 15, and traveled to the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Crystal City, Va., where they stayed for the next five nights. They were among 88 students from Pennsylvania and New Jersey who took part in Youth Tour.

The event kicked off Monday morning with National Youth Day. Highlights

of the action-packed morning included an inspirational keynote address by Michael Schlappi, a four-time Olympic medal winner who competes in wheelchair basketball. Other speakers included former Nebraska state Sen. Dave Landis, who gave a character portrayal of George Norris, a pioneer in the rural electric cooperative movement.

Following lunch, students traveled to Mt. Vernon for a tour of George Washington's historic home on the Potomac River, along with its beautiful gardens and orchards. Rounding out the day was an evening boat cruise on the Potomac, where the Pennsylvania delegates were able to dance and mingle with Youth Tour participants from other states.

On Tuesday, the Pennsylvania students visited Capitol Hill, where they met with Sen. Bob Casey Jr. Pennsylvania's junior senator spent about 45 minutes talking to the students and answering their questions on the steps of the U.S. Capitol.

Other highlights of the week included visits to the Smithsonian, the Holocaust Museum, Madame Tussauds Wax Museum, the Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt monuments, Vietnam, Korean War and World War II memorials, Arlington Cemetery, and the National Cathedral.

Students also enjoyed a performance of "Sheer Madness" at the Kennedy Center, as well as



FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH: Tri-County's Youth Tour student delegates mug for the camera outside of the Kennedy Center. Pictured are, front, from left, Trevor Sickler, Brayden Sickler, Deprise Faivre, Nathaniel Kosa, Levi Torrey, (back) Aric Root and Kristen Haymen.

the popular All States Dinner Dance, which brought together Youth Tour students from 47 states for an evening of dancing, games, videos and socializing in the basement of the Hyatt Regency.

Tri-County has been a supporter of Youth Tour for many years. Each year the cooperative seeks out students from its service territory who have an interest in learning more about the nation's capital and the rural electric cooperative movement.

Applicants must be high school juniors whose parents or legal guardians are members of the co-op. Students must complete an application form and brief essay for consideration.

Application information is generally available in February at local schools and in *Penn Lines* or through Tri-County's website, www.tri-countyrec.com.

Youth Tour, sparked by a speech by then-U.S. Sen. Lyndon Johnson at the 1957 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Annual Meeting, has been held annually since 1964. ☀



CAPITAL CRUISERS: Rural Electric Youth Tour participants representing Tri-County enjoy an evening boat cruise on the Potomac River. They are, from left, Deprise Faivre, Brayden Sickler, Aric Root, Nathaniel Kosa, Trevor Sickler, Levi Torrey and Kristen Haymen.

Tri-County returns \$250,000 in capital credits to members

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative recently returned \$250,000 in capital credits to members and former members of the cooperative.

The co-op board of directors approved the retirement of \$250,000 worth of capital credits allocated to members' accounts in 1982 and 1983. That means those who were members of the cooperative in 1982 and 1983 have been issued either a credit on their electric bill or a paper check.

Capital credits reflect margins the cooperative realizes at the end of each year. Margins, a cooperative's equivalent to "profits," are the excess of income over expenses.

Because cooperatives are member-owned, margins are allocated back to members in the form of capital credits. The

amount of the allocation to a member's account is based on that member's energy consumption for the retirement year.

The cooperative retains margins for a period of time — historically 20 to 25 years — to be used as working capital to assist in the financing of plant replacement and to build and maintain the electric system. When the co-op is financially able to do so, it retires margins by returning capital credits, also known as patronage capital, to members.

"I am extremely pleased that the cooperative finds itself in a position to return capital credits to members this year, especially in light of the current economy," said Craig Eccher, Tri-County's president and chief executive officer.

Jim Davis of Elkland, chairman of Tri-County's board of directors, said the board always considers the financial standing of the cooperative before approving the return of margins to members.

"Tri-County had a very good year in 2007," he says. "That we are able to return capital credit refunds to members speaks to the financial health of the cooperative."

Davis added that capital credit refunds are one of the many benefits of being a member of an electric cooperative.

"Co-ops exist to make sure the needs of their members are being met, not to make a profit," said Davis. "When we have a positive financial year, the members are able to share in the profits through capital credit refunds." 

High winds rip through co-op's Liberty building

Tri-County's Liberty District building sustained over \$15,000 in damage when a brief but severe storm swept through the southeastern portion of the co-

op's service territory Tuesday, June 10.

Rick Tavares, manager of purchasing and facilities for the co-op, said winds estimated at 75 mph ripped a heavy, 16-by-16-foot overhead garage door from the building, then blew off a 40-foot section of the co-op building's sheet metal roof. About 20 pine trees



A microburst tore the overhead garage door from Tri-County's Liberty District building and blew off a 40-foot section of sheet-metal roofing on the south side of the structure on June 10.

on the co-op property were uprooted during the storm, which lasted less than 15 minutes.

No one was in the building when the storm struck at about 5:15 p.m. In addition to damaging the Tri-County shop, the storm, described as a microburst by weather officials, tore the steeple off the East Point United Methodist Church, leveled several barns and outbuildings, damaged homes and snapped and uprooted numerous trees in an area from Cedar Run in Lycoming County to Alba in Bradford County.

More than 300 Tri-County members in areas served by the Cammal and Liberty substations lost power during the storm.



Our Energy, Our Future
A Dialogue With America

IT'S OUR TIME

It's our time to lead America in a national dialogue. About America's climate change goals and energy challenge. It's time to raise awareness. Have the hard conversations with our elected officials. Empower people. It's not us versus them. It's me. It's you. It's all of us. Together. It's about the energy to effect positive change. It's about the power of conversation. It's about the power in all of us, to find the right answers.

IT'S ABOUT OUR ENERGY. OUR FUTURE

Let's get the conversation going. Productive dialogue begins by asking tough questions and requiring straight answers. Start by asking your elected officials these questions to get the dialogue headed in the right direction:

- ▶ Experts say that our nation's growing electricity needs will soon go well beyond what renewables, conservation and efficiency can provide; What is your plan to make sure we have the electricity we'll need in the future?
- ▶ What are you doing to fully fund the research required to make emissions free electric plants an affordable reality?
- ▶ Balancing electricity needs and environmental goals will be difficult. How much is all this going to increase my electric bill and what will you do to make it affordable?

Start the conversation with your elected officials now at www.ourenergy.coop. Or stop by the office and we'll provide letters for your legislators. Just sign them, fill in your name and address, and drop them in the mail.

**Tri-County
Rural Electric
Cooperative will be
closed Monday,
Sept. 1, 2008, in
observance of
Labor Day.**

Avoid electrical hazards around water

In the United States, lightning kills an average of 66 people each year and injures another 300, according to the National Weather Service. In an effort to decrease these numbers, we offer the following tips to stay safe during storms:

- ▶ If you're close enough to the storm to hear thunder, you're most likely close enough to be struck by lightning. Seek shelter immediately.
- ▶ Do not seek shelter under trees, picnic or rain shelters, or in open-frame vehicles.
- ▶ Don't plug in or unplug anything electrical during the storm.
- ▶ Don't use corded telephones. Phone use is the No. 1 cause of indoor lightning injuries in the United States.
- ▶ Avoid contact with water, pipes, washers or dryers.
- ▶ If you can't find shelter in a building or in a closed-frame vehicle, keep your feet together and sit on the ground away from water, high ground or open spaces.
- ▶ If a person is struck by lightning, call 911 and care for the victim immediately. You cannot be harmed by touching the victim after he or she has been struck.

© Safe Electricity

Family-In-Need Fund It's common cents

With today's higher energy costs, we expect there will be an increase in the number of cooperative families struggling to keep up with their electric bills this winter.

You can help these neighbors in need by signing up to participate in Tri-County's Family-In-Need Fund.

This voluntary program allows you to assist members of the cooperative who have difficulties paying their electric bills. Participating in the program is inexpensive — less than \$1 a month — and helps unite the entire co-op as members help each other through difficult financial times.

Contributing is easy

The concept behind the Family-In-Need Fund is simple. You allow Tri-County to "round up" your monthly electric bill to the next dollar amount.

The difference between the round-up amount and your actual bill amount — which can be no higher than 99 cents in one month — goes into this new fund.

For example, if your electric bill is \$100.32, then you would pay \$101. The extra 68 cents goes into our member assistance fund for needy families of the cooperative.

In addition to being a great way to help neighbors in need, participating in the program can also make balancing your checkbook easier.

A few cents can make a difference

Your donation of less than \$1 a month doesn't amount to a large sum of money over the course of the year. On average, a member would end up donating about \$6 annually to the program.

But your pocket change, when



pooled with contributions from all of the other participating members of the co-op, can truly make a difference for a family that has fallen behind on its electric bill.

Here's how you can help

If you would like to help your co-op neighbors, the Family-In-Need Fund is an easy way to do just that. Just fill out the form below and enclose it with your next electric bill. If you decide you no longer want to participate in the program, just call the office and ask to stop.

The success of this program depends on the generosity of members. Neighbors helping neighbors — it's the cooperative way. Please send in your form today.

Yes! I want to become a volunteer for the Family-In-Need Fund!

I understand that my bill will be rounded up to the next dollar amount. My total bill will include my monthly contribution to the program, and I am responsible for paying that amount. I also understand that to stop donating to the fund, all I need to do is call the office and ask to stop.

Name: _____ Account No.: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Thank you for helping.