

# KEEPING OUR LINeworkERS SAFE

## A Local Viewpoint

BY DAVE FRICK GENERAL MANAGER

### STAY BACK AND STAY SAFE

Working with electricity can be a dangerous job, especially for lineworkers. In fact, *USA Today* lists power line repairers and installers among those having the most dangerous jobs in the United States. That's why for us at Morgan County Rural Electric Association, safety is the number one priority. This is not empty talk. Over time, we created a culture of putting our crews' safety and that of the community above all else.

Our mission is to provide safe, reliable and affordable energy to you, our consumer-members. Yes, we strive to deliver affordable and reliable electricity to you, but getting our employees home safely to their loved ones at the end of the day is equally important. This requires ongoing focus, dedication, vigilance — and your help.

### DISTRACTIONS CAN BE DEADLY

While we appreciate your kindness and interest in the work of our crews, we ask

that you stay back and let them focus on their task at hand. Even routine work has the potential to be dangerous, and it takes their full attention and that of their colleagues, who are also responsible for the team's safety.

Distractions can have (Jason Bowers, acct #xxxx600) deadly consequences. If a lineworker is on or near your property during a power outage, for vegetation management or routine maintenance, please allow them ample room to work. These small accommodations help protect our crews — and you.

If you have a dog, try to keep it indoors while lineworkers are on or near your property. While most dogs are friendly, some are defensive of their territory and can't distinguish between a burglar and a utility worker. Our crews work best without a pet "supervising" the job.



DAVE FRICK

We recognize that for your family's safety, you want to make sure only authorized workers are on or near your property. You will recognize Morgan County REA employees by their neon yellow shirts, gray hard hats and the service trucks with our name and logo on them. You may also recognize our lineworkers because they live right here in our local community.

### SLOW DOWN AND MOVE OVER

In addition to giving lineworkers some space while they are near your property, we also ask that you follow state law and move over and slow down when approaching a utility vehicle on the side of the road. This is an extra barrier of safety to help those who help all of us.

## POLE TOP RESCUE TRAINING

On June 5, Morgan County REA's linemen completed pole top rescue training. Our linemen train so that they are prepared if an emergency situation were to arise.



 Pole top rescue training.



 Preparing for pole top rescue training.

# MCREA Welcomes New Employee



Morgan County REA is pleased to welcome Fabian Vigil as the cooperative's new apprentice lineman. Fabian grew up in Fort Morgan and graduated from Rocky Mountain Line School in Colorado Springs.

Fabian came to us from CPI. He always wanted to work for Morgan County REA as it's home for him. Fabian and his wife, Andrea, have a daughter, Skye, who is 9. When Fabian isn't working, he enjoys spending time with his family, camping and hunting. Please join us in welcoming Fabian to the Morgan County REA family.

## OUTAGE DETECTIVES

BY MARIA KANEVSKY

Ever wonder what goes into restoring your power after an outage? The ordeal of losing electricity can be frustrating, but electric cooperatives are always looking for ways to get the power back on as soon and safely as possible.

Whether it's severe weather like a tornado or blizzard, or a fallen tree, as soon as an outage is detected your electric co-op is working to correct the problem. And thanks to new and more advanced technologies, co-ops can restore power outages faster than ever.

Powering up after an outage starts on a larger level and ends up in local areas. First, high-voltage transmission lines are examined, next distribution stations and finally the main distribution lines. If the outage can't be pinpointed to these areas, tap lines and individual homes are inspected. This process allows your electric co-op to efficiently help the most members in the shortest amount of time, and co-ops are working to make this process move even faster.

One of the biggest advancements in technology that electric co-ops are using is advanced metering infrastructure. These smart meters allow for two-way communications and work by sending information back to the co-op's operations center. This helps to distinguish between events that

affect a single home or multiple outages, which is important because solving each of these issues requires a different process. The two-way communication also provides a way to verify that power has been restored after an outage.

Another technology is the outage management system, which can predict the location of the issue and how many members are impacted. Especially when used with the AMI system, the OMS can be useful for a co-op's effectiveness in resolving an outage. As the AMI collects and sends data, the OMS then analyzes the data using mathematical functions and models the electrical network to assess the impact of the outage.

Interactive voice response is another technology used to manage power outages. Members can easily and quickly report an outage by entering their phone number or location, which is recorded onto an electronic map used by dispatchers. After service is restored, the system can make follow-up calls to members to confirm that the power is back on.

One technology is even capable of predicting outages before they happen. Distribution fault anticipation technology



was (Clint Langley, acct #xxxx400) developed by researchers at Texas A&M University. This system can detect tree branches hanging on power lines, damaged equipment and unusual, unrecognized events. By identifying these issues, co-ops can more

efficiently dispatch crews, avoid wildfires and prevent outages before they happen.

One of the major benefits from improved technologies, especially for outages caused by extreme weather, is understanding where the outages are located, which helps to reduce risk for crews out on the road during the weather events.

These technologies clearly benefit electric co-ops and the members they serve. Power outages are inevitable, but as technology continues to improve, disruptions are becoming shorter and easier to resolve.

Maria Kanevsky is a program manager for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

■ ■ Morgan County REA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## REMEMBER: GRAIN BINS HAVE CLEARANCE REQUIREMENTS

To stay safe, many farming tasks require looking up and around for power lines in situations like operating large equipment with antennas or when using long implements. Another safety issue farmers should keep in mind related to power lines is grain bin location.

The National Electrical Safety Code addresses grain bins and their proximity to power lines with extremely specific requirements. The code does so to decrease the chances of farming equipment and machinery coming in contact with a live electrical line and because utility lines have clearance requirements.

If you are planning on building a new grain bin or remodeling around an area that already has one, contact us at Morgan County REA at 970-867-5688. We can help with specific code requirements. The taller

the grain bin, the farther it must be placed from a power line. Not only is placing a grain bin too close to a power line extremely dangerous, it will most likely need to be relocated due to one or more code violations, and usually at the owner's expense.

Remember, calling your electric co-op before installing a new grain bin or making changes around an existing one is free. Moving one is costly, it interrupts your farming schedule and is just an all-around hassle. NESC specifies both horizontal and vertical distance requirements, so don't leave a bin's location to chance.

For example, a grain bin that is 30 feet high must be at least 93 feet from a power line, and all bins must have an 18-foot minimum vertical clearance from the highest point of the bin's filling port. There are also distance requirements for all sides

of bins. In addition, changes to the ground, such as landscaping and filling, and drainage work can affect clearance heights.

Even if you are not getting a new grain bin or making changes around an existing one, remember to always maintain adequate clearance when using a portable auger, conveyor or elevator to fill your grain bin or when moving machinery or farming equipment anywhere on your farm.

Contact with a power line could be deadly. For more information about electrical safety, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).

**SAFETY NOTE:** If your machinery or vehicle does come in contact with a power line, do not get out of the cab. Call 911 and the dispatched utility will de-energize the power so that you can safely exit your tractor or vehicle.



### WIN \$25 OFF YOUR ELECTRIC BILL

Each month Morgan County REA gives two lucky members a \$25 credit on their electric bill, just by reading *Colorado Country Life*!

Congratulations, David Bender (account #xxx904) and Ambrosita Romero (account #xxx803), you saw your names and account numbers in the June edition of *Colorado Country Life*. You both received a \$25 credit on your electric bill.

There are two more MCREA member names and their account numbers hidden somewhere in this issue. If you find your name and account number, call member services at 970-867-5688 by August 31 to claim a \$25 credit on your electric bill.



### A TIP FOR ELECTRIC TOOLS

Always unplug your power tools before servicing or cleaning them. Ensure that they are turned off before you disconnect them to prevent accidental starting.

## SAFETY NEAR SOLAR

Like any other source of electricity, solar panels can pose potential hazards. Keep these safety tips in mind when you're near solar panels.



Stay at least 10 feet away from the installation.



Never walk on solar panels.



Never cut any wiring to the solar panels.



Never touch broken or damaged solar panels.

# Myths & Misconceptions About Power Lines

Have you ever wondered why a bird can sit on a live wire or what you should do if a power line is on the ground? Here are some questions and answers to some common misconceptions concerning power lines, birds on a wire and other conundrums:

**Q: What do I do if I see a downed power line?**

A: Vacate the area and call 911 to report it. Do not return to the area until you are given the go-ahead by authorities.

**Q: Can I tell from looking or listening if a downed power line is still live?**

A: Absolutely not. Although it's possible you could see or hear signs that the power line is live, a live wire may not spark or arc and it may not make any noise at all.

**Q: Where might downed power lines be?**

A: A downed power line might be in the street, ditch or field after a bad storm or car accident. It could also be lurking in floodwater or under debris, trees or other objects after a severe storm. Once a line is on the ground, it is not automatically dead, even if the power is off in your area. There's a good chance the line is still energized, which not only means you should not touch it, it also means the surrounding ground and any metal objects nearby could be energized and extremely dangerous, even deadly.

**Q: Why might a power line be down or damaged?**

A: A car accident may cause a line to be hanging down or on the ground; severe weather could damage a pole or line; or, in some cases, it's caused by another unforeseeable reason, such as a storm-damaged tree or a hungry squirrel.

**Q: Why can a bird sit on a power line and not be hurt? Doesn't that mean the line is insulated?**

A: No. Lines are sometimes coated for protection against the elements but are still deadly on contact. A bird or other critter can sit on a power line because there is no path to ground. If the animal comes in contact with the utility pole or other grounded source, it will be electrocuted, just as a person would be under the same circumstances.

**Q: Do different kinds of utility lines look different?**

A: Perhaps, but for the most part, the nonutility professional cannot know what kind of line it is and what it carries — electricity, phone service, cable television and so on — just by looking. You also can't tell how much voltage it is carrying by its appearance.

**Q: What if my car comes in contact with a downed power line?**

A: Do not get out and do not try to drive over it. Call 911 and wait for utility personnel to de-energize the line. If you smell gas or if there is a fire, exit your car with a solid jump, landing on both feet (but don't touch the car at the same time) and do not walk, but rather shuffle away without lifting your feet.

**Q: Can I help someone who is in an accident involving a downed power line?**

A: No. Do not go near the scene and warn others not to do so. Although our first instinct is often to help, a person running near an energized area could get electrocuted.

Contact Morgan County REA at 970-867-5688 with any questions about downed lines. For more information about electrical safety, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).

