Lineworkers learn best practices

Inside, learn more about the training KEM Electric Cooperative lineworkers undergo.

SEPTMBER 2016 IN THIS ISSUE

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Lineworkers learn best practices

KEM Electric Cooperative Journeyman Lineworker Austin Ohlhauser prepares to perform a self-rescue by repelling from a bucket. Here, Daniel Leigh, utility specialist with 3M, discusses the tools and equipment required, and shares practical situations in which a lineworker might consider repelling.
The job of an electric cooperative lineworker is to help build, maintain and repair the electric distribution system to continue the flow of power to its member-owners. When possible, lineworkers repair lines without disrupting the flow of power, which means they work on energized lines.

Safety is a priority for KEM Electric Cooperative, so members of its crew receive annual training. Nearly 100 lineworkers from North Dakota’s 16 electric distribution cooperatives, including Austin Ohlhauser from KEM Electric Cooperative, attended a refresher course in July. The lineworkers learned the best practices regarding the application of equipment to work on energized high-voltage power lines.

They also practiced using grounding to de-energize the power line and complete a repair. While on the job, lineworkers have the option to work on an energized power line or de-energize the line.

The North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC) in Mandan hosts the Hotline School training each year. “It allows our lineworkers to network with others to see if there’s a more efficient way, or safer way of doing their work,” says Gary Hulm, line superintendent for KEM Electric. “We see what is recommended. It’s also a refresher course to remember to continue to work safely.”

During the hotline school, lineworkers network with each other; learn practical skills and safe work procedures with hands-on instruction and demonstrations from experienced lineworkers; and apply skills learned throughout six work stations under the guidance of skilled mentors. Education starts in the classroom and ends in the field with hands-on training and practice.

Four of the six stations required participants to develop an equipotential zone (EPZ), which is a work zone to prevent electric shock. The other two stations included traditional hotline work situations that require the use of rubber gloves and equipment to insulate energized lines and apparatuses.

Christina Roemmich, director of safety services for NDAREC, says lineworkers partake in safety and technical training throughout the year. Field training, in a controlled environment like the hotline school, is the best time for lineworkers to apply the skills they have learned. “When an outage occurs or storm restoration is required, the linemen have practiced the skills needed to complete the job safely,” she says.

Austin Ohlhauser, a journeyman lineworker with KEM Electric Cooperative in Linton, attended the second session as a participant. He said he appreciated the emphasis on EPZ grounding, as the method becomes more utilized statewide. “A lot of work we do hot, or open and isolate it,” he says. “This training helps us take a step back and learn a relatively new procedure. It’s a good thing.”
Trees may seem harmless on a calm, sunny day. But add a bit of wind or ice on a stormy night and those towering pillars may threaten your home’s electric supply.

This summer, some storm-related outages were caused by branches falling onto power lines.

“Trees are a nuisance. They cause blinks and outages. They cause all kinds of problems,” says Gary Hulm, line superintendent for KEM Electric.

But regular trimming of trees and brush along power lines helps cut down on the number of outages as well as annoying blinks.

Electricity interruptions can occur when branches break and fall across power lines, or when trees tumble onto power lines. When strong winds blow, limbs growing too close to power lines may sway and touch wires, causing those annoying “blinks” in power.

To fight these potential problems, electric cooperatives clear growth away from power lines as a way of reducing potential outages and safety risks.

KEM Electric Cooperative is committed to providing safe, reliable and affordable power, and a tree-trimming program is key to fulfilling that promise.

Two contractors are currently working in KEM Electric Cooperative’s service territory to trim trees. Landowners are encouraged to allow trimmers to remove a tree completely if it is growing under or too close to a power line.

If a tree is growing underneath or near a power line, it should be cut down completely, Hulm advises, to avoid dangerous situations.

“When we have tree trimmers in the area, we like to have them cut the trees all the way down, because we don’t have the time to keep coming back every four or five years to keep trimming a tree that’s under a power line,” Hulm says.

Trees growing under a power line are simply in the wrong place and need to be removed.

Crews look for foliage growing under lines, overhanging branches, leaning or other types of dangerous trees that could pull down a power line if they fall. As a rule of thumb, 25 feet of ground-to-sky clearance should be available on each side of utility poles to give power lines plenty of space.

Hulm also advises members to consider where they plant new trees. While a sapling may seem fine where it’s planted, members should consider what the tree will look like at maturity.

If trees in your area are growing into power lines, please call KEM Electric at 701-254-4666 or 800-472-2673.
When danger looms

Sprawling tree limbs look beautiful when covered with leaves, but what’s hiding among those branches? If it’s a power line, call a professional to trim that tree before it causes a hazard for you or leaves you without power.

When a tree touches an overhead power line, danger looms. Children climbing that tree can get shocked or killed; branches can break or fall onto the wire, causing an outage; or the wind can whip a limb into the line and cause an outage. But remember: When power lines are involved, always leave the trimming to professionals.

Never plant near power lines:

*Trees which should never be planted near an overhead power line include:*

- Ash
- Birch
- Black walnut
- Corktree
- Cottonwood
- Elm
- Hackberry
- Honeylocust
- Kentucky coffeetree
- Larch
- Linden
- Maples
- Oak
- Ohio buckeye
- Pine
- Spruce
- Poplar
- Willow

*Source: North Dakota State University Extension Service*

Plan, then plant

Trees can filter the sunlight to help cool your home, and break cold winds to lower your heating costs. But before you plant that tree, look up. Is there a power line overhead or nearby? If so, you may need to change your landscaping plans.

Always consider the mature height of the trees and shrubs you plant. Ask professionals how tall your sapling will be when it’s mature. If it is expected to reach within 25 feet of a power line, plant it somewhere else. Also find out how sprawling the tree’s branches will be at maturity. A tree planted 25 feet away from a power line could still interfere with the wires.
KEM Electric members can now use SmartHub

KEM Electric Cooperative is putting the power of data into members’ hands. With the introduction of SmartHub, members will have convenient account management and detailed usage information at their fingertips. This mobile and Web app delivers accurate, timely information and allows members to make payments in a secure environment right from a mobile device or from a computer.

Manage your account right from your computer or smartphone

For mobile access, download the free app in the Apple app store or Android marketplace.

If you don’t have a smartphone, you can still manage your account online. All the services offered by the SmartHub app are also on KEM Electric’s website at www.kemelectric.com. When you visit the website, you are provided with a link to your “My Account” section.

For more information about KEM’s SmartHub service, contact us at 701-254-4666 or 1-800-472-2673.

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Don’t look for Pokémon near electrical equipment

Gotta catch ’em all?

Fine. Just be careful catching Pokémon around high-voltage electrical equipment.

That’s the warning electric cooperatives and other utilities are sharing with players of Pokémon Go, the new smartphone-based augmented reality game in which players try to catch Pokémon in real world places.

Pokémon turn up everywhere, from the North Dakota Capitol grounds to local restaurants and parks. But they’re also appearing at electric substations, which is concerning KEM Electric Cooperative.

The game allows players to train, battle and capture Pokémon through “geocaching,” during which players use their smartphones to hunt the characters hiding in the real world.

The reality game may be drawing players into some dangerous situations. Online threads are reporting the “electric” type Pokémon can be found near electrical sites.

Electric cooperatives cannot control where the Pokémon appear, making it important for players to make sure they catch their Pokémon from a safe distance.

Climbing a utility pole or a fence surrounding a substation is not only trespassing, it’s dangerous. Poles, substations and transformers are for processing electricity—not for playing games.

Numerous co-ops have taken to social media to get the word out.

“Searching for the rarest of the rare in #PokémonGO? Well, we know one place NOT to look,” Cass County Electric Cooperative, based in Fargo, wrote on its Facebook page.

The post continues: “Entering electrical substations is both a crime and incredibly dangerous – NEVER attempt to gain access to one. Trust us. Zapdos isn’t in there. We checked.”

It refers to Zapdos, a rare electric bird Pokémon which, in the original games, was found in a power plant.

Parents of children are encouraged to talk to their children about how to be safe around electricity. Here are some important safety tips:

- Stay away from power lines, transformers, substations and electrical work sites.
- NEVER touch electric equipment, including transformers and power lines.
- Do not climb power poles or throw things into power lines.
- Stay away from power lines that have fallen because they can still be energized.
- Power lines near trees also pose a danger; exercise caution and check for power lines before climbing a tree.
**KEM Electric Cooperative**

**Board meeting highlights**

**July 26, 2016**

- Held reorganization of the board
- Approved the May and June regular board meeting minutes
- Signed the special equipment summary
- Heard a report from the Voucher Review Committee
- Approved the retirement of three estates
- Approved the long-range forecast
- Approved 2015 update to the 2014 load forecast
- Heard department updates
- Heard an Innovative Energy Alliance update

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Chris Baumgartner..Co-General Manager/CEO

Report outages to the following toll-free number: 800-472-2673
Hazleton, Linton and Strasburg exchanges’ phone number: 701-254-4666

**OFFICE HOURS:**

Monday through Friday,
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Website: kemelectric.com
Email address: kem@kemelectric.com

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