


WESTERN CO-OP ELECTRIC



WESTERN COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC

NEWS

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FROM THE MANAGER

Celebrating Co-op Month: The 7 Cooperative Principles



Tom Ruth

As we enter the beautiful month of October, there's a crispness in the air and a sense of anticipation for football

and Halloween. But October also holds a special place in the hearts of cooperatives — it's National Co-op Month! This month, we celebrate the cooperative spirit that unites us all and reaffirms our commitment to the Seven Cooperative Principles.

ACE Hardware, State Farm, REI, Land O'Lakes and Western Cooperative Electric all share something in common: we're all cooperatives. We may be in different industries, but

we all share a passion for serving our members and helping our communities to thrive.

The Seven Cooperative Principles are the ties that bind all cooperatives and serve as the cornerstone of the cooperative model. Something this integral to our operation deserves affirmation and an explanation of why we must abide by them.

1 VOLUNTARY AND OPEN MEMBERSHIP:

This principle reminds us that our cooperative is open to all, without discrimination. Anyone in our service territory who needs reliable electricity is welcome to join our cooperative. It's essential to cherish this principle as it ensures that we remain an inclusive organization that serves the needs of everyone.

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ENERGY EFFICIENCY Tip of the Month

Did you know using your dishwasher is more energy efficient than washing dishes by hand? To maximize efficiency, wash full loads in the dishwasher and don't block the arms or other parts that move while the appliance is in use. For additional savings, turn on the "air dry" setting instead of using the "heat dry" setting and use a rinse aid to help dishes dry faster without spotting and streaking.

SOURCE: WWW.ENERGY.GOV



Share Information That Saves Lives

National Teen Driver Safety Week is Oct. 15-21

Eight people die in distracted-related crashes on American roads each day, according to the National Safety Council (NSC). National Teen Driver Safety Week is observed the third week of each October, which is a good time to talk to the teens in your life about safety on the open road, including the hazards of distracted driving and downed power lines.

Distracted Driving

There were 3,522 people killed by distracted driving in 2021*, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Lead by example and, as the NSC touts, “just drive.”

Texting while driving is the most alarming distraction behind the wheel, since sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for approximately 5 seconds. Other distractions include sifting through music, checking social media, using navigation, eating, talking on the phone, taking selfies, drinking a beverage or using an app.

Distracted driving is preventable. Teens and adults alike can follow these five easy tips to help them concentrate on just driving:

- ▶ That text can wait. Do not text while driving.
- ▶ Make responding less tempting by blocking texts while behind the wheel. LifeSaver is one of many apps that activates to block text notifications and disables certain phone features while the car is in motion.
- ▶ Do not eat while you drive.
- ▶ Rely on playlists instead of searching for music.
- ▶ Set up navigation before you leave or have a passenger navigate.

Downed Power Lines

Although no one wants to think about teens being in car accidents, it does happen. Severe storms can damage utility equipment, such as power lines/ poles and pad-mounted transformers (green boxes). Have discussions with teens about what to do if there is a downed power line or damaged equipment.

Here is how the ground or objects can become energized without any visual indication:

- ▶ The energy spreads like ripples on a pond.

- ▶ If you walk or run from one voltage “ripple” to another, your feet experience a difference in voltage (this is called step potential).
- ▶ If you touch something at one voltage and step on or touch something at a different voltage, your hands (or your hand and foot) experience a difference in voltage (called touch potential).
- ▶ Your body becomes electricity’s path to ground when electrical current enters your body at one point and exits at another.

What to Do

If you are in a car accident, stay inside your vehicle, call 911 and report that there is damaged electric utility equipment. If you are a bystander, do not approach the scene to help. Stay at least 50 feet away and do not lean on or touch anything.

Downed lines or other damaged utility equipment can look lifeless and harmless and still be live. Downed lines and other damaged electrical apparatuses do not have to be sparking, moving, sizzling or giving off flames to be energized.

*2022 STATISTICS NOT AVAILABLE AS OF THE WRITING OF THIS ARTICLE.

Geist and Penka Earn Journeyman Lineman Certification

On Sept. 1, Western Cooperative celebrated two linemen earning their journeyman credentials. **NICK GEIST**, WaKeeney, and **THOMAS PENKA JR.**, Olmitz, have completed the merchant program and training hours to earn their journeyman lineman certification.

Achieving the status of a journeyman lineman is a remarkable accomplishment that signifies a person’s dedication, skill and unwavering commitment to their craft. These individuals, often referred to as the unsung heroes of our modern world, embark on a rigorous and demanding journey to attain this prestigious title.

As they navigate intensive training programs, apprenticeships, and countless hours of hands-on experience, journeyman linemen develop a profound understanding of the intricate electrical systems that power our communities.

“I am extremely proud of Nick and Thomas for their achievements,” said Tom Ruth, Western Cooperative general manager. “It takes a special individual to process the unwavering commitment to keeping the lights on, often under challenging conditions. It is a testament to their resilience and dedication to the communities we serve.”



Nick Geist



Thomas Penka Jr.

SCAMMERS CAN BE A

REAL PAIN IN THE NECK



Learn how to avoid these common scams, so you are not left drained.

Electric cooperative members, like consumers in any industry, can be vulnerable to various scams and fraudulent activities. While the specific scams may evolve over time, some of the biggest scams and frauds that have historically targeted electric cooperative members include:

- ▶ **UTILITY IMPERSONATION SCAMS:** Scammers often pose as utility representatives and contact members through phone calls, emails, or even in person. They may threaten to disconnect service or demand immediate payment, often using high-pressure tactics to trick members into providing personal or financial information.
- ▶ **PHISHING EMAILS AND WEBSITES:** Scammers create fake emails or websites that appear to be from your electric provider, asking members to click on links, provide account information, or make payments. These phishing attempts can lead to identity theft and financial losses.
- ▶ **PREPAID DEBIT CARD SCAMS:** Scammers may ask members to purchase prepaid debit cards and provide the card information to pay fake bills or overdue balances. Once the scammers have the card details, the funds are difficult to trace or recover.
- ▶ **DOOR-TO-DOOR SCAMS:** Individuals may show up at members' homes claiming to represent the electric cooperative or offering services like energy audits or equipment repairs. These scammers may pressure members into unnecessary purchases or collect payments for non-existent services.
- ▶ **UNSOLICITED SALES AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY SCAMS:** Some scammers offer energy-efficient products or services and claim they are endorsed or affiliated with the electric cooperative. Members should verify such claims and research any offers before making purchases.

▶ **BILL OVERCHARGES AND FAKE INVOICES:**

Scammers may send fake utility bills or invoices, hoping that members will pay them without verifying the charges. It's essential for members to review their bills carefully and confirm their accuracy with the cooperative.

▶ **FALSE PROMISES OF DISCOUNTS:** Scammers may promise special discounts or incentives to switch to a different energy provider or service plan. Members should be cautious about offers that seem too good to be true.

By taking precautions and staying informed, homeowners can protect themselves from potential scams. So next time scammers try to play a trick, they won't be able to collect a treat.

TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SCAMS, FOLLOW THESE TIPS:

- ▶ **VERIFY THE IDENTITY:** Always confirm the identity of anyone claiming to represent the cooperative. Ask for a callback number and contact the cooperative directly using official contact information to verify the request or claim.
- ▶ **NEVER SHARE PERSONAL INFORMATION:** Avoid sharing personal or financial information, such as Social Security numbers, credit card details, or bank account numbers, with unsolicited callers or online sources.
- ▶ **USE OFFICIAL CHANNELS:** Pay bills and conduct business with the cooperative using official channels and websites. Be cautious when clicking on links or downloading files from unsolicited emails.
- ▶ **EDUCATE YOURSELF:** Stay informed about common scams and fraud tactics so that you can recognize suspicious activity.
- ▶ **REPORT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY:** If you encounter a scam or fraudulent activity, report it to the electric cooperative and local authorities to prevent further victimization.

Zerr Achieves Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate



Nick Zerr

NICK ZERR, board president for Western Cooperative Electric, recently received the Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) certificate from the National Rural Electric

Cooperative Association (NRECA).

An ever-changing business environment has imposed new demands on electric cooperative directors, requiring increased knowledge of changes in the electric utility business, new governance skills, and a solid knowledge of the cooperative principles and business model.

Western Cooperative Electric is committed to working through its statewide organization, Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (KEC), and NRECA to sharpen the body of knowledge to benefit its electric cooperative members.

“The electric utility industry is rapidly evolving,” said Zerr. “It is crucial to stay up-to-date locally and nationally in order to identify potential risks and make the best decisions for the members we represent.”

The CCD program requires attendance and demonstrated understanding of the basic competencies contained in five core courses:

- ▶ Director duties and liabilities.
- ▶ Understanding the electric business.
- ▶ Board operations and process.
- ▶ Strategic planning.
- ▶ Financial decision making.

Celebrating Co-op Month: The 7 Cooperative Principles *Continued from page 12A* ▶

2 DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL: At the heart of our cooperative is the belief that every member has a voice and a vote in our decision-making processes. We don't just provide electricity; we are a democratic institution that empowers you, the members, to shape our direction. Embracing this principle reinforces the fact that we're in this together, working hand-in-hand to achieve our common goals.

3 MEMBER ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION: Cooperative membership is not just about receiving services; it's about sharing economic benefits. Any money leftover at the end of the year is allocated to our members as patronage capital and will be returned over a period of time. When you invest in our cooperative, you become an integral part of our financial strength. By doing so, you ensure that we can continue to provide affordable and reliable electricity to our community.

4 AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE: This principle emphasizes that we are an organization with the autonomy to establish rates and policies free from external control. Our autonomy allows us to make decisions that are in the best interests of our members and our community. It ensures that we can adapt to changing circumstances while remaining true to our core values.

5 EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND INFORMATION: Knowledge is the key to empowerment. We are committed to providing you with the information and resources you need to make informed decisions about your energy use and cooperative involvement. By embracing this principle, we encourage a culture of learning that benefits us all.

6 COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES: Together, we are stronger. This principle encourages us to collaborate with other cooperatives

to find innovative solutions and share resources. It's a reminder that we are part of a larger cooperative family, and by working together, we can overcome challenges more effectively.

7 CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY: Lastly, but certainly not least, our cooperative has deep roots in our community. We exist not only to provide electricity but to enhance the quality of life for all our members. This principle reminds us of our responsibility to support local development, sustainability, and the well-being of our community.

As we celebrate Co-op Month, I encourage each of you to reflect on these principles and what they mean to you personally. They are not just words; they are the values that drive us as an electric cooperative. By upholding these principles, we ensure that we remain a trustworthy, member-focused, and community-driven organization.

This Co-op Month, let's come together to reaffirm our commitment to these principles and the cooperative spirit that binds us. Thank you for being a valued member of our cooperative family, and here's to a bright, cooperative future for us all!

