Reminders to Cultivate Safety Every Day

BY BRUCE GRAHAM

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Bruce Graham

From time to time, it's important to remind ourselves of some basic safety lessons. For most of us, buckling up is probably second nature. We know better than to text and drive. Hazardous materials should be stored out of reach of children and basic first aid skills are great to learn. I hope safety awareness around electricity is also automatic: water and electricity don't mix, ladders and power lines should not get acquainted, and call 811 to dig safe.

This time of year, it is also important to remember safety during our outdoor activities. On the farm, harvest means long hours and little rest which can make it difficult to stay alert and on the lookout for potential hazards. Equipment improvements, such as GPS auto-guidance, have increased productivity and quality, but they have also added a safety concern when working near power lines. Safety should not be put on auto-pilot.

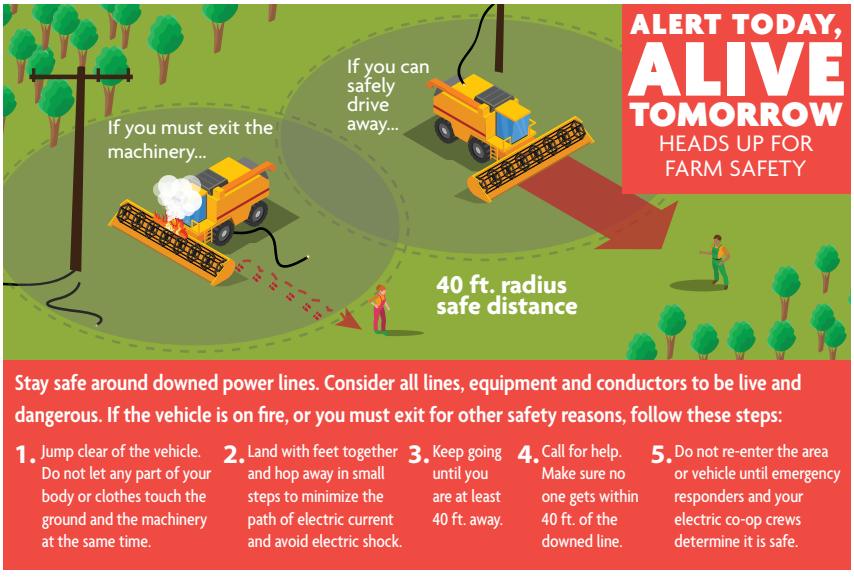
Most agricultural equipment is not a problem for overhead lines when stowed for road travel or in operation for field work. The problems occur when equipment is prepared for operation as it enters the field and in the process of unloading the harvested product. These operations typically occur at the edge of the field and, oftentimes, under the overhead power line. The good news is with the following safety steps, risk can be greatly reduced:

- Keep a 20-foot minimum distance around power lines—above, below, and to the side.
- Use a spotter when moving machinery around the farm. It can be difficult to judge how close a piece of machinery is to an electrical hazard from the driver's seat.
- Use caution when handling long items such as irrigation pipe, ladders and rods. Coming too close to a power line can cause electricity to arc, or "jump," to conducting material or objects.
- Be aware of increased height when loading and transporting tractors on trailer beds. Many tractors are now equipped with radios and communications systems that have tall antennas extending from the cab that could make contact with power lines.
- Avoid raising the arms of planters, cultivators and truck beds near power lines.
- Never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path.
- Remember, even non-metallic materials such as lumber, tree limbs, tires, ropes and hay will conduct electricity depending on dampness, dust and dirt contamination.

Overhead electric wires are not the only source of electrical contact that can result in a serious incident. Pole guy wires, used to stabilize utility poles, are grounded. However, when a guy wire is broken it can cause an electric current disruption. This can make those neutral wires anything but harmless. If you hit a guy wire and break it, call the utility to fix it. Do not try to fix it yourself.

If you are in equipment or a vehicle that has come into contact with power lines, stay in place and call 911 to have the utility notified. Warn others to stay away and wait for the utility crew to cut the power. The only reason to exit is if the equipment starts on fire, which is very rare. If this is the case though, jump away with your feet together and without touching the ground and vehicle at the same time. Then, still keeping your feet together, hop at least 40 feet away to safety.

For more information on electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org—and let's cultivate safety every day. **KCL**



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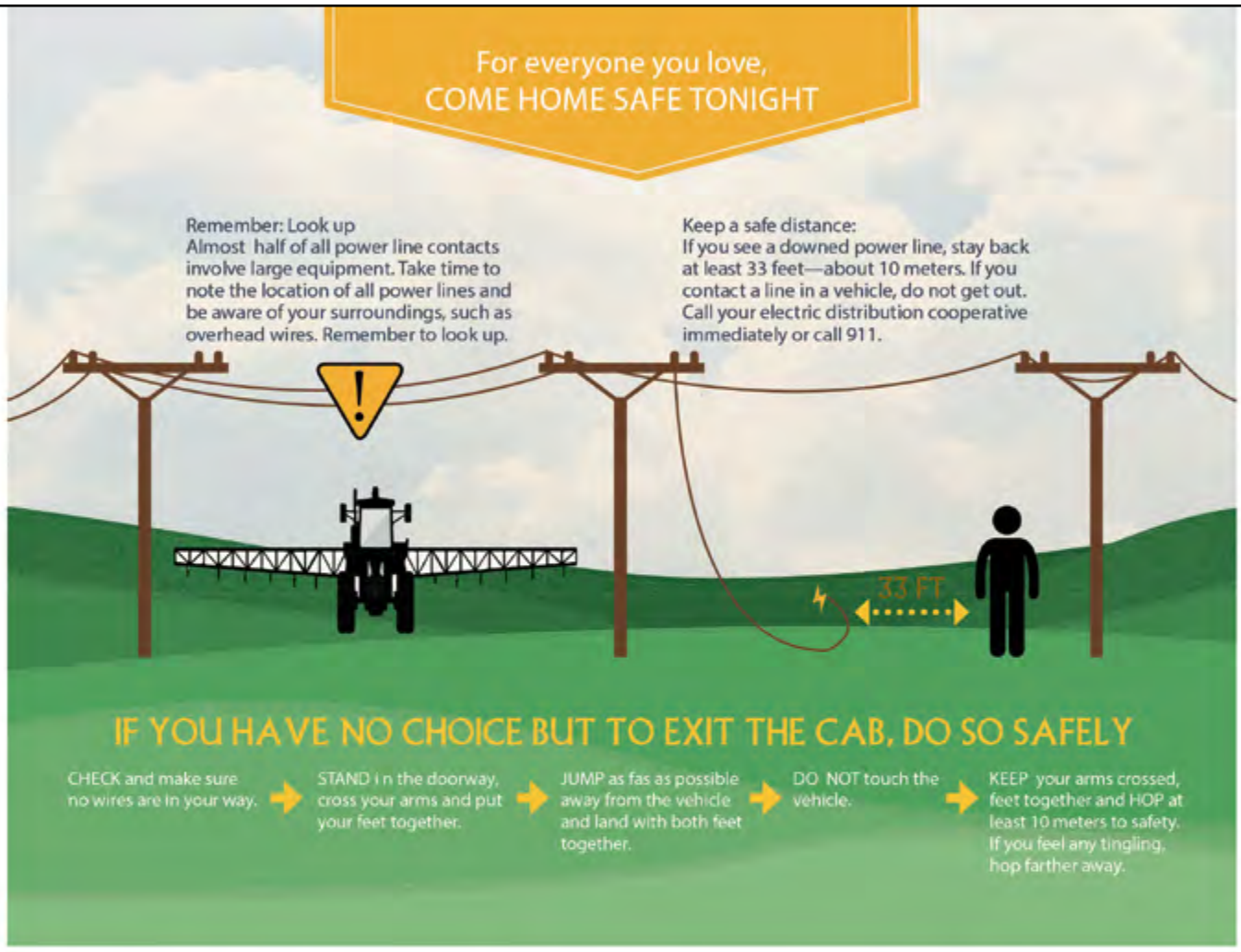

For more information on how to stay safe around electricity, visit www.safeelectricity.org.

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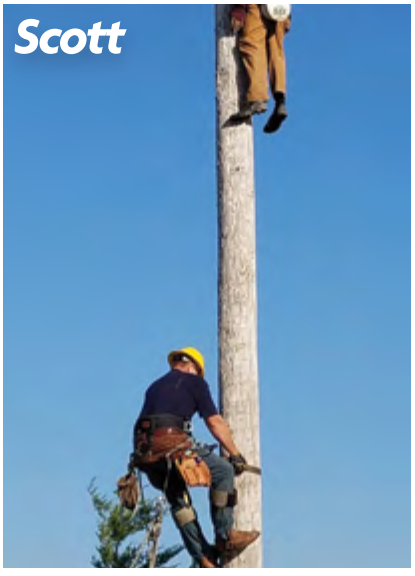
Working *on the* LINE

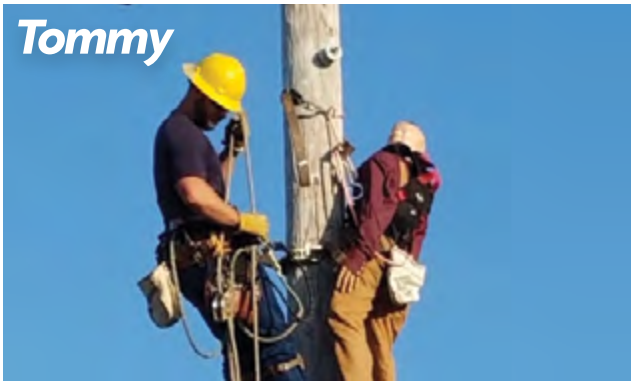
FROM SEDGWICK COUNTY ELECTRIC

Every year, Sedgwick County Electric Cooperative linemen practice rescuing a disabled person from atop a pole. This mandatory pole top rescue training simulates methods and precautions to rescue a fellow lineman if an accident were to occur on the job.

During training, linemen must remove a life-like mannequin from a pole safely and within a set amount of time. The mannequin is placed on a power pole, and the lineman must climb up and safely lower the 200-pound mannequin to the ground.

Safety is a top priority at Sedgwick County Electric. Linemen practice this training and hope they never have to use it, but it's good to know that their fellow workers have the ability to respond in the event of an emergency.





ELECTRICAL SAFETY

FROM VICTORY ELECTRIC

FOR YOUR HOME

Did you know 48 percent of home electrical failure fires involved electrical distribution or lighting equipment between 2007 and 2011? Also, 46 percent involved washers or dryers, fans, and portable or stationary space heaters.

FUSES AND BREAKERS

Older homes have fuses. Newer homes have breakers. Frequently blown fuses or tripped breakers indicate electrical system issues. Call your electrician.

PROTECT YOUR OUTLETS

Kids under six like to explore. That's great unless it is with electrical outlets. Place protectors on all outlets or update to tamper resistant outlets.

CHECK YOUR PLUGS

Plugs should not appear loose or wobble after insertion in the outlets. It is time to replace them if they are loose.

APPROVED FOR OUTDOOR

Only use electrical cords outside that are approved for outdoor use. Indoor cords are not equipped to handle the outdoor elements.

DON'T MIX THESE TWO

Water and electricity don't mix. You can get shocked and it is dangerous. Unplug any appliance before you wash or wipe it down. Be careful with hair dryers around sinks or bathtubs.

REPLACE FRAYED WIRES

A frayed wire can give you a shock or spark a fire. If possible, turn-off appliances and unplug, or cut power to the appliance or area with the bad wiring. After, you can enlist an electrician to help.

DON'T FORCE A PLUG

If a plug won't fit into the outlet, it is tempting to force it by adjusting the plug's prongs. That is a definite no-no.

KEEP CORDS CLEAR

Do not place furniture on top of cords or run cords under rugs or carpet. It is a fire hazard.

For more electrical safety tips, visit Victory Electric online at victoryelectric.net or on Facebook and Twitter. If you have any questions, call the office at 620.227.2139.

Understanding Energy Demand, Purchasing

FROM NINNESCAH ELECTRIC

You may not think you need to have an understanding of energy demand and purchasing, but do you ever look at your energy bill and wonder what it all means? If your answer to that question is "yes," then you might be interested to learn how demand impacts your utility bill. To start, it is important to understand how electricity is made and how it is delivered to your home.

Before Ninnescah Electric can send electricity to your home, that electricity needs to be generated by our generation and transmission cooperative (G&T) Kansas Electric Power Cooperative (KEPCo). Once the electricity has been generated, it travels over high-voltage transmission lines to substations, where the voltage is reduced to a safer level. The electricity then travels over distribution power lines and finds its way into your home. So while you pay your bill to us—your electric distribution cooperative—we don't actually generate the electricity you use. That is the job of the G&T.

We help to determine how much electricity our members need to power their homes and businesses, and you play a big part in determining how much electricity the G&T needs to create to keep the lights on in our community. That is where these terms "consumption" and "demand" come in.

Generating and distributing power can be a tricky and complicated business, but rest assured Ninnescah Electric will always meet the necessary demand to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity.

Consumption is measured in kilowatt hours (kWh). Demand is measured in kilowatts (kW). A lightbulb "consumes" a certain number of watts, let's say 100 watts per hour. If that lightbulb stays on for 10 hours, it "demands" a certain number of kilowatts (in this case, 1 kW) from the generation station producing electricity. Now, if you turn on 10, 100-watt lightbulbs in your home for one hour, you are still consuming the same number of kW. However, you are placing a demand on the utility to have those kW available to you over the course of one hour, instead of 10. This requires the G&T to produce more power in less time in order to meet your demand.

Ninnescah Electric purchases kilowatt hours from the G&T based on the average demand of our members. Peak demand refers to the time of day when the demand for electricity is highest. This time is typically during the evening when families return home from work or school, cook dinner and use appliances the most. Using electricity during this peak demand period often costs more to both Ninnescah Electric and to our members.

Demand is the reason your electricity bill fluctuates season to season and even year to year. Generating and distributing power can be a tricky and complicated business, but rest assured Ninnescah Electric will always meet the necessary demand to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity to your family.

Utilities are Raising Awareness About Scams

FROM LANE-SCOTT ELECTRIC

When a scammer called Florida pet clinic operator Cindy Evers last year and demanded immediate payment on an overdue electric bill, it sounded real.

"They knew my account number and gave me a figure that I owed that's close to what I usually pay on my electric bill," Evers said. She paid, even though, in the back of her mind, she knew her payment wasn't late.

"I have pets under sedation, and I'm taking care of animals. I think I just panicked, thinking they were going to shut my electricity off. I did what they told me to do."

Unfortunately, the call was a scam, and Evers lost $900.

The scam that duped Evers has been plaguing utility consumers across North America for several years, robbing them of millions.

Now, utilities are fighting back.

Recently, more than 80 utilities and energy industry organizations from across the U.S. and Canada joined forces to recognize the first-ever North American Utilities United Against Scams Day on Nov. 16, 2016.

Electric co-ops have increased their communication efforts, sending information directly to members and encouraging local TV stations and newspapers to warn citizens about the scam and what people should do and not do if they are targeted.

Even the wariest consumers can be duped, however. The scammers are developing new tactics every day.

The "past due" scam, similar to the one Florida customer Evers experienced, goes something like this: A customer gets a call from an 800-number that looks like a valid utility company phone number. Widely available spoofing software allows crooks to display what appears to be an official number on caller IDs. The caller threatens to cut off power if the customer doesn't pay.

But here's the giveaway: The crook will demand payment via a prepaid debit card or money order and will often ask for payment within a specified time frame—often an hour or less.

The scammer may even quote an amount that sounds like your typical monthly bill. That way, the threat has even more credibility.

Scammers might direct the customer to a specific store nearby that sells the prepaid cards and instruct the customer to put money on the card and provide the card number to the scammer.

Some scammers have even been bold enough to contact potential victims in person, coming to the member's house.

Here are some tips on how to protect yourself:

- Do not assume the name and number on your caller ID are legitimate. Caller IDs can be spoofed.
- Never share your personal information, including date of birth, Social Security number or banking account information.
- Never wire money to someone you don't know.
- Do not click links or call numbers in unexpected emails or texts—especially those asking for your account information.
- Remember, most utilities will ***not*** require their customers to purchase prepaid debit cards or money orders to avoid an immediate disconnection.
- If you receive a call that sounds like it may be a scam, hang up, call the police and report the incident to your local utility.

How You Can Help

You can alert your family members and friends. Share the scammers' tactics described in this article or those you have heard about. You can also help raise awareness and warn others by reposting scam awareness information on social media; use the hashtag #stopscams.

If you fear you have fallen victim to a scam, notify Lane-Scott Electric by calling 800-407-2217 and reporting the incident to local authorities.

Scammers are developing new tactics to take advantage of consumers every day. Don't fall victim, #stopscams.