

# PowerLines

April 2023

## Springtime

Welcome to the month of April and the spring season! Although our winter was relatively mild, it is always good to see flowers and bushes show off their spring colors and to feel the returning warmth of the more direct sunlight.

### EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

The month of April contains two national employee appreciation days. The national lineworker appreciation day is the 18th (electric cooperatives recognize this day on the 10th), and administrative professional day is the 26th. We recognize all employees during our April safety meeting with a special luncheon. Thank you for recognizing our talented, loyal, and dedicated employees based on the excellent scores recorded in the most recent annual survey.



### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

### SAFETY

Although safety is always important, it comes even more into focus during the springtime in our service territory. We trust our employees to work and drive safely every day – not only while at work but at home and within the community as well. With the start of the spring farming season, please be careful – not only around energized lines – but also while operating and maintaining farm equipment.

### NRECA ANNUAL MEETING

There were many different topics and informative presentations to choose from during the annual electric cooperative national meeting held in Nashville during early March. A few highlights of the topics were phase 2 of zero contact safety

program rollout, electric vehicles and charging networks, availability of federal money for various infrastructure projects, member satisfaction and leadership, and broadband provision in rural areas.

### EASTERN ILLINI ITEMS

During recent board meetings, staff and your directors have been discussing various options for future rate structures, which may include the implementation of a monthly demand charge in addition to the existing facility and energy charge components on your bill. We hope to have the preliminary billing determinants completed and approved for discussion prior to the June membership annual meetings.

Nextlink (EIEC has partnered with them to help facilitate broadband expansion in our territory) was recently authorized to receive their Rural Development Opportunity Funds (RDOF) from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to assist with rollout of high-speed internet access. Nextlink is in the process of initiating service in various portions of the territory. We are working with them to provide information and schedules that can be shared with our membership.

**STAY SAFE** in all your activities and enjoy the nicer weather!

Sincerely,

*Bob Hunzinger*

## In this issue:

- Stay safe around work zones
- Be prepared for thunderstorms this spring
- April is distracted driving awareness month
- Administrative Professionals Day
- Lineworker Appreciation Day



- View your bill
- Make a payment
- Compare usage by month
- Review known issues
- Report an outage
- Update account information

SmartHub is available online or through an application on your cell phone. Sign up today!

### Energy Efficiency Tip:

This planting season, include energy efficiency in you landscaping plans. Adding shade trees around your home can reduce surrounding air temperatures as much as 6 degrees. To block heat from the sun, plant deciduous trees around the south side of your home.

Your Touchstone Energy<sup>®</sup> Cooperative 

# SLOW DOWN AND MOVE OVER

## Stay safe around work zones

MOVE OVER!



KEEP  
OUR  
CREWS  
SAFE

Here are some of the actions our crews take to stay safe:

- Discuss all aspects of safety at the tailgate meeting prior to starting a job.
- Post more signs, more cones, more barrels, and more flaggers.
- Use flashing lights when necessary.
- Stage bucket trucks so there is as much buffer as possible between the linemen and traffic.
- When possible, schedule work during off-peak times.

To help keep roadside crews safe:

- Keep a safe distance between your vehicle and traffic barriers, trucks, construction equipment and workers.
- Be patient. Traffic delays are sometimes unavoidable, so allow time for unexpected setbacks.
- Obey all signs and road crew flag instructions. Slow down and move over.
- Merge early and be courteous to other drivers. It's not a race and arriving safe is more important than arriving on time.
- Use your headlights at dusk and during inclement weather.
- Stay off your cell phone in work zones.

Our crews prepare and plan for safety each and every day. They take special precautions when working near roads, highways, and busy intersections.

We ask that you keep our crews safe and remember to slow down when approaching a work zone and move over for work crews. Do your part to help everyone return home safely at the end of the day.

National Work Zone Awareness Week, April 17-21, 2023, is a good time to remind everyone about work zone safety; however, work zone safety should be observed 365 days a year to save lives.

Cars and trucks that speed through a work zone not only endanger workers on the ground. Driving too fast or too close to a work truck can also put an elevated worker in danger by causing their raised bucket to move or sway.

Streets and highways are lined with power poles and electrical equipment, and narrow country roads often require crews like ours to place their equipment in or near traffic lanes. Be alert to co-op trucks and linemen for their safety and yours. Besides our crews, you might encounter our forestry management crews who are trimming trees and clearing areas in and around power poles. Please slow down, move over and stay alert.

According to the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse, 774 fatal crashes and 857 deaths occurred in work zone crashes in 2020. Many other work zone crashes result in injuries. In 2020, more than 102,000 work zone crashes occurred.

By the very nature of the work tasks electric linemen perform on electrical distribution systems, the inherent hazards of vehicle traffic must be considered a critical hazard. Our linemen perform routine tasks such as replacing old wooden poles or changing over existing conductors and insulators that require traffic control. Workers often find themselves at risk when exposed to vehicle traffic that could enter their safe work zones. For this reason, traffic safety is important.

One of the highest risk hazards comes from vehicle traffic that passes by a lineman's work area. In recent years, the number of vehicles on the road has increased and the speed at which they travel has increased, so work planning procedures must be adjusted accordingly to protect linemen and to prevent traffic hazards and avoid accidents.

Cell phone use and other distractions that take the driver's attention away from the road have increased hazards and risks to line crews at work. Aggressive drivers and those blinded by the sun or frosted up windows in the winter increase the safety risks to workers even further. Visit the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse website for more details.

# Be prepared for thunderstorms this spring

Thunderstorms are common in Illinois with an average of 70 storms per year, so be prepared for storms and know how to stay safe.

**Before the storm:**

- Assemble a kit of essentials, like water, battery-operated flashlights, and radios. Keep a list of emergency phone numbers, including the number for Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative. We can be reached via SmartHub or 800-824-5102. Be prepared for the possibility of a prolonged outage due to downed or damaged power lines and electric equipment damage.

- If severe weather is on its way, pay attention to local weather reports. A tornado or severe storm watch means conditions are favorable for those weather conditions forming. A warning means dangerous weather conditions are developing and imminent and everyone should seek shelter.

- Lightning can travel up to ten miles away from a storm, so seek shelter when you hear thunder.

- Consider installing ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) or purchasing a portable GFCI. GFCIs detect dangerous electrical situations and cut off power before a person can be shocked. These dangerous electrical situations are likely to occur around water, so GFCIs should be installed in bathrooms, laundry rooms, kitchens, basements, and anywhere else water and electricity may meet.

- If power goes out, switch off lights, large electronics, and appliances to prevent overloading circuits and damaging appliances when power is restored. Leave one lamp or switch on as a signal for when your power returns.

**After the storm:**

- When venturing outside, stay away from downed power lines and be alert to the possibility that tree limbs or debris may hide an electrical hazard. Assume any dangling wires you encounter are energized and dangerous. Warn others to stay away and contact us at 800-824-5102.

- If you are driving and come upon a downed power line, stay in your vehicle,

warn others to stay away, and call 911 or call us at 800-824-5102. Also, when driving, be careful at intersections where traffic lights may be out.

- Before re-entering storm-damaged buildings or rooms, be sure all electric and gas services are turned off. Never attempt to turn off power at the breaker box if you must stand in water to do so. If you can't reach your breaker box safely, call Eastern Illini to shut off power at the meter.

- Never step into a flooded basement or other area if water is covering electrical outlets or appliances, Never touch electrical appliances or wires while you are wet or standing in water.

- If using a portable generator, keep the generator dry and never plug it into a wall outlet or directly into the home's wiring. This could energize the utility lines and injure yourself or others working to restore power.

Since severe storms are prevalent in the spring, be prepared and stay safe.

## Understanding Severe Thunderstorm Risk Categories

THUNDERSTORMS (no label)	1 - MARGINAL (MRGL)	2 - SLIGHT (SLGT)	3 - ENHANCED (ENH)	4 - MODERATE (MDT)	5 - HIGH (HIGH)
No severe* thunderstorms expected	Isolated severe thunderstorms possible	Scattered severe storms possible	Numerous severe storms possible	Widespread severe storms likely	Widespread severe storms expected
Lightning/flooding threats exist with <u>all</u> thunderstorms	Limited in duration and/or coverage and/or intensity	Short-lived and/or not widespread, isolated intense storms possible	More persistent and/or widespread, a few intense	Long-lived, widespread and intense	Long-lived, very widespread and particularly intense
					

\* NWS defines a severe thunderstorm as measured wind gusts to at least 58 mph, and/or hail to at least one inch in diameter, and/or a tornado. All thunderstorm categories imply lightning and the potential for flooding. Categories are also tied to the probability of a severe weather event within 25 miles of your location.

# AVOID ACCIDENTS BY LIMITING DISTRACTIONS WHILE DRIVING

## April is distracted driving awareness month



### Put down the phone and pay attention; April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month.

A recent survey revealed that almost 100% of teens agree that texting and driving is dangerous, but half admitted to doing it anyway. According to the National Safety Council (NSC), the top three causes of roadway fatalities are alcohol, speeding and distracted driving. Using a cell phone while driving makes a crash four times as likely.

#### WHAT IS DISTRACTED DRIVING?

In simplest terms, distracted driving is when the driver of a vehicle is not paying 100% attention while driving. There are many ways someone can drive distracted, so it is important when you get behind the wheel that you focus on the road ahead.

#### IT'S A THEM PROBLEM, NOT A ME PROBLEM

Research shows that more than half of drivers text and/or email while alone in a vehicle. That number increases

among drivers under 34 years old. Unfortunately, it has become socially acceptable to handle phones while driving. People think, I'm just taking my eyes off the road for a second, and are biased about their driving skills.

Talking and texting are the primary distractions when driving. People who use their cell phones to talk or text while driving are by far the most common reason for distracted driving accidents. In fact, the NSC estimates that 26% of all car crashes involve cell phones.

When people think of distracted driving, most people think of drivers using their phones while behind the wheel. However, there are many factors that play into a driver being distracted. They can be broken down into the following three categories of distracted driving:

**Cognitive Distraction** - When it comes to cognitive distractions, this is when the driver's attention is diverted to another task besides driving. Cognitive distractions include talking/texting on the phone, daydreaming and anger with another driver. Rubbernecking occurs when drivers take their eyes off the road to look at a distraction, such as an accident or arrest.

**Manual Distraction** - For manual distractions, these require the driver to physically take their hands off the wheel to perform another task. Manual distractions often go hand-in-hand with cognitive distractions. Examples of manual distractions include eating, changing the dashboard controls, texting and grabbing a cup of coffee.

**Visual Distraction** - These distractions take place when the driver's eyes are taken off the road. Examples of visual distractions include checking your GPS, looking at and talking with a passenger, putting on makeup and checking out the scenery around you.

#### TYPES OF DRIVER DISTRACTIONS

Distracted driving can put you and your loved ones at risk. Distractions take a motorist's attention off driving, which can make a driver miss critical events, objects, and cues or abandon control of a vehicle, all potentially leading to a crash. There are many different diversions that can cause distracted driving. Make sure you don't do these while driving, and you'll be a better and safer driver:

- Texting
- On your phone
- Calling someone with the phone in your hand
- Trying to settle or attend to children in the vehicle
- Programming the navigation system
- Applying makeup
- Eating or drinking
- Grabbing something from your purse or bag
- Reaching in the back seat or floor for something
- Fiddling with the radio

## STAY SAFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

# Put down the phone and pay attention

### SIGNS OF A DISTRACTED DRIVER

Now that you know the distraction types, it's time to focus on ways you can spot a distracted driver on the road with you.

#### - Chewing, Drinking or Eating

One of the more common forms of distracted driving is eating or drinking behind the wheel. A sure sign of a distracted driver is seeing the driver eating something, chewing or drinking when behind the wheel. That means their focus is not on the road and they are distracted by either grabbing for their food or drink or actually eating or drinking.

#### - Failing to Maintain a Consistent Speed

While driving, if you see another driver that is speeding up and slowing down

erratically, it's probably because that driver is too distracted to maintain a steady speed. They are not focused on the road and speed limit, so they are going up and down while focusing on something else.

#### - Personal Interactions

If you see a driver having personal interactions with people in their car, then they are probably distracted by them. When they have those personal interactions it can be a sign they aren't looking at what's happening around them on the road.

#### - Looking Down or Bent-Over Posture

Another sure sign of a distracted driver is seeing them look down at their lap or in a bent over position. If they are looking down at their lap, they are

probably looking at their cell phone. You can especially see this at night, as the light from the cell phone is shining brightly in the car.

### PREVENTING DISTRACTED DRIVING

There are many ways to prevent distracted driving. The first way is by putting your phone down and turning on the do not disturb setting. Not only is it dangerous, but Illinois law prohibits the use of hand-held cellphones, texting or using other electronic communications while operating a motor vehicle. Hands-free devices or Blue Tooth technology is allowed for persons age 19 and older. There are setting options that can send automatic responses while you are on the road. These automatic replies let people know that you are driving.

APRIL 26, 2023



EASTERN ILLINI MEMBER CARE

Administrative  
Professionals  
Day

Thank you for providing  
exceptional service to our members.

# Thank you



## Lineworker Appreciation Day April 10, 2023

We greatly appreciate the hard work, innovation, and dedication of Eastern Illini linemen. They work tirelessly to ensure our members have uninterrupted power 24/7, 365 days a year. Our team of linemen upgrade and maintain more than 4,400 miles of energized line across ten counties.

It's a big job — and, one they do exceptionally well.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 