

PowerLines

March 2022

Time Marches On

A COVID-19 Retrospective

The middle of March marks the 2-year point in the U.S. for the start of COVID-19 impacting our daily business and lifestyles. To me, these last two years have been pretty much a blur, going by extremely quickly while at other times seeming like an endless repetitive slow motion time loop. Maybe you have experienced similar feelings. It appears that we are approaching a new normal, as many states that had various restrictions in place have begun to retract them. As of the writing date for this column, Governor Pritzker has announced a proposed lifting of the public businesses mask mandate. This is not to say that COVID-19 has gone away, but hopefully we are entering a more manageable phase of an endemic. Time will tell as COVID-19 has proven itself to be ever-changing, resilient, and quite deadly.

I reflect on COVID-19 because it has drastically impacted all of us the last couple of years.

In February 2020, some EIEC employees, Directors and myself, attended the NRECA annual meeting in New Orleans. This annual event can attract up to 10,000 total attendees. Although we were reading news stories and hearing other media reports regarding COVID-19, the conference went on in a normal manner. Little did we know then what the future had in store for us.

The NRECA annual conference was held remotely in 2021, but is going back to in person for 2022, and will be held the first week of March in Nashville. This represents taking another step to normal with employees and Directors planning to

attend, but not without some trepidation for some. We will have information about some of the topics and major themes from the meeting in future editions.

Wholesale Power Savings in 2021

As we have mentioned previously, your January 2022 bills (December 2021 energy usage) reflected the pro-rated return of \$1 million to members from an immediate return of net operating margins as

opposed to returning these margins earned as future capital credits. I

want to also mention that our members received additional savings throughout 2021 from lower wholesale power costs billed to us from Prairie Power, Inc. (PPI).

PPI was able to better their 2021 budgeted amount billed to EIEC by approximately \$1 million. These savings versus our initial budget were passed along throughout the year to members in the monthly PCA value. The PCA monthly

credits began in March and continued through December. Presently, PPI has a significant credit balance in their power cost adjustment account that will be passed along to EIEC during 2022.

We have hopefully turned the corner on winter, although March can certainly be unpredictable and a challenging weather month itself. Enjoy the early signs of spring and be safe in all that you do.

Sincerely,

Bob Hunzinger



**MESSAGE FROM
THE PRESIDENT**

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Did you know?

Safety is of the utmost importance at Eastern Illini and in 2021 we are proud to report that every employee went home safe every single day. We had zero lost time accidents. Safety first and safety always is our motto at EIEC.

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Electrical inspection is important



When buying or selling a home, it is imperative that you conduct a thorough inspection of the electrical systems of the structure. The electrical systems in your home contain hundreds of feet of linear wire, and every connection & receptacle is a possible point of failure or defect. Your electrical system wiring may also be prone to pest or rodent damage in some cases. Every year, electrical outlets alone account for over 5,000 house fires, and over 40 deaths and 100 injuries due to faulty electrical systems. Remember, it is always important to hire a trained electrician to conduct a proper inspection on your home's electrical systems to prevent injury, fires, or possible death.

According to the National Electric Code (NEC), all modern homes must be equipped with GFCI outlets. Many older homes don't have ground wires, which isn't considered safe by today's standards. A ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlet is a special type of circuit breaker that can automatically shut off power directly at the outlet when it detects an electrical fault. Damp areas can make you prone to dangerous electric shock but using a GFCI outlet can greatly reduce your risk of injury. GFCI outlets are currently used where many appliances can be expected to

be plugged in, like a kitchen. They are equipped with built in breakers that are designed to trip whenever there is a risk of an electrical shock.

The first step to take in inspecting light switches and fixtures is to turn them on and off to see if they work. If they do not, you can use a voltage tester to determine if the current is getting to the switch, but this is not a necessary part of the inspection.

- Are any of the electrical outlets warm to the touch?
- Do appliances such as the refrigerator, stove, and dishwasher have dedicated outlets?
- Are the kitchen outlets AFCI and GFCI protected?

Inspectors measure outlet and switch heights to see that they are consistent. Typically, outlets (more correctly called receptacles) should be at least twelve inches above the floor and switches should be at least forty eight inches above the floor.

The most important part of the electrical system inspection is the electrical panel. It's where the electricity enters the home and is disbursed throughout the rooms. A distribution board (aka panel board),

breaker panel, electric panel, DB board or DB box) is a component of an electricity supply system that divides an electrical power feed into subsidiary circuits while providing a protective fuse or circuit breaker for each circuit in a common enclosure.

It is important to never touch an electrical panel if you notice anything dangerous. You should exercise extreme caution when attempting to inspect any element of your home's electrical panel. Serious injury, fires, or death may occur if you do not know what you are doing or looking for. You should never directly touch any part of the electrical system if there is water on the floor. If you feel any heat or tingling when touching any part of the electrical system, stop immediately and do not go any further.

Inspectors will check to see that all electrical boxes are flush with the wall and large enough to accommodate the number of wire conductors they will contain, along with whatever devices will be contained. The box should be securely fastened so the device and box are secure. Homeowners doing their own work are well-advised to use large, spacious electrical boxes; not only does this ensure you'll pass inspection, but it makes it easier to complete the wire connections.

Your inspection should include looking outside the home at the wires coming into the electrical panel. Check that the connection is fastened to the house securely and note any trees that are interfering with the wiring. Visible wiring should appear to be in good condition and covered with insulation, with no metal showing.

Purchasing or selling a home can be an exciting and tense process. Do yourself a favor and look past the white picket fence and dive into the health of the property's electrical system.

Put safety first in your home workshop

Without taking proper precautions, the enjoyment of a do-it-yourself project can quickly turn into disaster. You may have all the latest power tools, hand tools, hardware and materials, but if you do not put safety first, you may end up with a trip to the hospital instead of a new set of shelves, upgraded lighting in the kitchen or a trendy ship lap accent wall in the bedroom. Here are some fundamental workshop and electrical safety tips to help keep things running smoothly.

WEAR SAFETY GEAR, GLASSES AND GLOVES

The first rule of workshop safety is to dress appropriately. Avoid loose clothing that can get caught in power tools. Never wear dangling jewelry or scarves. Roll up your sleeves or choose ones that are tight against your skin. Closed-toe shoes or steel-toed boots are a must. Safety glasses are necessary 100 percent of the time. Gloves are fine for handling materials. Before you reach for a belt sander or scroll saw, however, take the gloves off to minimize the risk of them getting caught and so you get tactile feedback in case anything goes wrong.

OBSERVE ELECTRICAL SAFETY

Before you start any DIY project, inspect all your power tools and their cords for loose plugs, exposed wires or worn insulation. Fires are one of the top dangers when working with electric gear, especially if you have combustible materials around, such as sawdust.

Your site's electrical service should be adequate for the tools you have. Tool outlets should be on a separate circuit from lighting, because even hand tools can draw a lot of amperage when they start. If you must use an extension cord, choose one long, heavy-duty cord and keep it untangled and out of the way to prevent tripping. When you are done working, unplug equipment and put everything away.

KEEP YOUR WORKSHOP CLEAN

Anything left on the floor is a tripping hazard, and you do not want to imagine what could happen if you trip while using a power tool. Anything cluttering up your worktable introduces obstacles that can get caught in a saw or drill mechanism or block your ability to move your project safely as you work on it. The byproducts of do-it-yourself work, such as sawdust, cast-off nails and screws, and rags or brushes with potentially combustible or hazardous fluids on them, increase the risk of fires and projectiles.

KEEP TOOLS IN GOOD CONDITION

Besides inspecting the cords and plugs for electrical safety, everything works better in the workshop if you have clean, sharp and well-lubricated tools. A dull saw blade brings a much higher chance of injury than a sharp one. It is less likely to cut smoothly through the wood or other material and more likely to kick back and cut you. Dull saws, routers or drill bits also run the risk of breaking during use. Use appropriate lubrication, such as WD-40 or others specifically created for power tools.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

If you have a lot of experience as a do-it-yourselfer, there are projects you can tackle from memory. However, approach anything new as if you are a beginner for maximum workshop safety. Read instructions. Look up reputable guide videos to refresh your skills or learn something new. Most importantly, recognize when you are in over your head and leave those non-DIY projects to the professionals.

The home workshop is the DIY enthusiast's palace and this is where a lot of work gets done. Hours are spent drilling, grinding and welding. Unfortunately, most of us have the same mindset when it comes to safety, thinking that a bit of common sense is all that is needed to be safe. A lot of DIY related accidents happen every day that could have easily been prevented.

Safety in the workshop starts with creating a safe working environment. There are three very important items that every home workshop should have to make it safe.

- 1. FIRST AID KIT:** Your first-aid kit should include bandages, plasters, burn treatment cream, gauze, scissors, stitching tape(steri-strips) etc.
- 2. SMOKE DETECTOR:** A smoke detector is vital and can save your life. Sparks from an angle grinder can cause a fire without you realizing it and a smoke detector will alert you to this. Make sure to check the batteries of the smoke detector regularly.

- 3. FIRE EXTINGUISHER:** Keep the fire extinguisher in an easily accessible place. Frequently check the charge status of your fire extinguisher.



41 GRANTS FOR \$20,000

2022 Empowering Education Grant Winners

Congratulations!

NAME	SCHOOL	PROJECT
Carolyn Rice	Armstrong-Ellis Grade School	State Capitol Field Trip
Katie Burdick	Atwood-Hammond Grade School	Lively Letters to Build Literacy
Jessica Grant	Atwood-Hammond Grade School	Electrical Circuits
Hope Walker	Bement Middle School	Drones for Education
Angie Corum	Bement Elementary School	Hand Chimes
Amy Davenport	Bement Elementary School	Let There Be Light
Sandy Spitz	Christ Lutheran High School	CPR/AED/First Aid Training
Angela Dirks	Clara Peterson Elementary	Reading Mini Lessons Picture Books
Rebecca Swigert-Fenton	Clifton Central High School	Social Studies Coming Alive
Carrie Tapp	Clifton Central High School	3D Printing in Geometry
Jane Daniels	Crescent City Grade School	Snap Circuit
Sarah Throneburg	Donovan High School	Class Business: T-Shirt Making
Angela Van Deven	Fisher Grade School	Successful Reading with Dyslexia
Shelly Curry	GCMS High School	Mental Health, Social/Emotional Learning
Sandy Beherns	Gifford Grade School	Super Bowl Math Family Fun Night
Samantha Carpenter	Gilman Elementary	Flexible Seating
Rachel Basham	Gilman Elementary	Comfort & Joy
Jessica Fehland	Glenn Raymond Middle School	Making Music
William Rosser	Hoopeston Area High School	Responsive to Intervention
Jacqueline Gregory	Hoopeston Area Middle School	Non-fiction Books
Brenda Muench	Iroquois West Elementary	Kid-friendly Library
Carrie Miller	Iroquois West High School	Entrepreneurship in Action
Jennifer Free	JW Eater Junior High School	Coffee Cart
Sarah Dyer	Lincoln Trail Elementary	Snap into Electricity
Jill Wulff	Lovington Grade School	3D Printing in STEM
Valerie Holmes	Ludlow Grade School	Keyboarding
Jennifer Taylor	Maple Grade School	Science Discovery
Laura McCleary	Monticello High School	Child Development Courtyard
Cindy Cheney-Hunter	Pine Crest Elementary School	Flexible Seating
Lindsay Brotherton	Pleasant Acres Elementary	Bird Houses
Anthony Nowaczyk	Potomac Grade School	Educational Board Game Library
John Lubinski	Potomac Grade School	Physical Education Equipment
Jason Whitfill	Prairie Central Jr. High School	Workout Trail
Tahlia Guimond	Proegler School	Giving Children a Voice
Jackie Wright	Rantoul Township High School	Sensory
Lauren Schuler	Ridgeview Elementary	Popular Playaways to Promote Reading
Robert Riggins	Ridgeview High School	Robotics and Programming
Chelsi Harrold	Salt Fork North Elementary	ScanNCut
Drew Sterkel	Tuscola High School	Driving Under the Influence
Tina Douglas	Wanda Kendall Elementary	Math and Reading Intervention
Brittney Ryan	Washington Elementary	Energy Equalizer

The importance of surge protection

A power surge is an unexpected increase in voltage, and it can occur from a variety of sources. Regardless of the cause, power surges can majorly damage electronic devices and equipment in your home. Let's look at common causes of power surges and how you can protect your electronics.

One of the most common causes of a power surge is lightning. Most of us have experienced this during a severe thunderstorm. When lightning strikes an electrical system, the excess current must be channeled somewhere. Unfortunately in many cases, it's sent through a home. Your best bet is to unplug all unused devices and electronics during severe thunderstorms.

Another common cause of power surges is electrical overload. This happens when devices or appliances

are plugged into an outlet that can't handle the required amount of voltage, or if multiple devices are plugged into one outlet through an extension cord. If you're experiencing power surges due to electrical overload, it's time to call a qualified electrician to evaluate your home's circuits and electrical needs.

Faulty wiring in a home can also cause power surges. Damaged or exposed wires can cause spikes in voltage, creating a potentially dangerous situation. If you notice signs of faulty wiring, like visible burns on outlets, buzzing sounds from outlets or frequently tripped circuit breakers, your home may be due for electrical wiring repairs and updates.

Surges can also occur after a power outage. Sometimes, when electricity is being restored and reconnected, it's common to experience a quick surge in current. Aside from unplugging devices when you suspect

a power surge, there are two ways you can take additional precautions to protect electronics in your home. Point-of-use surge protection devices or you can install specialized electrical outlets that offer additional surge protection. Another option is a whole-home surge protector, which can help protect your home from larger, more powerful surges. In most cases, whole-home suppressors are connected to your home's service panel and include features like thermal fuses and notification capabilities that indicate when a device has been impacted by a surge.

Occasional power surges are inevitable, but by unplugging devices when you think a surge may occur and using additional levels of protection like power strips or whole-home suppressors, you can better safeguard your sensitive electronics and devices.



SURGE PROTECTION

Keep your electronic equipment safe.

A power surge is typically caused by lightning, changes in electrical loads, faulty wiring or damaged power lines.

Install power strips with surge protection to protect sensitive equipment.

- **Easy to use (just plug them in)**
- **Protect electronics plugged into the device**
- **Must be replaced over time or after a major surge event**



REMEMBER:

Not all power strips offer surge protection. Carefully read the packaging labels when purchasing.

Unlocking the Value of Broadband



Eastern Illini is bringing internet and enhanced broadband services to members like you through a new strategic alliance with NextLink. A fiber-optic network will be constructed over 400 miles in the EIEC service territory in the coming months. Stay tuned for more details about availability in your area.

