

# PowerLines

September 2021

## Goodbye Summer

Summer is effectively over on Labor Day as we move into the meteorological fall season. The ability to participate in meaningful labor provides us with a sense of accomplishment and pride in a job well done. Please take a moment to reflect on the many people and work that it takes to provide the various goods and services that we have access to in this country, especially those individuals who have put their lives at risk in various industries since the start of the pandemic.

Schools are back in session, and for some students, this is a portion of a third school year affected by COVID-19. Let's hope that students can have some semblance of normalcy for this entire school year, including participation in extracurricular activities. There is a definite sense of uncertainty due to the continuing presence of COVID-19 and its variants.

### AIEC Annual Meeting

The statewide electric cooperative association recently held their annual meeting in Springfield. It was squeezed in between the reopening of Illinois under Phase 5 guidelines and before the Delta variant became more widespread in the state. It was good to see and learn from employees and board members from other cooperatives in person, some for the first time in two years. Here are some meeting highlights:

The CEO of CoBank gave his perspective of the future for rural areas. He predicts less reliance on fossil fuels, increased use of electricity for transportation and farm use, and enhanced broadband access.

Federated cooperative insurance provided informative safety and cybersecurity suggestions – many safeguards of which begin with us as individuals.

AIEC staff provided an update of Illinois legislative activities related to proposed energy legislation. As of this writing, many of the issues have reached consensus, but there are a few key issues that are keeping the legislation stalemated. Thank you to our members that have sent

information to the Governor and other elected representatives providing the cooperative viewpoint for reliability, affordability, and the need for all types of generation sources, especially those baseload plants operating within the state.

Rivian's communications director provided a fascinating overview of the startup automaker who is manufacturing electric SUVs, trucks, and delivery vehicles. They have received \$10

billion in venture capital funding. Their first vehicles will roll off the assembly line this month at the former Diamond Star Motors plant in Normal. The EV market is predicted to grow exponentially. Some automakers have announced a complete timeline for switching from internal combustion engines to EVs. We are not experiencing many EVs in our specific service area yet, but we are putting some thought and planning into this area.

Stay safe,

*Bob Hunzinger*



**MESSAGE FROM  
THE PRESIDENT**

## In this issue:

- Staying safe during harvest
- Strategies to relieve farming stress
- Dos & don'ts of extension cords
- Use extension cords properly
- National Preparedness Month



- 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!

## September is National Preparedness Month:

Consider putting together a kit to have on hand in case of a storm or natural disaster. See the back page for a list of what to include.

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

## DEALING WITH LONG DAYS AND LITTLE SLEEP

# Staying safe during harvest



For many farmers, fall requires long days in the field and little rest. The pressure to harvest as much as possible, combined with fatigue and looming deadlines, increases the risk of injury. In fact, most injuries occur during the spring and fall when stress and fatigue are common among farmers.

The safety and health of workers, including making time for sleep, should be a priority when considering a farm's productivity, according to Josie Rudolphi, from the University of Illinois Extension. "Rushing and cutting corners can lead to injury, which no one has time for, especially during the harvest," she says.

Rudolphi grew up on a farm and understands the pressures of harvest season. She says that getting proper rest can make a huge difference in staying safe, but during the time crunch of harvest season, farmers sacrifice sleep to work late into the night.

"Sleep deficiency has been associated with increased injury, reduced reaction time, and reduced concentration," Rudolphi says. "All of which could impact health and safety, as well as productivity."

The demands of harvest are stressful, and a lack of sleep can intensify that and

lead to errors in the fields or even when transporting crops from the field back to the grain bins or to the elevator.

To improve sleep, Rudolphi advises farmers to go to bed and wake up at regular times when possible. They can use rainy days to catch up on sleep. Other sleep health tips include:

- Create a bedroom environment that encourages sleep. Find ways to keep it quiet, dark, and cool.
- Limit electronic device use before bed. An hour before sleep, put down the cell phone and laptop and start to relax.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.

In addition to improving sleep, managing stress is an important component to injury prevention, health and safety.

"By using the 'Four A' Method of **AVOID** (planning ahead), **ADAPT** (changing expectations), **ALTER** (changing the situation when you can) and **ACCEPT** (acknowledging that a situation is what it is), farmers can successfully manage the stress of long hours and unpredictability," Rudolphi adds.

A new online resource, FarmStress.org, aims to help farmers manage stress, anxiety, depression, or substance use issues. It's a project of the North Central Farm and Ranch Assistance Center, a 12-state collaborative based at the University of Illinois that is funded by the USDA via the Farm Bill.

Depression, anxiety, and suicide are more prevalent among agricultural populations than the general public. Job-related stressors include: commodity prices, weather, or larger political or economic situations. So much of what farmers experience is completely out of their control, and so managing those stressors becomes a little bit more challenging.

COVID-19 has only added to the stress, with some producers worried about finding a market for their livestock or pondering what to do if they get sick and can't work on the farm. Farmers also worry about how can they keep employees safe and healthy? We know there's a lot of seasonal or temporary work hired in the spring and the fall during those peak agricultural periods. Farmers always have safety top of mind and often wonder what can be done to ensure everyone remains healthy while still getting everything done.

In general, there are not enough mental health care providers in the U.S. and in Illinois. That's especially true in rural areas. Many of the federally identified mental health provider "shortage areas" in Illinois are in rural places, said Courtney Cuthbertson, Extension specialist and assistant professor in human development and family studies. The stigma associated with mental health is another challenge.

"We've heard a lot of producers specifically say, 'Everyone knows my truck in town. And if I'm parked outside a behavioral health specialist's office, people are gonna know and people are gonna talk. And what will that mean for me and my family in this community?'" Cuthbertson and Rudolphi said.

FarmStress.org has resources including crisis numbers, telephone hotlines, and training resources. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Those in crisis should visit their local emergency department or call 911 immediately.

Farming will never be without unforeseen, uncontrollable challenges, which affect not only the producer, but the family.

Anyone who is experiencing the stress of fall harvest to the point it becomes overwhelming, should reach out to those who can assist.

PREPARE, LEARN, ACTIVATE, NIP  
**Strategies to relieve farming stress**

*Feeling stressed this harvest season?*

# WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

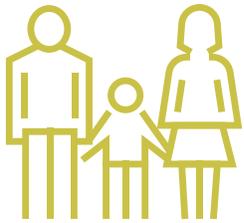
Breakdowns. Long hours. Setbacks. There is no way to predict what harvest will bring.  
Have your PLAN in place to manage your stress for a safe and healthy harvest.



# P

## Prepare for the season

With preparation, some stress can be avoided. Anticipate the demands of harvest and plan ahead. For example, prep healthy meals, fuel equipment and perform routine maintenance ahead of schedule. **What can you do to prepare?**

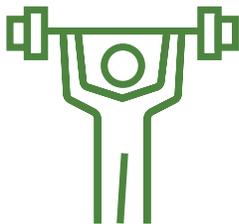


# L

## Lean on loved ones

Seeking support from others rather than taking on everything yourself can help reduce stress. Text or call a friend or family member when you need support.

**Whom can you lean on?**



# A

## Activate coping mechanisms

Coping mechanisms can help manage stress. They include engaging in physical activity, finding ways to make yourself laugh and carving out time for hobbies.

**Which coping mechanisms will you use?**



# N

## Nip negative self-talk

Negative self-talk leads to decreased morale and feelings of hopelessness. When your inner critic nags, be kind to yourself and remember thoughts are not reality.

**How will you tell your inner critic to take a hike?**

## Need immediate assistance?

FarmStress.org

Farm Aid Farmer Hotline: 1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243)

Avera Farm and Rural Stress Hotline: 1-800-691-4336

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

# PULL THE PLUG ON CORD-RELATED HAZARDS

## Dos and don'ts of extension cords

### REACHING TO SAFETY:

#### Use Extension Cords Properly

Roughly **3,300 home fires** originate in extension cords each year, **killing 50 people and injuring 270 more**. Extension cords can overheat and cause fires when used improperly, so keep these important tips in mind to **protect your home and workplace**.

**DON'T** attempt to **plug extension cords into one another**.



Make sure extension cords are **properly rated** for their intended use, indoor or outdoor, and **meet or exceed the power needs** of the appliance or device being used.



Keep all **outdoor extension cords** clear of snow and standing water.



Do **NOT** overload extension cords.



A heavy reliance on **extension cords** is an indication that you have too few outlets to address your needs. Have **additional outlets installed** where you need them.



Inspect cords for **DAMAGE** before use. Check for **cracked or frayed sockets**, loose or bare wires, and loose connections.



Do **NOT** **nail or staple electrical cords** to walls or baseboards.



Do **NOT** run through **walls, doorways, ceilings or floors**. If cord is covered, heat cannot escape, which may result in a **FIRE HAZARD**.



**NEVER** use **three-prong plugs** with outlets that only have two slots. **Never cut off the ground pin** to force a fit, which could lead to electric shock.



Buy only cords that have been **approved** by an **independent testing laboratory**.



Do **NOT** substitute **extension cords** for permanent wiring.



**DO NOT** use an **extension cord** or a **power strip** with **heaters or fans**, which could cause cords to **overheat and result in a fire**.

## Use extension cords properly

Unless you are always lucky enough to have an electrical outlet positioned exactly where you need it, you almost certainly use electrical extension cords around your home. However, most people don't understand just how dangerous it can be to use the wrong kind of cord. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission found that extension cords are among the most dangerous electrical devices in our homes, due to improper cord sizing and use.

Each year, accidents from extension cords kill around 50 people, result in 4,000 injuries requiring hospital treatment, and cause more than 3,000 residential fires. Most extension cord failures can be prevented simply by using the right type of cord for the job.

### Why Extension Cords Are Dangerous

An extension cord essentially is a bundle of insulated electrical wires with a plug on each end. Electrical current flowing through wires generates heat, and when too much current flows through a wire, it can overheat and melt the plastic insulation of the wires, causing short circuits and fires.

This is normally not a problem when you plug an appliance directly into an outlet using its factory cord because the manufacturer has sized the cord appropriately for the electrical current demand, or load, that the appliance requires. But if you use an undersized extension cord to extend the reach of that appliance cord, you can exceed the safe load capacity of the extension cord, and the result can be disastrous.

### Extension Cord Gauge and Length

Electrical extension cords come in different types, lengths, and sizes. Two important factors determine any cord's load capacity, its ability to carry electrical current:

- **Wire gauge:** The thickness of the wire affects how much current the wire can carry and how much the wire heats up.

- **Length:** The length of the extension cord affects voltage drop, or how much voltage is lost through resistance in the cord wires.

Gauge is a numerical rating of copper wire diameter and is identified by an American Wire Gauge (AWG) number. For example, a 12 AWG, 120-volt cord contains 12-gauge wires and is intended for use with standard 120-volt outlets. In the AWG rating system, the smaller the number the thicker the wire.

Voltage drop is an effect that reduces the voltage of electricity in wiring due to electrical resistance. The longer the wire, or cord, the greater the voltage drop. For this reason, long extension cords have a lower capacity than shorter cords of the same AWG size.

For example, an 18 AWG cord may only be rated for 5 to 7 amperes (amps) of load at a length of up to 25 feet. To get the same load rating with a 50-foot cord, the cord must have larger, 16 AWG wire. It's best to use the shortest extension cord possible for the job at hand.

### Light-Duty Extension Cords

Light-duty extension cords are those that resemble lamp wire cord. These cords should never be used with anything other than very light-duty devices. They are especially dangerous to use with space heaters and other heat-generating appliances, such as toasters or clothes irons, which draw heavy electrical loads.

Light-duty cords often are not grounded. They have only two plug prongs and do not include a third wire and prong for grounding, so don't use them with appliances that have a three-prong grounded cord.

### Medium-Duty Extension Cords

Medium-duty cords usually are grounded extension cords, which include the third wire and plug prong for grounding.

They have plugs that accept three-prong grounded appliance cords. Medium-duty extension cords work well for televisions, computers, and other devices that draw up to 10 amps of power.

### Heavy-Duty Extension Cords

Heavy-duty extension cords are suitable for drawing 10 to 15 amps of power. These are always grounded extension cords that include a third wire and plug prong for grounding and have plugs with three slots for accepting grounded appliance cords. Heavy-duty extension cords are best used with tool and heating appliances drawing up to 15 amps of power.

Follow appliance manufacturer instructions regarding the use of extension cords. Some appliances should never be used with extension cords.

### Built-In GFCI Protection

Never use an indoor extension cord for outdoor use. When using extension cords outdoors, below-grade (such as in a basement or crawlspace), or anywhere a cord might encounter moisture, the cord should be a GFCI (ground-fault circuit-interrupter) type or should be plugged into a GFCI-protected outlet or consider using an extension cord with built-in GFCI protection.

Extension cords can be very helpful in delivering power right where it is needed. Use extension cords properly to stay safe.



# BE PREPARED

## BUILD A KIT

Plan to be on your own for at least 7-10 days



Water  
(1gallon per person,  
per day)



Food  
(non- perishable)



Medications



Medical  
equipment



First aid kit



Can opener



Radio



Flashlight



Personal hygiene  
items



Tools



Pet supplies



Small bills



Toilet paper



Identification  
& important  
documents



Sturdy shoes



Extra batteries



Warm clothes



Fire extinguisher

! Keep a 7-10 day kit at home — also have smaller kits in your vehicle and at work