

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

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Guest Column

Never Overlook Chainsaw Safety



FALL IS QUICKLY APPROACHING, WHICH means many of us will be dusting off our chainsaws to begin cutting firewood. Chainsaws allow us to work much faster than wielding an ax or hand saw, but gas-powered saws are an extremely dangerous tool when used incorrectly. Let's take a few moments and review some basic points about chainsaw safety.

The most frequently overlooked part of chainsaw safety is routine maintenance. We've all seen someone using a stubborn chainsaw that won't start, cut or stay running. Ensuring your chainsaw is operating correctly with a sharpened chain is essential to your overall safety and the saw's longevity. A dull chain often causes the operator to try to force the saw through the wood, which can cause damage to the chainsaw. The saw could also "kick back" toward the operator, which can result in serious injuries. Cleaning the air filter is another simple, often-overlooked maintenance practice. A lack of air flow caused by a carburetor covered with wood chips will force the saw to run poorly. Keeping a saw well-maintained can alleviate these issues and many of the safety threats that accompany them.

Wearing the proper personal protective equipment can mean the difference between a successful day of cutting or ending up in the emergency room with an avoidable injury. I have been hit in the eyes and face by flying wood chips many times, which makes a good pair of safety glasses worth their weight in gold. Other essential protective equipment, such as ear plugs, gloves, boots and saw chaps, offers increased protection, too. According to a 2014 article in *Incident Prevention Magazine*, "there were more than 28,500 chainsaw injuries in 1999. More than 36% were injuries to the legs and knees." Clearly, these areas of the body are most susceptible to a saw when it is being used improperly. Proper work boots provide support and sturdy footing when operating your chainsaw. Boots also help protect your feet from briars, thorns and rolling or dropped pieces of firewood.

Cutting firewood on a cool, beautiful fall day can be a pleasant escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. While enjoying your time outdoors, it is important to remain alert to your surroundings. Never operate a chainsaw within 10 feet of another person. Instruct those around you to avoid coming near you while the saw is running. Our natural reaction is to turn toward someone when we are tapped on the shoulder. That's not something you want to do with a running chainsaw in your hands. Make sure the area where you are cutting is free of debris and trip hazards. Most chainsaws are equipped with a chain brake that should be applied if you need to move more than a few feet to make your next cut.

In closing, remember to consider safety the next time you pick up your chainsaw. The most important part of your day is returning home safe and unharmed to those you love. 🍂

Cooperatively yours,

KEVIN DETWILER
UTILITY FORESTER/ARBORIST

Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program Builds Cooperative Safety

TODD ROSS, VICE PRESIDENT OPERATIONS

AT AN ELECTRIC CO-OP, SAFETY is everyone's business. The time lost due to accidents costs money and affects morale. More important, mistakes around energized lines or heavy equipment can be a matter of life and death.

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) provides training and education as part of the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP). The cooperative has been involved with RESAP for more than 20 years and is on a three-year cycle.

To create and maintain a safe work environment for the cooperative, the organization's leaders must be

committed to the effort. This begins with the president/CEO and the board of directors. They encourage maintainable goals for improving a safe environment for employees and members.

Once leadership has made a commitment to RESAP, employee safety leaders (district managers, safety coordinators, crew leaders, etc.) create a safety improvement plan. After the plan has been created and areas of concern have been announced, safety leaders are assigned, and a date is determined for the corrective action and completion. Depending on what has been identified, some safety

improvements may take months or possibly up to three years to complete.

The safety improvement plan can cover many different areas, such as refurbishing existing facilities, conducting in-house training, adding security measures, constructing substations, upgrading the electrical distribution system, increasing job-site visits or upgrading vehicles, among others.

Through RESAP, staff from the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA) and other electric cooperatives perform an on-site inspection at the cooperative every three years. Depending on the size of the cooperative, these inspections can take up to three days to complete.

During the on-site inspection, the group walks through all facilities. The emergency lighting is checked for proper function. Fire extinguishers are checked to ensure they are operational and not past their expiration dates. Inspectors also take a look at building neatness, shelving and its weight-class rating, ladder and other top-heavy equipment storage, storage areas for gases and chemicals, the use of eye and hearing protection, forklifts and their manuals, and evacuation procedures.

The inspection group will ask random employees questions about such things as building evacuation procedures or the location of emergency manuals, first-aid kits, fire extinguishers and emergency defibrillators. Outdoor employees are questioned about electrical approach distances and procedures, personal protective equipment instruction,

TODD ROSS



SUBSTATION INSPECTION: From left, Mike Chamberlin and Heather Holt from Gettysburg-based Adams Electric Cooperative inspect the fence around the Path Valley substation with Joe Selnekovic, manager, Job Training & Safety/environmental adviser at the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association.

and rubber-glove and sleeve-testing procedures.

Required paperwork is reviewed for job-site visits, job briefings, vehicle pre- and post-trip inspections, personal tool inspections, truck and tool inspections, rubber glove and sleeve inspections, overhead line inspections, and substation inspections. The annual dielectric test results for bucket and digger trucks, rubber goods, and insulated hot sticks are reviewed, too.

Several substations are randomly selected to be inspected. Sections of the electrical distribution system and right of way are inspected, too. Job-site visits are done during these inspections, and outside personnel are questioned about the job they are performing.

Vehicles are inspected for organization and cleanliness, and they are checked for updated

insurance cards, registrations, operator's manuals, accident reporting guidelines, fire extinguishers and first-aid kits. Bucket and digger trucks are also checked for recent dielectric inspections.

After the on-site inspection is completed, an exit review meeting takes place between the inspection team and the cooperative's safety leaders. During this review, issues found and noted during the safety inspection are brought to the cooperative leaders' attention. Recommendations for the next safety improvement plan are made, depending on the type of corrective action that must take place.

Stepping back and taking a hard look at the co-op's safety program is challenging. Valley REC appreciates the leaders who are conducting the evaluation and any recommendations they may provide. 📍



TODD ROSS

JOB SITE WALKTHROUGH: Dennis Shawley, Job Training & Safety coordinator/safety instructor with the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, second from right, visits a job site with Valley Rural Electric Cooperative employees.

REMEMBERING BACK-TO-SCHOOL SAFETY

Summertime has come and gone, and it's time again to send the kiddies back to school. Before you get too excited, remember: There are steps we all need to follow to ensure our children remain safe in transit and while they are attending school.

For instance, those big, yellow school buses transporting our children to and from school are often ignored by drivers during their daily routines. To ensure we don't forget the safety rules, review these simple tips:

- ▶ When you are approaching a school bus from either direction, if its red lights are flashing, be prepared to stop. When you see a stop sign extended from the side of a bus, make sure to stop completely. Always be alert for children waiting for the school bus. And be on the lookout for children running or walking in front of or behind the bus.
- ▶ When traveling through a school zone, abide by the speed limits posted on flashing signs. Do not resume your speed until you are out of the area. Also, be sure to watch for children who are out for recess or fire drills.
- ▶ Be especially watchful for children during bad weather. If it's raining or snowing, they may be playing in puddles or throwing snowballs as they wait at the bus stop. Always be on the lookout for those who could slip and fall into your path.

When you send your children off to school in the morning and welcome them home in the afternoon, don't forget what we all need to do to keep them safe. By following these simple reminders, accidents can be avoided, and school days can be happy days for everyone.



Valley Rural Electric Cooperative Awards \$1,000 Scholarships to Local Students

VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC) recently awarded \$1,000 scholarships to 14 high school seniors and a student enrolled in a post-secondary institution for the 2023-2024 academic year.

The co-op's Brighter Future Scholarship Program was established in 2010 to assist eligible students who are cooperative members or their dependents. To date, Valley REC has awarded nearly \$270,000 in scholarship funds. Selection criteria include academic achievement, school activities and community service.

The money to finance this initiative comes from unclaimed capital credits. Valley REC uses these co-op funds to assist consumers facing financial hardships, to support civic organizations and to fund educational programs.

The following students received scholarships:

Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High School — **Elaine C. Farabaugh** of Altoona, daughter of Brian and Shannon Farabaugh, attending the University of Montevallo; and **Lia A. Simanski** of Altoona, daughter of Kimberly and Patrick Simanski, attending Penn State University.

Claysburg-Kimmel High School — **Emma D. Ritchey**, of Claysburg, daughter Donald and Stefanie Ritchey, attending Penn State Altoona.

Fannett-Metal High School — **Joey L. Booze** of Fort Loudon, daughter of Crystal and Larry Booze, attending Penn State Mont Alto.

Forbes Road High School — **Kayla D. Baker** of Hustontown, daughter of Kirk and Kathy Baker, attending University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown.

Huntingdon Area High School — **Isaac T. Cummings** of Huntingdon, son of Amy and Tim Cummings, attending Frostburg State University; and **Ryan E. Marshall** of Huntingdon, son of Bobbi and Alton Marshall, attending Penn State Altoona.

Juniata Valley High School — **Grace V. Brown** of Petersburg, daughter of Julie and the late Michael Brown, attending Purdue University; and **Adria M. Russell** of Alexandria, daughter of Aden and Raylene Russell, attending Penn State University.

McConnellsburg High School — **Bronson W. Earley** of McConnellsburg, son of Ryan Earley and Nichole Kendall, attending Penn State Harrisburg; and **Molly A. D. Mellott** of Harrisonville, daughter of Scott and Lori Mellott, attending Saint Francis University.

Mount Union Area High School — **Abigail M. Brodbeck**

of Mount Union, daughter of Sean and Annette Brodbeck, attending Mount Aloysius College.

Southern Huntingdon County High School — **Braedon Q. North**, attending PennWest California (deferred due to deployment in Pa. Army National Guard), and **Majerle D. North**, attending Penn State Mont Alto, twin son and daughter of Holly and Todd Varner of Orbisonia.

One high school graduate from a previous year also received a scholarship from Valley REC: **Quincy L. McMath** of Hustontown, daughter of Heidi and Ashley McMath and a 2021 graduate of Forbes Road High School, attending Shippensburg University.

Valley REC is a member-owned cooperative providing electric service to consumers in eight counties of south-central Pennsylvania, including Bedford, Blair, Centre, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata and Mifflin. For more information about the Brighter Future Scholarship Program, call 800-432-0680 or visit valleyrec.com and follow the "Programs and Services" tab to the "Scholarships" section. 

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Did you know ceiling fans can make a room feel 4 degrees cooler? To save energy through ceiling fan use, remember to raise your thermostat a few degrees while fans are turned on. Ceiling fans can help improve comfort year-round. In the summer, operate ceiling fans in a counterclockwise direction. Reverse the direction to clockwise during winter months and set fans on a low speed so warm air can circulate from the ceiling to the lower levels of the room. Remember, ceiling fans cool people, not spaces. Be sure to turn them off when you leave the room.

Source: Dept. of Energy

