The SOUTHEASTERN *Light*

SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

President's Comments

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President/CEO

Since 1964, October has been designated as National Cooperative Month, providing cooperatives with an opportunity to explain the cooperative difference to their members. In this month's article, I would like to explain some of the cooperative differences and how they benefit all of us as cooperative members.

As the electric utility industry continues to evolve and face continual change, we can all be proud that we are part of the electric cooperative program. Electric cooperatives have a very unique business model that provides many benefits for its members and has proven the test of time for more than 84 years. Your electric cooperative is a not-for-profit, member-owned business and exists for the sole reason of serving members. Your electric cooperative sets the rates just high enough to cover the cost of doing business, unlike investor-owned utilities that strive to maximize profits for investors or shareholders. Any money that is collected by the cooperative above the cost of operations is allocated back to you as capital credits. This allocation becomes your equity ownership in the cooperative, and when the financial condition of the cooperative permits, the capital credits are returned to you in the form of cash. Over the past 11 years, your cooperative has paid back approximately $19.7 million in capital credits as cash to members.

Electric cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by the members, who actively participate in electing representatives, setting bylaws and making decisions. The members of a cooperative have equal voting rights – one member, one vote. Each customer of the cooperative is a member and owner of the business with an equal say as every other member, unlike investor-owned utilities where the amount of governance is determined by the number of shares held in the company.

Electric cooperatives and their employees support the local community and local economy in various ways. Commitment to community is a founding principle of electric cooperatives, and as a local business, your cooperative is staffed by your friends and neighbors who work hard for you. Whether the employees are working through storms to restore your power, volunteering their time to help install lighting on local ball fields or finding ways to help provide grants for local schools, your cooperative employees are finding ways to make a difference in your community.

In summary, your local cooperative has a very unique business model that benefits all of us as cooperative members. As the utility industry continues to evolve and explore different ways to serve its customers, all of us can be very proud to be member-owners of our electric cooperatives, what we stand for, how we operate and how we truly make a difference in our very own communities.

See you next month and as always, "We'll keep the lights on for you."

READERSHIP PRIZE WINNER:
Jesse Taylor,
Vienna, IL
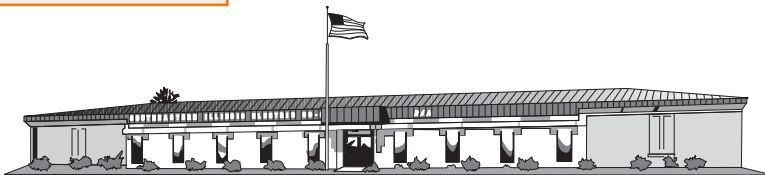
Four ways to boost your cyber hygiene

October is cybersecurity awareness month

In today's digital world, cyberattacks are unfortunately nothing new. Cyber criminals can attack on a multitude of levels, from large-scale attacks targeting corporations to smaller phishing attacks aimed to gain an individual's personal information.

October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month, but good cyber hygiene should be practiced year-round. This year's theme is "See Yourself in Cyber" – because we *all* have a part to play in cybersecurity. When we hear about massive data breaches, it can feel overwhelming and lead us to think we're powerless as individuals to stop cyber criminals.

The truth is, there are several practical steps we can take to safeguard our devices and data. Here are four easy ways to boost your cyber hygiene:

1. **Enable multi-factor authentication.** Also known as two-step verification, multi-factor authentication adds a second step when logging into an account (to prove you're really you), which greatly increases the security of the account. This second step could include an extra PIN, answering an extra security question, a code received via email or a secure token. Regardless of the type of authentication, this additional step makes it twice as hard for cyber criminals to access your account. Not every account offers multi-factor authentication, but it's becoming increasingly popular and should be utilized when available.

2. **Use strong passwords and a password manager.** Remember, passwords are the "keys" to your personal home online. Your passwords should always be long, unique and complex. Create passwords using at least 12 characters, never reuse passwords for multiple accounts and use a combination of upper- and lower-case letters, numbers and special characters. If you have a lot of accounts, consider using a password manager to store them easily *and securely* in one place.

3. **Update software.** It may seem obvious, but regularly updating software is one of the easiest ways to keep your personal information secure. Most companies provide automatic updates and will send reminders so you can easily install the update. If you're not receiving automatic software updates, set a reminder to do so quarterly. Be aware that some cyber criminals will send fake updates; these typically appear as a pop-up window when visiting a website. Use good judgment and always think before you click.

4. **Recognize and report phishing attacks.** Don't take the bait when cyber criminals go phishing. The signs of a phishing attack can be subtle, so take the extra time to thoroughly inspect emails. Most phishing emails include offers that are too good to be true, an urgent or alarming tone, misspellings and poorly-crafted language, ambiguous greetings, strange requests or an email address that doesn't match the company it's coming from. Most platforms like Outlook, Gmail and Mac Mail allow users to report phishing emails. If you suspect a phishing attempt, take an extra minute to report it.

Cyber criminals are here to stay, but when we all take a risk-based approach to our cyber behavior, we're creating a safer internet for all. Visit staysafeonline.org for additional cybersecurity tips.

WHEN POWER LINES COME DOWN
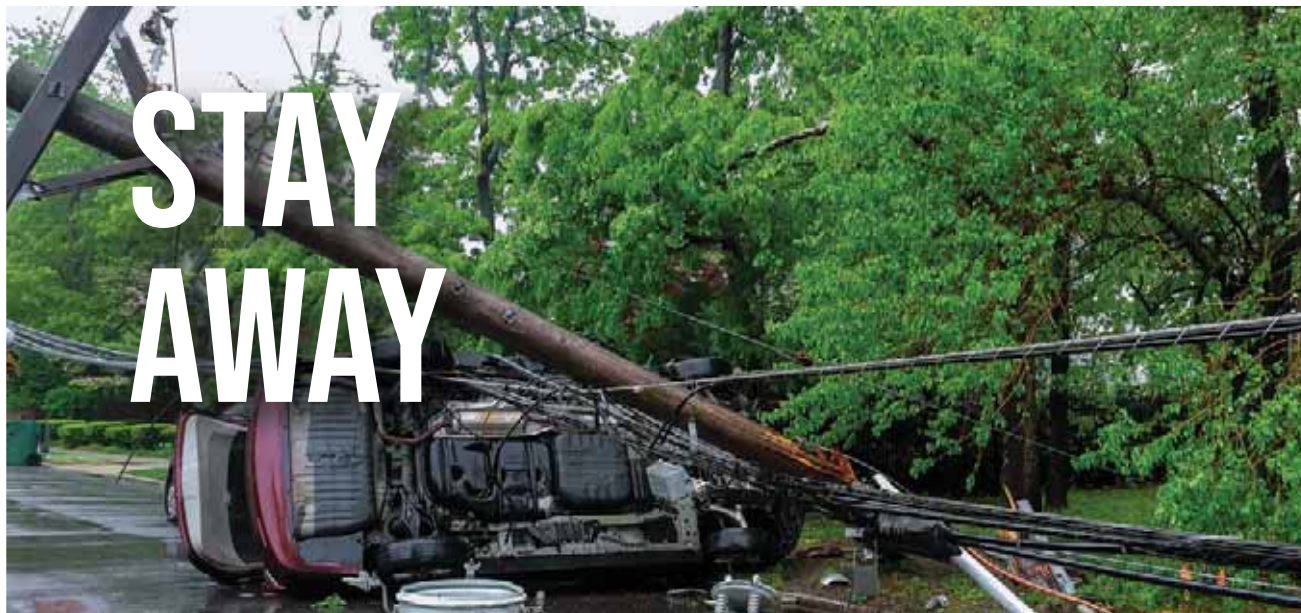
STAY AWAY

A variety of conditions or scenarios can result in a downed power line. Sometimes downed lines are visible while other times they are hidden by ice, snow, branches or storm debris.

Collisions with a pole or padmount transformer can cause the ground and objects to become energized. Regardless of the cause, always consider a downed line or damaged equipment energized and deadly.

If you are in a car accident involving a downed line, stay in the cab or car and wait until someone from the electric utility says it is safe to get out.

Call 9-1-1 to report a downed or damaged power line. Stay away and alert others to do the same.

Remember, if there is a downed line, stay away! Electricity can jump from a wire or object to you to find the quickest path to ground.

Learn more at:

Safe Electricity.org®

If you see a downed or damaged power line or pole or a dislodged electrical cabinet:

- Do not go near it.

- Do not touch it.

- Do not try to move it with another object.

- Do not touch items that could be energized.

Focused on YOU.

Electric cooperatives were created to serve their members. Because we're a co-op, we're able to adapt to our community's unique needs. That's the power of co-op membership.

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH

POWER OUTAGE

If your power goes off, we offer these suggestions

1. Check the fuses or circuit breakers in your service panels. If you have breakers, make sure they are in the "ON" position.

2. If you have a meter pole, check the main breaker panel just below the meter socket. If the breaker is in the "OFF" position, check all of your wiring from the meter pole to your various buildings. If the wiring appears to be okay, reset the breaker to the "ON" position.

3. If you still do not have power, check with neighbors to see if they have power.

4. To report a power failure or other emergency, please phone 1-877-399-8405. This phone number is monitored around the clock, 365 days per year to accept your outage and emergency calls.

5. Your phone call will be handled by SouthEastern's automated outage reporting system and will be identified automatically through ANI (Automatic Number Identification). An outage record will then be generated for your location. Please note that the phone number from which you place the call will be the number used to generate the record. If the system fails to recognize your phone number, members having touch-tone phones may simply enter their seven-digit phone number (without area code) in order to report the outage. Members not having touch-tone phones will be asked to leave a message. It is important you leave your name, phone number and location of the outage. Retrieving messages and entering them into the system is time consuming; therefore, please leave only a message that will help in restoration of electric service. Do not remain on the line for an operator because a live operator is not there to respond. In order to keep a current listing of all numbers, it is important that you notify the Cooperative of any changes in your telephone number.

6. Handling outage calls electronically allows you to report power failures very quickly. Once your outage has been reported, it will be dispatched to repair personnel who will restore your outage as soon as possible. Calling back repeatedly will not shorten the length of the outage, but may hinder the efforts of other members who are trying to report outages.

OUTAGE CALLS ONLY 1-877-399-8405

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618-273-2611 or 800-833-2611 • Office hours: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. M-F

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