

JAMUP

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Bridging the digital divide: *How fiber broadband is transforming southern Illinois*



Karen Jackson-Furman
Chief Executive Officer,
WK&T Telecommunications

At WK&T, we believe fast, reliable internet access is no longer a luxury — it's a necessity. As the CEO of a company dedicated to delivering world-class fiber broadband to Southern

Illinois, I've seen firsthand how this technology is reshaping lives, strengthening communities and opening doors to new opportunities.

Empowering remote work and education

The rise of remote work and online learning has redefined what it means to be connected. Fiber broadband delivers symmetrical gigabit speeds — meaning upload and download speeds are equally fast. This is critical for video conferencing, cloud collaboration and virtual classrooms. Whether you're a student attending college from home or a professional managing a team across time zones, fiber ensures a seamless, stress-free experience.

Expanding access to healthcare

Telehealth is no longer a futuristic concept — it's a vital service. With fiber connectivity, patients in rural areas can consult with specialists, attend follow-up appointments and manage chronic conditions — all



from the comfort of home. High-speed, low-latency connections make virtual care more accessible and effective, reducing travel time and improving health outcomes.

Boosting property values and economic growth

Fiber doesn't just connect homes — it adds value to them. Studies show that homes with fiber internet can sell for 3-5% more than those without. For communities across southern Illinois, this means stronger real estate markets and greater appeal to new residents and businesses. Reliable broadband also attracts entrepreneurs and remote workers, fueling local economies and creating jobs.

Billy Hart

Smart, efficient deployment: aerial fiber

In Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative (SIEC) territory, we are installing fiber on electric poles. This approach minimizes disruption, reduces costs and accelerates timelines. It's a smart use of existing infrastructure that enables us to reach more homes, faster — without compromising safety or reliability. To support this effort, we continue to seek permission to access existing electric easements on your property to facilitate fiber deployment.

Cooperation that builds connectivity

At WK&T, we live out the sixth cooperative principle — cooperation

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Farm safety for kids

Farm and ranch safety: Top tips to protect kids

Farms and ranches give kids unique opportunities to gain responsibility, independence and strong work ethics. Growing up on a farm helps children develop problem-solving skills, build close family bonds, gain respect for the food cycle and cultivate a deep passion for the land.

However, agriculture is also one of the most dangerous industries for youth in the U.S. More young people die working in agriculture than in all other industries combined, with a child lost to an agriculture-related incident approximately every three days. Many of these tragedies occur when kids take on tasks that aren't suited to their age or abilities.

The impact of a farm injury or fatality extends beyond the individual, affecting families and entire communities. The emotional and mental toll can last a lifetime, underscoring the importance of making safety a priority for everyone.

Dalton D. Shattow

By implementing safety strategies, farmers, ranchers, families and

employees can reap the benefits of farm and ranch life while minimizing risks.

Why are kids at greater risk?

Injuries often occur when children are doing something beyond their mental, physical or emotional abilities. They are susceptible to certain types of accidents and injuries:

- Children often work on farms at young ages and in hazardous jobs.
- Their bodies and brains are still developing, affecting coordination, decision-making and impulse control.
- Kids tire easily, are more likely to get distracted (think cell phones and social media) and may take risks to prove themselves.
- Many lack experience and may be reluctant to ask questions or admit uncertainty.

Grain bin dangers

Grain bins are especially hazardous. Grain can act like quicksand, trapping

and suffocating anyone who enters. Most youth grain entrapments are fatal. Kids should never enter grain bins or “walk down” grain, and all grain storage areas should be off-limits and secured.

In 2010 in Mt. Carroll, Ill., four young farm workers aged 14–20 were sent to loosen clumped grain from inside a grain bin. Three of the youth became entrapped in the grain. Two were engulfed and suffocated and the third was rescued following a six-hour mission. A settlement of \$16 million was awarded to the affected families. This case led to the formation of the Grain Handling Safety Council, www.GrainSafety.org.

Five essential farm safety tips for kids

1. **Keep kids off tractors.** Tractors are involved in more than 40% of fatal farm accidents involving children under 15. Most kids are not tall or strong enough to

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FARM SMART:

5 Safety Tips for Kids

Farms and ranches are full of valuable lessons — but also serious risks, especially for kids. More young people die working in agriculture than in all other industries combined, often due to taking on tasks beyond their abilities.

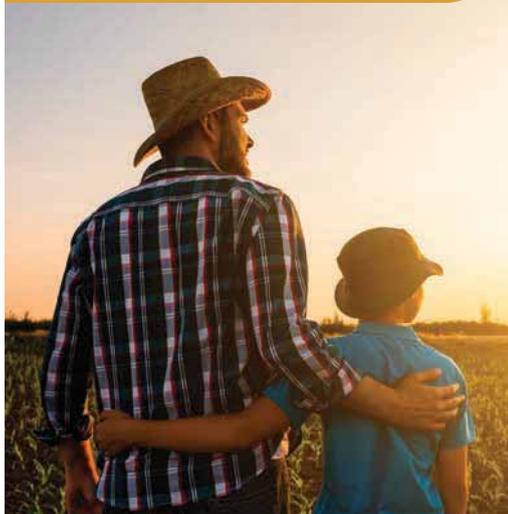
Five ways to keep kids safe around equipment, animals and chores:

- 1 **Keep kids off tractors.** Tractors cause more than 40% of fatal farm accidents involving children. Most kids are not tall or strong enough to operate them safely. Only let youth operate tractors if they meet age, size and maturity guidelines.
- 2 **Supervise and restrict access.** Never leave young children alone near work zones. Lock or fence off danger zones like grain bins, pens and machinery.
- 3 **Assign age-appropriate chores.** Match tasks to age and maturity. Teens may take risks, so set clear rules and supervise closely.

- 4 **Create a safe environment.** Eliminate slip hazards, lock up keys, limit heavy lifting and provide protective gear like gloves, non-slip shoes and hearing protection.

- 5 **Model safe behavior.** Teach tasks step-by-step and demonstrate safe habits — kids learn by watching adults.

Make safety a family priority so future generations can enjoy the rewards of farm life with less risk.



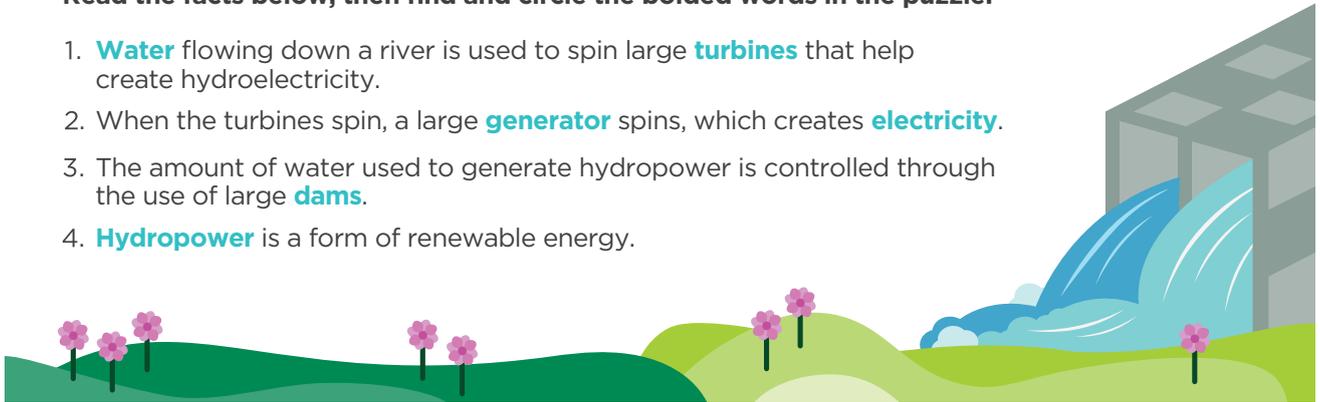
HYDROPOWER WORD SEARCH

You know that it's never safe to mix water and electricity at home, but did you know that large amounts of flowing water can be used to create electricity? This process of generating electricity from the movement of water is called hydropower.



Read the facts below, then find and circle the bolded words in the puzzle.

- Water** flowing down a river is used to spin large **turbines** that help create hydroelectricity.
- When the turbines spin, a large **generator** spins, which creates **electricity**.
- The amount of water used to generate hydropower is controlled through the use of large **dams**.
- Hydropower** is a form of renewable energy.



J	R	E	E	R	Y	R	L	L	R	S	W	Z	M	H
N	E	B	G	L	O	G	E	N	E	R	A	T	O	R
V	T	R	C	T	E	P	U	N	N	F	L	U	D	V
R	A	I	M	L	Q	C	I	G	H	X	C	S	A	E
A	W	A	K	E	R	B	T	Y	V	W	D	L	M	P
K	B	Q	J	K	R	D	D	R	M	N	N	H	S	R
Q	Q	V	U	U	R	R	V	N	I	O	Y	O	R	K
N	G	Y	T	P	O	Z	L	Q	S	C	Y	E	R	Q
T	G	E	I	P	Z	S	M	X	X	Y	I	F	E	O
M	K	G	O	R	A	B	N	K	H	K	P	T	H	U
V	N	W	P	Q	L	Y	P	A	D	J	S	Z	Y	O
X	E	A	K	J	A	Z	T	Q	P	O	P	I	B	X
R	B	W	A	B	D	O	K	C	I	Q	C	T	K	O
S	Y	B	B	P	Y	S	D	O	F	D	H	B	R	D
W	X	E	D	W	U	G	N	V	H	D	Q	W	P	S



Member prize

In this issue of the JAMUP, we printed the names of three SIEC members who are eligible to receive a \$10 credit toward their utility bill. If you find your name printed in this center section and it's not part of the story, call Brent with your account number at 800-762-1400 to claim your prize.

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"Digital divide" continued from page 18A

among cooperatives — by forging strong partnerships that bring last- ing infrastructure to communities often overlooked by larger providers. Working hand in hand with SIEC, we strategically deploy fiber in areas where investment has historically lagged. With a local office in southern Illinois staffed by local employees who understand the region's needs, WK&T delivers not just technology, but a personal connection. Our customer and technical service teams embody the spirit of neighbors serving neighbors. Fiber offers the highest-quality broad- band solution available — scalable, symmetrical and built for tomorrow. When you experience the WK&T difference, you see local commitment in action: dependable pricing, reliable service and a network built on the strength of cooperative collaboration.

Progress in southern Illinois

Through a combination of federal and state grants, along with local partnerships, we're expanding our fiber network across Pulaski, Union, Johnson, Massac and Alexander coun- ties. These investments will deliver multi-gigabit-speed internet to thou- sands of underserved homes and busi- nesses by the end of 2027. It's a bold step toward digital equity — and we're proud to lead the way.

Looking ahead

Our mission is simple: to ensure that every resident of southern Illinois has access to the tools they need to thrive in a digital world. Fiber broad- band isn't just a utility — it's a founda- tion for opportunity, innovation and resilience.

We're not just building a network. We're building the future.

"Farm safety" continued from page 18B

- operate them safely. Only let youth operate one if they meet safety guidelines for age, size and maturity.
- Supervise and restrict access.** Young children should never be in work areas unsupervised. Fence off or lock hazardous areas like grain bins, animal pens and equipment storage.
- Assign age-appropriate tasks.** Match chores to the child's abilities and maturity. Teens are more likely to take risks, so clear guidelines and supervision are essential.
- Create a safe environment.** Remove hazards such as slippery or uneven surfaces, keep equip- ment keys out of reach and avoid repetitive motion. Provide pro- tective gear like gloves, non-slip shoes and hearing protection.
- Train and model safe behav- ior.** Teach kids how to do tasks safely, practice together until they are proficient and always demonstrate safe habits yourself. Kids learn by watching adults.

Farm safety starts with open communication

Talk regularly with your kids about farm safety. Clearly explain which areas are off-limits, how to spot haz- ards and why following rules is impor- tant. Frequent, open conversations help build safe habits and encourage kids to think before they act.

Conduct safety audits of your farm, ranch and home together. Identifying and fixing hazards not only protects your children but also helps them learn how to prevent injuries.

Supervision is key. Always keep an eye on children, especially around potential dangers. Remember, learning safe habits takes time and patience — be prepared to repeat instructions to encourage smart, lasting and safe work habits.

Charles L. Kilpatrick
For more tips on assigning safe farm tasks to kids, check out the Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines at CultivateSafety.org/AYWG.

Farming is more than a job; it's a way of life. By making safety a family priority, we can help ensure that future generations enjoy the rewards of farm life with fewer risks.