

# POWERLINE

NEWSLETTER FOR CO-OP MEMBERS OF CORN BELT ENERGY



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## Beyond the Headlines: Keeping the Lights On Takes Balance and Planning Ahead

### How the Electric Grid Works

When people hear about grid challenges, conservation requests, extreme weather alerts, or rising electricity demand, it's common to question what is really behind these issues and how the system manages to keep up. The truth is that grid reliability is about balance, coordination, and planning ahead. It is not driven by a single customer, community, or industry; rather, it encompasses how electricity is produced, moved, and consumed across an entire region, constantly, every second of every day.

The electric grid is the system that delivers power from generation sources to homes, businesses, and industries. It has three main parts: generation, transmission, and distribution. All three must work together at the same time for the proverbial "lights to stay on."

Unlike most products, electricity must be produced and consumed at the exact same moment. This means that supply and demand must stay in balance at all times. Grid operators continuously monitor conditions and adjust the system



to ensure that power flows safely and reliably.

The biggest driver of short-term grid stress is extreme weather. Both very hot and very cold conditions can drive sharp increases in electricity use across entire regions, not just in one town or for one type of customer. During cold weather, heating systems run longer, water heaters work harder, and people spend more time indoors using lights, appliances, and electronics. Even small temperature drops over several consecutive days can significantly increase regional

demand.

### Why Voluntary Conservation Matters

That's why, during uncommon and extreme conditions, regional grid operators may ask utilities to request voluntary conservation. These requests are preventative measures, and the timing matters. Demand can rise quickly, and even small reductions across many homes and businesses can significantly reduce strain on the system, helping protect reliability and lowering the likelihood that rolling outages would ever be

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needed. These requests are not a sign of local system failure; rather, they reflect proactive coordination across the grid to maintain safe and reliable service for everyone.

## What About Rolling Blackouts?

In situations when electricity demand exceeds available supply, something that has occurred in other regions of the country, grid operators may implement controlled temporary outages, known as rolling blackouts. These measures are used only as a last resort to protect the overall system and prevent a larger, uncontrolled outage.

If rolling blackouts were ever required, members would experience brief, rotating power interruptions. This means electricity is temporarily reduced in selected areas while other areas remain energized, then restored as the rotation continues. These outages are typically short and carefully managed to protect the electric grid and avoid longer-lasting disruptions.

Critical services such as hospitals and emergency response facilities are prioritized whenever possible. If rolling blackouts were ever required, entire homes or businesses within the affected area would temporarily lose power. While every effort is made to minimize impacts and restore service quickly, members should expect a complete interruption of electricity during their assigned rotation. When advance notice is available, members will be informed and provided with guidance on how to prepare.

Most importantly, voluntary energy conservation during extreme conditions helps reduce strain on the grid and lowers the likelihood that rolling outages would ever be necessary.

## Planning for Growing Demand

Looking ahead, electricity demand is beginning to grow again after years of relatively flat usage. This growth is driven by a combination of factors, including electrification, manufacturing expansion, transportation and emerging large-scale users such as data centers. While data

centers currently represent a small portion of overall electricity consumption in our area, their growth nationwide is expected to increase demand over time and will require thoughtful, long-term planning.

Importantly, new demand is planned for years in advance. Power suppliers and grid operators plan and invest in new generation and transmission infrastructure alongside growth, not after it arrives.

Corn Belt Energy plays a vital role as a local distribution cooperative, delivering electricity to members while working closely with our power supplier and regional grid partners. Reliability doesn't happen by accident. It's the result of constant coordination, thoughtful planning, and cooperation at every level of the electric system.

When members help conserve during extreme conditions, they're an important part of that reliability effort, helping ensure safe, reliable power for our entire community.





## Utility scams in this age of AI: How to spot and avoid fraud

Someone calls claiming to be from your utility company. They say your service will be cut off if you don't pay them immediately. Real utility companies don't do this. But scammers want to scare you into paying before you have time to confirm what they're telling you. And scammers are now using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to craft frauds that are difficult for consumers to detect. Learn how to protect yourself.

### Beware of these common scam tactics

- Disconnection threats: Scammers claim your service will be cut off without immediate payment.
- Caller ID spoofing: Fraudsters use software to make their calls appear legitimate.
- Overpayment claims: They may say you've overpaid and ask for personal or banking information to issue a refund.
- Smishing: Scammers send fake text messages that seem to come from your utility company.
- Phishing attempts: Beware of emails that look like bills; always verify the sender's email before clicking links.

If you have any doubt about the status of your electric service, call your utility company using the customer service phone number on their website.

### Watch for the following red flags

- High-pressure tactics that demand urgent action.
- Unusual payment method requests (wire transfer, gift cards, reloadable cards or cryptocurrency).
- Poor grammar, misspellings and suspicious email addresses.

### AI use enhances utility scams

By leveraging AI-powered techniques, utility scammers can create sophisticated and convincing frauds that are hard for consumers to recognize and avoid.

- AI helps scammers craft convincing emails that appear to be from legitimate utility companies and include the use of company colors and logos.

- Scammers use AI to create realistic-looking utility company websites that are nearly indistinguishable from legitimate ones.
- AI technology can clone the voices of utility company representatives, making phone scams convincing.
- AI analyzes victims' online presence and social media to create highly personalized spam related to your utility services.
- Scammers create geographically targeted online ads that appear when users search for keywords related to their energy bills.
- Scammers use AI to launch large-scale utility scam campaigns quickly and efficiently.

According to Kathy Stokes, AARP Director of Fraud Prevention Programs, "the ability of AI to improve and scale scam tactics is the equivalent of the Industrial Revolution for fraud criminals."

### Protect yourself

- Take your time: Don't rush into payments or action.
- Verify any communication by calling your utility company directly using the number on your bill.
- Never share personal information. Legitimate companies won't ask for sensitive details over the phone.
- If someone claims to be a utility worker, request official identification.

If you suspect a scam, report it to your utility company and the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.reportfraud.ftc.gov).

Remember, legitimate utilities will provide multiple notices before disconnection and will not pressure you for immediate payment. If you are in doubt, let your utility company know so they can take proactive measures to both protect you and others from becoming victims.

Learn more at:



# Farmers: Make electrical safety a priority this Spring planting season

It's planting season for many of Illinois' farmers.

As fields are prepared and equipment is put to work, Corn Belt Energy reminds farmers to keep electrical safety top of mind.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 62 farm workers are electrocuted each year in the United States.

## Farmers should remember the following safety practices this spring:

- Ensure farm equipment, such as planter arms and sprayers, is clear of overhead power lines. Maintain a minimum 10-foot distance from lines in all directions.
- Ask your cooperative about relocating overhead lines near buildings or high-use pathways. Consult your cooperative before new construction to learn about required clearances.
- Stay clear of power poles and guy wires when operating machinery. If equipment damages a guy wire or pole, do not attempt to fix it yourself. Call your cooperative immediately.
- If equipment becomes entangled with power lines, call 911, keep others away, and remain on the equipment. If you must exit for life-threatening reasons, jump clear without touching the equipment and

ground at the same time. Land with feet together and shuffle at least three tractor lengths away. Never re-enter or touch equipment in contact with a line.

- When planning a controlled burn, mow and clear vegetation at least 15 feet around poles and use fire retardant as directed. Do not apply retardant directly to poles. If a burn threatens poles or electrical equipment, call 911 immediately.
- Prevent fire and smoke from passing directly under power lines. Smoke contains carbon particles that conduct electricity, which can cause electrical discharges from the line to the ground. Avoid spraying water directly onto lines, as water conducts electricity.

## What to do if electrical contact occurs

If farm machinery contacts a power line:

- Call 911 immediately. Keep others away and remain calm.
- Stay inside the equipment. Only exit if there is a life-threatening emergency, such as fire.

## If you must exit:

1. Do not touch the equipment and the ground at the same time.
2. Open the door, cross your arms, and jump clear, landing with feet together.

3. Shuffle at least 40 feet away with your feet together.
4. Do not return to the equipment.

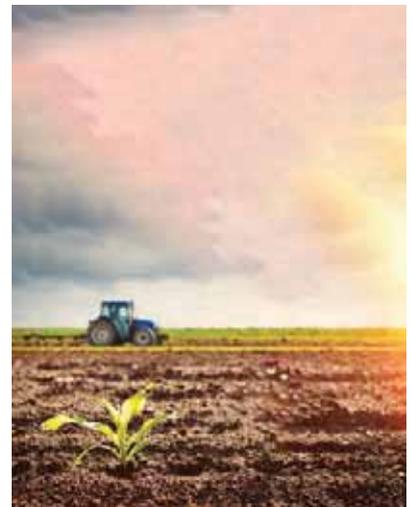
## If you see someone else in contact with a downed line:

- Stay at least three tractor lengths away.
- Tell the person to remain on the equipment.
- Call 911 immediately.
- Do not attempt a rescue or touch the person, equipment, or line.

These steps can mean the difference between life and death in an electrical emergency.

Farmers can protect themselves, their workers, and their operations during this busy season by staying alert and taking precautions.

For more information on electrical safety, please visit [cornbeltenergy.com](http://cornbeltenergy.com) or [safeelectricity.org](http://safeelectricity.org).



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