

# This May, Plug Into Safety



## MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER KATHI CALVERT

**THIS MONTH, I'D LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT** to reflect on the importance of safety. We all depend on electricity to power our lives, but accidents can happen when electricity is improperly used.

May is National Electrical Safety Month, and throughout the month, Houston County Electric Cooperative will work to raise awareness about the dangers of electricity. Visit our recently redesigned website, [houstoncountyelec.com](http://houstoncountyelec.com), and our Facebook page to see safety tips and reminders.

### Our Responsibility to You

We care deeply about the well-being of our members and encourage you to plug into safety, especially this month. Thousands of people in the U.S. are critically injured or killed each year as a result of electrical fires, accidents and electrocution in their own homes, according to the Electrical Safety Foundation International.

Small safety steps can save your life or the life of someone

you love. Make sure you have a fire safety plan for your home. Remember that the appliances you use require maintenance. Clean vents, coils and filters on major electrical appliances annually. Unplug small electrical appliances when not in use.

To promote safety education, we have produced a video explaining electricity and electric safety tips with the help of Ty Johnson, son of lineman Tim Johnson. Watch for the video on Facebook and our website soon. We also conduct safety programs for local schools and other groups. We provide electrical safety content in *Texas Co-op Power* and encourage the public to contact us if they see a downed power line or any other type of dangerous electrical situation.

We strive to provide our communities with safe, reliable and affordable electricity and serve as your trusted energy advisor, now and well into the future.

### Our Responsibility to Employees

It is no accident that safety is a top priority at your electric co-op. We are committed to a culture of safety that is integral to our daily operations. We participate in programs and follow specific guidelines and protocols for electrical safety that are considered leading practices.

Our linemen are required to wear personal protective equipment at all times when on the job. This includes special fire-resistant clothing that will self-extinguish, limiting potential injuries from burns and sparks. Insulated and rubber gloves are worn in tandem to protect from electrical shock. Our safety team regularly discusses important safety issues pertaining to work in our buildings and out in the field.

As the general manager of HCEC, I believe it is my duty and responsibility to raise awareness about the importance of electrical safety. Take a moment to plug into safety. For tips on how to keep yourself and your loved ones safe, please visit [houstoncountyelec.com](http://houstoncountyelec.com).



Tim Johnson, HCEC lineman, and son Ty Johnson on the set of our newest safety and educational video, "Hey, What About that Electricity?"



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## Hire the Right Electrician for the Job

**IF YOU DIDN'T BUY** your home new, or if it is more than 20 years old, you should have an electrician check your electrical system to be sure it can safely handle your family's electricity needs.

**The Electrical Safety Foundation International offers tips for selecting the best electrician for the job.**

- ▶ Look online for a directory of local electrical contractors.
- ▶ Ask the electrician to show you current insurance certificates for liability, property damage and workers' compensation.
- ▶ Choose an electrician who has a contractor's license issued by the state.
- ▶ Do not hire electricians who go door-to-door asking for work. Reputable companies don't need to do that.
- ▶ Call more than one electrical contractor for estimates to comparison shop.
- ▶ Ask the contractor for local references or check with the Better Business Bureau.
- ▶ Determine whether the electrician is part of a national or regional electrical association. Membership doesn't guarantee a quality inspection, but associations offer educational programs to keep members up to date on technological advancements.



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Happy  
Mother's Day  
from Houston County EC  
Sunday, May 14

## Houston County Electric Cooperative

P.O. Box 52, Crockett, TX 75835

### GENERAL MANAGER

Kathi Calvert

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dan Courmier, President  
 Kennon Kellum, Vice President  
 Mitchell Huff, Secretary-Treasurer  
 Mary L. Pearl Adams  
 William Emmons  
 Kay Reed  
 Charles "Chuck" Siems  
 Grady Wakefield  
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## Contact Us

**TO REPORT A POWER OUTAGE,  
CALL OUR 24-HOUR HOTLINE**

**1-800-970-4232** toll-free

### BUSINESS HOURS

Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

### CUSTOMER SERVICE

*For general information  
during business hours*

**(936) 544-5641** local

**1-800-657-2445** toll-free

To report an outage or other problem with electrical service, press 1.

To make a payment over the phone or speak with a member services representative in the billing department, press 2.

For electrical connects, transfers and disconnects, press 5.

For directions to our office, mailing address or fax number, press 6.

For satellite internet services, press 7.

For staking and construction, press 8.

### FIND US ON THE WEB

**houstoncountyelec.com**



**FIND US ON FACEBOOK**

# Observe Electrical Safety on the Outside

**ELECTRICAL HAZARDS ARE NOT ONLY** present indoors but also can occur outside. Follow these guidelines to help prevent common outdoor electrical hazards.

## Power Lines

Before planting trees near a power line, do some research or speak with a professional at your cooperative to ensure that there's enough space for them to grow safely. If you suspect that a tree is too close to power lines, report it to your electric co-op.



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Electricity can jump to nearby objects! Always keep yourself and any equipment at least 10 feet away from power lines.

Power lines are also found underground. Call 811 before you dig for any project.

## Outdoor Outlets

Have ground-fault circuit interrupters installed on outdoor outlets. GFCIs automatically cut power when a plugged-in item comes in contact with water or begins to “leak” electricity.

Install weatherproof boxes or covers on outdoor outlets.

## Generators

Of the 931 carbon monoxide fatalities between 1999 and

**Before planting trees in your yard, speak with a professional to make sure they will have room to grow.**

2012, 79 percent were associated with generators. Twenty-four percent occurred when generators were used inside an attached garage or shed.

When in use, position generators outside and away from doors, windows and vents.

Make sure your home is properly equipped with carbon monoxide alarms and test them monthly.

Make sure your generator is properly grounded. Do not plug it directly into a home outlet without a transfer switch to prevent “backfeeding,” which could harm utility lineworkers making repairs.

## Extension Cords

Extension cords provide a temporary solution and should not be used long term.

Never use an indoor extension cord outdoors. Outdoor cords will be labeled “for outdoor use” and are often orange.

Never attempt to extend the length of an extension cord by connecting it to another extension cord.

Only use extension cords that bear the mark of a nationally recognized safety testing laboratory such as UL, Intertek or CSA.

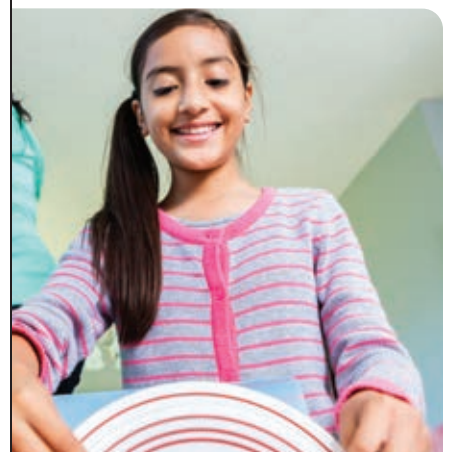


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Houston County EC thanks all our veterans and wishes everyone a peaceful

# MEMORIAL DAY

Monday, May 29



STEVE DEBENPORT | ISTOCK.COM

# Power Tip

Air-dry clean dishes to save energy. If your dishwasher does not have an automatic air-dry switch, then turn off the dishwasher after the final rinse and prop the door open slightly so the dishes will dry faster.

# The Well-Connected Lineworker

**WHEN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES** were formed in the 1930s, technology was primitive by any standard: digging holes by hand, walking utility poles up into those holes and using ladders to service equipment. If you had to get in touch with the line crew, face-to-face communication was the only option.

Today, the lineworker rivals anyone when it comes to using technology to get the job done safely, quickly and accurately. Let's take a look at a few of the devices behind this evolution.

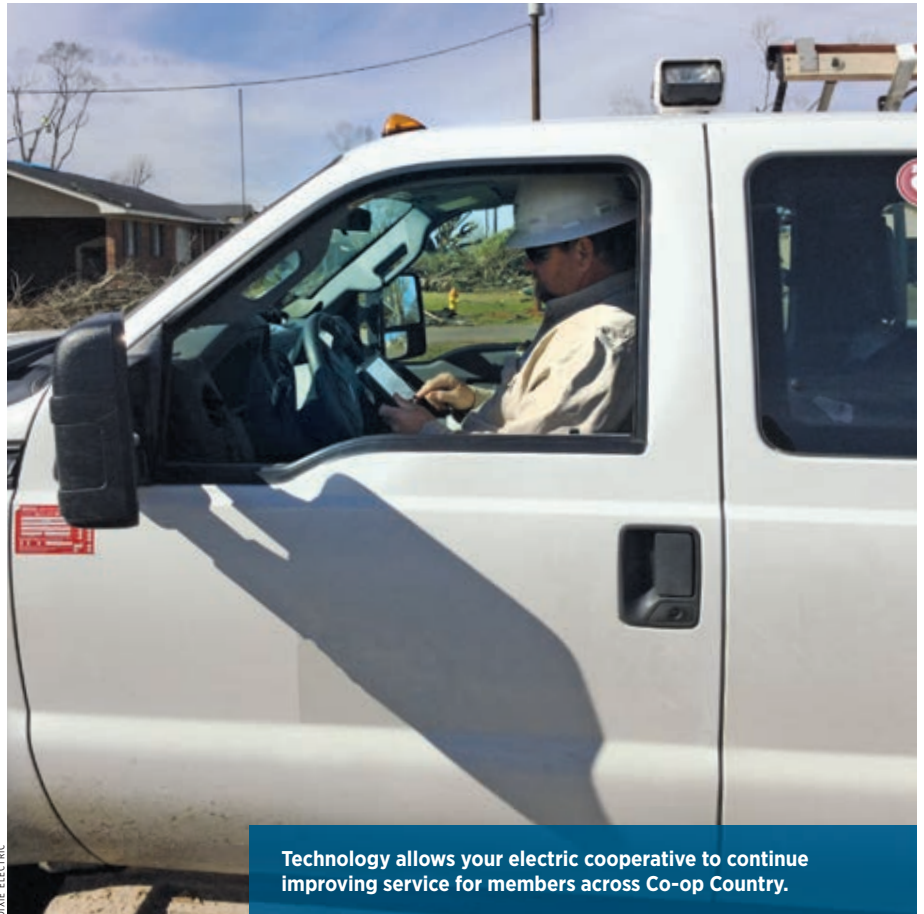
Many electric co-ops send their crews into the field with "ruggedized" tablets, which are loaded with work orders detailing each day's projects. This can include construction drawings, system maps and a bill of materials detailing the necessary equipment. Gone are the reams of paper and cumbersome map books of the past.

Equally important are GPS units. As more co-ops map their systems using coordinates, the GPS capability gets the crews where they need to be in a more efficient manner. Some GPS units are designed specifically for heavy trucks, and they plot routes that avoid bridges with weight limits or roads with height restrictions.

Co-ops are laser-focused on getting the lights back on as soon as possible after an outage. Key in this effort is the outage management system. This system builds on geo-tagged system maps of poles, sophisticated engineering models of the distribution system and an advanced metering system.

When an outage occurs, the system determines the exact location of the fault and the extent of the outage, then crews are sent to the spot to correct the problem. Part of this restoration effort might be a vehicle tracking system that tells operations staff the exact location of each line truck. The crews closest to the outage are sent to restore power—and essential information can be accessed via tablets, depending upon the situation.

Sometimes an old-fashioned visual inspection is required. During daylight hours, it can be easy to see the cause of a problem. At night, however, lineworkers need a reliable source of light. That comes from powerful LED flashlights and truck-mounted lights. In the hands of a lineman, they provide an



Technology allows your electric cooperative to continue improving service for members across Co-op Country.

## WHAT DOES "RUGGEDIZED" MEAN?

The job of the lineworker is one of the most rigorous and demanding in the world. A regular tablet or smartphone won't last long. A lineworker's devices need to survive bouncing along in a line truck, being tossed into a bucket or tool bin, being dropped and exposed to all kinds of weather. Your electric cooperative invests in special cases and screen protectors, or in devices specially made to survive.

amazing view of the lines during the darkest of nights.

Technology now permeates every aspect of cooperative operations, allowing your electric co-op to constantly improve service. The well-connected lineworker is at the forefront of that technical evolution.

# The Ins and Outs of Outlets

**OUTLETS—THE COMMON TERM** for electrical receptacles: You can't enter a modern building without seeing them, and they all seem pretty much the same, right? Wrong! As electrical construction practices have evolved over the years, electrical outlets have evolved along with them, building in greater safety features.

The old-school, two-pronged receptacle that you remember from your grandma's house was installed in residences before 1962 and is no longer recommended for any structure. Since 1971, the National Electrical Code has required at least the standard three-pronged, grounded receptacle, which reduces the risk of electrical shock and protects equipment from damage. From there, receptacle design has advanced to cover a range of safety needs.

**TRRs:** Tamper-resistant receptacles are recommended for homes with children or pets, as outlet covers have been proven not to provide adequate protection. In a TRR, a built-in shutter system prevents objects from being inserted, except when simultaneous, equal pressure to both slots is applied by a plug.

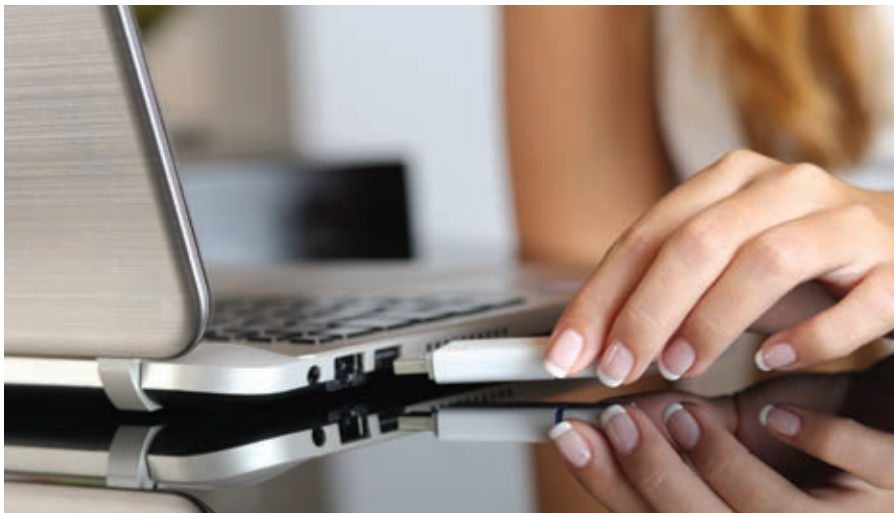
**AFCIs:** An arc-fault circuit interrupter reduces the risk of fire by interrupting power when an arc fault occurs anywhere in the circuit, including within the items plugged into it—even attached cords. The Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that more than 50 percent of electrical fires occurring annually in the U.S. could be prevented by AFCIs.

**GFCIs:** Ground-fault circuit interrupters are recommended for installation in areas where water and electricity are in close proximity, such as bathrooms, garages, kitchens, laundry areas and any outdoor receptacles. A GFCI prevents shock by quickly shutting off power (in as little as 1/40 of a second) to a circuit if the electricity flowing into the circuit differs from that returning, indicating current leakage, or a "ground fault."

**Surge suppressors:** A surge-suppression receptacle protects sensitive electronic equipment from transient power surges, as happens when large appliances such as air conditioners turn on and off. These often are installed to protect costly devices such as computers and TVs.

**USBs:** The newest kind of electric receptacle combines a computer USB port with a traditional outlet. The Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates that more than 10 billion electrical devices in use today are charged via USB cables.

**USB receptacles are commonly used to charge electrical devices.**



## The Value of Membership

**SERVICE IS OUR MISSION.** Electric co-ops were established to provide safe, reliable and affordable power. This has remained our mission since day one.

**You are a member, not a customer.** Cooperatives are businesses owned by members. Members elect the co-op's board of directors and can run for seats on the board. Your votes and participation help shape the co-op's direction.

**We are a nonprofit.** Unlike investor-owned utilities, which operate to make profits for stakeholders, electric co-ops do not earn profits. Instead, revenue remaining after expenses is returned to members in the form of capital credits.

**We are community-focused.** Electric co-ops are committed to local community development programs and projects such as Habitat for Humanity, Relay For Life, Youth Tour and others.

**We are guided by a set of principles.** All co-ops are guided by Seven Cooperative Principles: Voluntary and Open Membership; Democratic Member Control; Members' Economic Participation; Autonomy and Independence; Education, Training and Information; Cooperation Among Cooperatives; and Concern for Community.

**We are committed to innovation.** Electric cooperatives are able to respond quickly to changing member needs. We are committed to experimenting and innovating in ways that benefit the communities and members we serve.

# We Can't Recognize You Without Your Phone Number

*Update your phone information before a major outage*

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**Houston County Electric Cooperative needs your phone number on file.** When you call, our outage management system attempts to match your phone number to your account and then alerts our staff. This enables us to dispatch a repair crew more quickly and efficiently.

If we don't have an accurate phone number associated with your account, it could delay repair of your electric service.

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## How to update your phone number:

- ▶ Visit [ebiz.houstoncountyelec.com](http://ebiz.houstoncountyelec.com) and click on "Profiles" then edit your information under the Accounts tab.
- ▶ Call one of our customer service representatives Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at (800) 657-2445 or (936) 544-5641 to update your information.
- ▶ Stop by our Crockett office to talk with a member service representative today.

*Your information will remain confidential and only be used by the cooperative.*

**Don't keep us in the dark. Update your information!**

