

Lightning, Snakes and Sticks ... Oh My!



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER KATHI CALVERT

LIGHTNING, SNAKES AND STICKS may seem trivial to the average person, but the linemen at Houston County Electric Cooperative think just the opposite. Common elements in nature sometimes inflict chaos on HCEC's distribution system despite protective equipment and well-maintained easements intended to prevent outages.

Lightning strikes happen in the blink of an eye and can cause members to instantly be without power. In some locations, HCEC structures are the tallest object, creating a target for direct lightning strikes. Proximity to trees and soil conductivity also have implications for our system. When lightning strikes near our lines, it can produce induced over-voltages and damage equipment.

We have arresters installed to divert the current from lightning surges and our equipment is insulated for protection. This protection greatly reduces the number of outages we experience, but it is not a guarantee and lightning leaves little evidence for our linemen to locate and repair.

In addition, did you know that animals account for about 11 percent of power outages across the nation? Electricity seeks the fastest route to the ground. Utility pole insulators keep power flowing safely to your home, but snakes unwittingly offer high-voltage electricity a way around insulators. If a snake gets into equipment, like a transformer, safety measures will shut the power off. Snakes and squirrels are the main culprits, but they're definitely not alone. Birds, opossums and other animals trigger outages, too. HCEC installs animal guards to protect equipment and wayward animals and to reduce outages.

Our beautiful trees present another threat to our lines. Although trees and electricity are both great to have, they simply do not mix. Trees or branches can fall in high wind or wet soil conditions, breaking lines and poles. Winds can whip limbs into lines. Even the smallest limb can cause an outage.

Recently, HCEC linemen David Hildebrand and Doug Whitehead were working a storm outage near Houston County Lake, about 15 minutes northwest of Crockett. This particular outage initially affected 71 members. It rained while Hildebrand and Whitehead drove along the lines, looking for the cause of the outage. Finding no issues, they re-energized the line. Instantly, the entire circuit went out and the problem was evident: A small stick, approximately 10 inches long, was resting on top of our pole, touching the equipment and causing the outage.

With an untrained eye, this problem would have never been spotted, but our skilled HCEC linemen know that even the most minuscule objects can cause major problems. You are probably thinking anyone could spot a limb on a line. How hard can it be to remove a limb and restore our power? The picture on Page 19 shows the exact stick that David and Doug found and how it was located on the pole. Can you imagine finding that stick during a storm in the dark?

Trust me, we all wish power restoration was simple, but it is



Can you imagine driving down the highway trying to spot a problem 35 feet in the air? Probably not, but our HCEC linemen do it in the cold, heat, wind and rain!

not always easy. Sometimes the problem is obvious, but it requires significant repairs such as replacing a broken pole. Sometimes the repair is easy, but finding the problem is like searching for a needle in a haystack. We work diligently to prevent outages, but when they occur, I am grateful for our expert linemen. Whether facing lightning, snakes, sticks or some other challenge, they are dedicated to keeping your lights on.



Can you spot the problem? This is how linemen David Hildebrand and Doug Whitehead found the stick—resting right on top of HCEC’s power pole.



Assistant Line Superintendent Stacy Freeman found this killdeer nest in the HCEC equipment yard, where on-call linemen park. (Killdeer birds nest in gravel, and their eggs blend in almost perfectly.) Thinking quickly, he borrowed two crossarms and diverted traffic so that employees would not accidentally harm the bird or her eggs.

Although birds and other animals can cause problems for HCEC members, we still take time to treasure Earth’s precious creatures. Thank you, Stacy, for your speedy thinking!

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
David Whittlesey

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.

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houstoncountyelec.com



FIND US ON FACEBOOK

Director Election: Running by Petition

CALLING ALL POTENTIAL DIRECTOR CANDIDATES! If you think you have what it takes to lead Houston County Electric Cooperative into the future, running by petition provides a simple way to be included on the HCEC director election ballot, if you meet the eligibility criteria.

The HCEC bylaws Article VI, Section 6.01 state that directors for Houston County District 1, Madison County District and the District At-Large will be elected this fall.

The incumbent directors are William Emmons, Houston County District 1; Mary Pearl Adams, Madison County District; and Daniel Courmier, District At-Large.

In accordance with Article VI, Section 6.01 of the cooperative bylaws, individuals wishing to be elected to the board of directors must meet and uphold the following criteria:

QUALIFICATIONS: A person shall be eligible to become or remain a director of the Cooperative who:

- a.** If nominated, agrees to serve as a Director if elected;
- b.** is a Member, which is an individual, in good standing with the Cooperative, having his or her primary residence for at least one year in the Director District that he or she would represent. The Board shall make a fact determination of primary residence based on factors including voter registration, homestead exemption, other public records and electric service history. The board shall serve as an arbiter of any disputes over primary residence.

- c.** may not have been convicted of a misdemeanor involving moral turpitude or a felony pursuant to Law;

- d.** may not be an employee or may not have been an employee of the Cooperative in the prior three (3) years;

- e.** may not be employed by or financially interested in an enterprise that may be entitled to sell electric energy to a Member;

- f.** may not be or may not have a close relative who is a representative, agent, officer, or in any way employed or compensated by a labor organization that is recognized bargaining representative for any unit of the Cooperative's employees or by an affiliate of any such labor organization;

- g.** may not be a close relative of a Director or Officer;

- h.** except as otherwise provided by the Board for good cause, attend at least a majority of all Board meetings during each twelve- (12-) month period; and

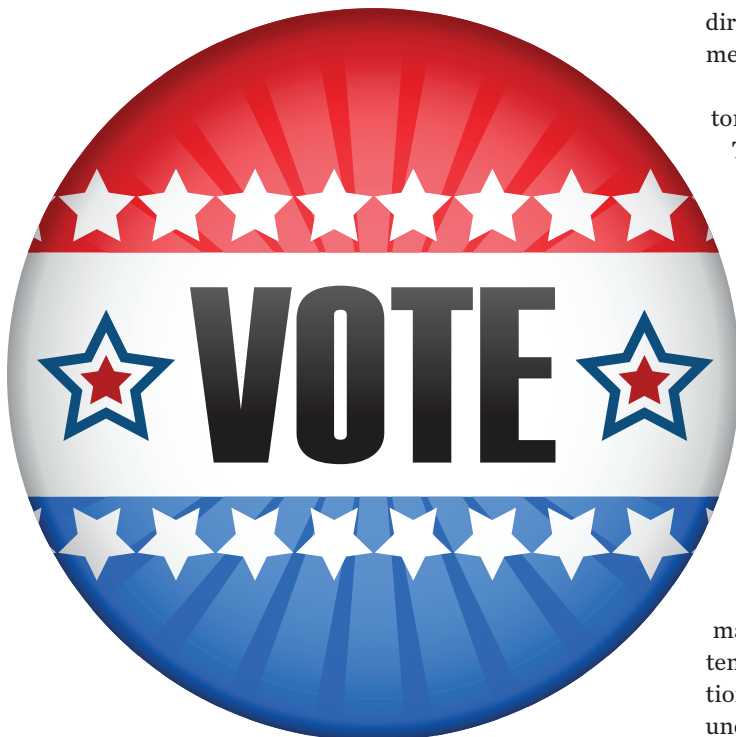
- i.** complete and sign a certification/disclosure form approved by the Board concerning conflicts of interest and these Director Qualifications. An existing Director shall complete and sign the certification/disclosure form annually.

Members interested in serving as a director may gain nomination two ways: by Nominating Committee or Nominating Petition. At the regular May board meeting, a Nominating Committee was appointed. The committee consists of two members from each of the three electing districts. The six-member Nominating Committee will nominate at least one director from each district at least 90 days before the annual meeting.

Any member meeting the qualifications to serve as a director may also visit our office to obtain a Nominating Petition. The Nominating Petition requires written signatures from district members in the amount of 10 percent of the District or 150, whichever is less.

For the convenience of our members considering running by petition, the required forms are available at the HCEC office. The petition may be obtained any weekday during normal business hours. HCEC personnel will provide instructions for preparation of the petition. Petitions are available beginning June 30. Official petitions must be completed and delivered in person to the cooperative office or by registered mail addressed to Houston County Electric Cooperative, P.O. Box 52, Crockett, TX 75835, on or before August 1. No petitions will be accepted after 5 p.m., August 1.

All director candidates will appear on the ballots to be mailed to residents of each respective district on or about September 16. The candidate with the most votes will win the election. Ballots will not be mailed if the election is declared uncontested by the Nominating Committee, and the board will deem the sole director candidate elected.

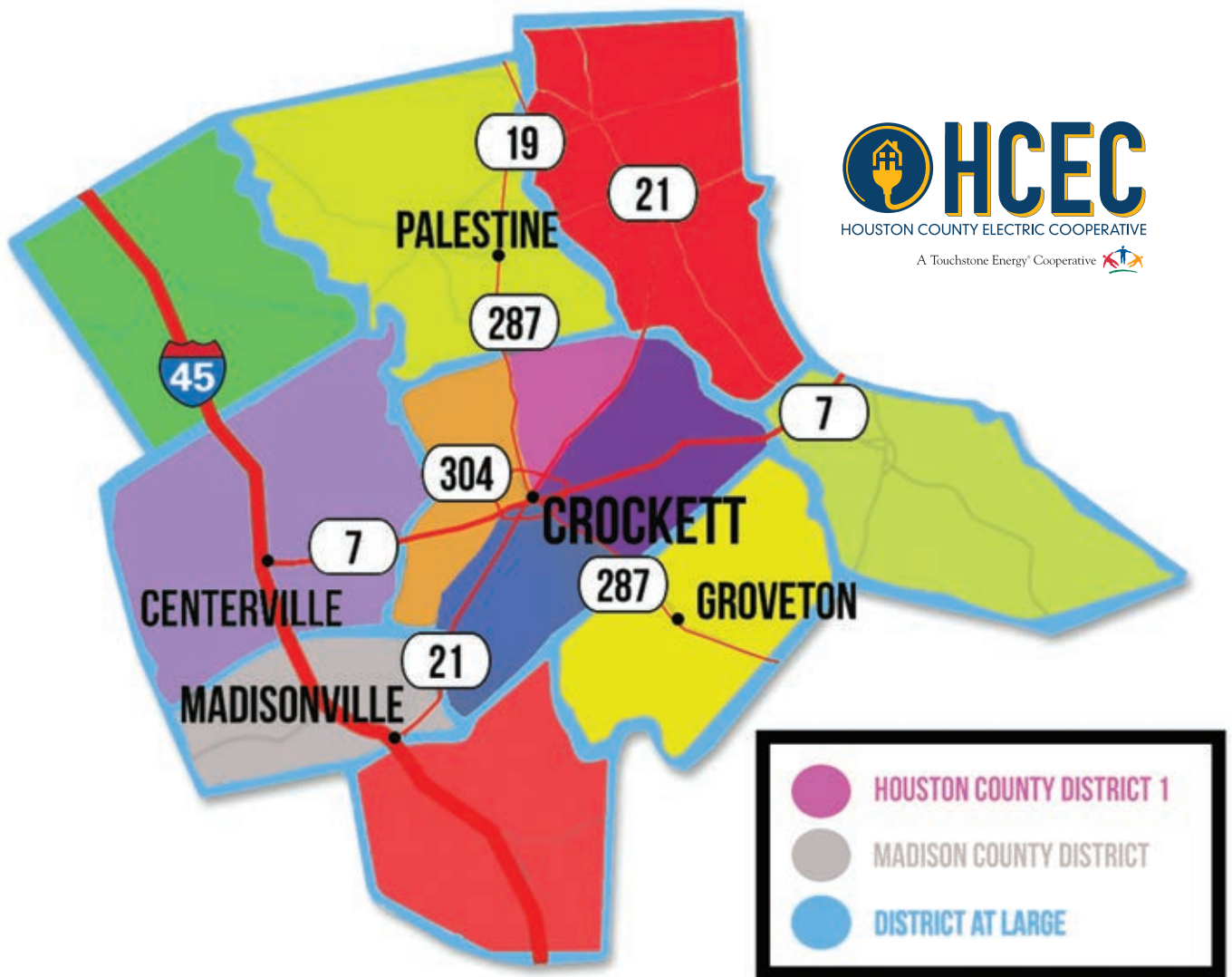


Please Vote

We're a busy society. No questions about that, but we need to make time for the things that count.

Houston County Electric Cooperative's purpose is to power communities and empower members to improve the quality of their lives. Make your voice count in the next HCEC election.

Remember: Democratic governance is what makes co-ops work!



The Benefits of Co-op Member Engagement

MOST CONSUMERS WOULD NOT EQUATE active involvement in their electric company with helping their community. But Houston County Electric Cooperative is not an ordinary utility.

We're a co-op, and our business model is meant to serve the members and the community—not to make a hefty profit for investors five states away. Our customers are more than consumers; they are members of the co-op. Therein lies the difference.



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As an electric cooperative, we serve the members and the community. Make your voice heard at our annual meeting.

setting policies and making decisions. This is why we value your participation in our annual meeting and at other co-op events.

Houston County EC has numerous ongoing programs that benefit the community. Every summer, for example, we participate in the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, which sends local high school students to the nation's capital to meet with lawmakers, enabling young people to learn firsthand how our democracy works. We are proud to be part of a nationwide veteran hiring initiative called Serve Our Co-ops, Serve Our Country. In addition, we maintain a scholarship program and support local community service initiatives.

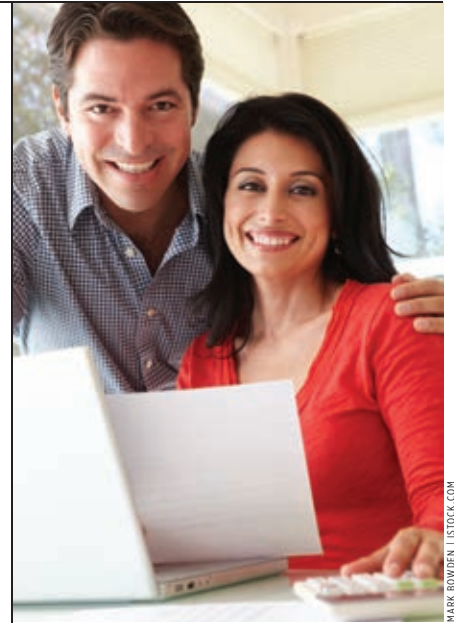
We recognize the vital role that our cooperative plays in energizing our local economy. But to continue to innovate and effectively serve the community, we rely on you, our members, to provide guidance. We cannot operate effectively and help our community thrive without you, and we value your perspective.

Please let your voice be heard. Weigh in at the annual meeting and consider joining one of our advisory boards or our board of directors.

Our core purpose and mission is to provide safe, reliable and affordable power to our members. As a cooperative, we are motivated by service to the community rather than profits.

We depend on the guidance and perspective of our members and board to help set priorities for the co-op and guide governance decisions. At our annual membership meeting, we raise issues for voting consideration by the general membership. Our board of directors is composed of members who live and work in our service area because they are in a position to know where community investments are needed most.

Your electric co-op is controlled by members who actively participate in set-



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3 Summer Projects

Make your home more efficient

TAKE SOME TIME this summer to invest in your home's energy efficiency. Here are three projects that will pay off in lower energy bills.

1. Install a programmable thermostat.

It's one of the best ways to save energy, and not just in the summer.

The catch: It doesn't save energy if you don't program it. Tell it to raise the temperature of your home by at least 7 degrees when everyone leaves the house for the day, and 4 degrees at bedtime. This could save you up to \$180 a year.

2. Change your AC filters.

You should do this every three months—unless you live in a particularly dusty climate. In that case, change the filter every month. Dirty filters prevent air from flowing through them, forcing your AC to work extra hard. That's a big waste of energy.

3. Switch to LED bulbs. Make the switch this summer from outdated incandescent and compact fluorescent bulbs. LED bulbs save more energy and last longer than either.

Look for the Energy Star label on lightbulbs; those use up to 90 percent less energy and give off less heat, and can save you more than \$30 on electricity over the life of the bulb or fixture.

Prevent Power Line Problems

NEARLY EVERYONE KNOWS NOT TO TOUCH a downed power line, but you might not know that you do not have to touch a power line to be in danger. High-voltage electricity can jump to anyone who gets too close.

Anytime you're working or playing outside, stay at least 10 feet away from power lines and their connections. Look up before raising a ladder or pole, and use wooden or fiberglass ladders outdoors. Avoid using metal ladders because they conduct electricity.

Downed Power Line Safety Tips

▶ If you see a downed power line, move away from it and anything touching it. The ground around power lines—up to 35 feet—can be energized.

▶ You cannot tell whether a power line is energized just by looking at it. Assume that all downed power lines are live.

▶ The proper way to move away from the power line is to shuffle away with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times. This will minimize the potential for a strong electric shock.

▶ If you see someone who is in direct or indirect contact with the downed line, do not touch the person. You could become the next victim. Call 911 for help.

▶ Do not attempt to move a downed power line or anything else in contact with it by using an object such as a broom or stick. Even nonconductive materials such as wood or cloth can conduct electricity if even slightly wet.

▶ Be careful not to touch or step in water near a downed power line.

▶ Do not drive over downed power lines.

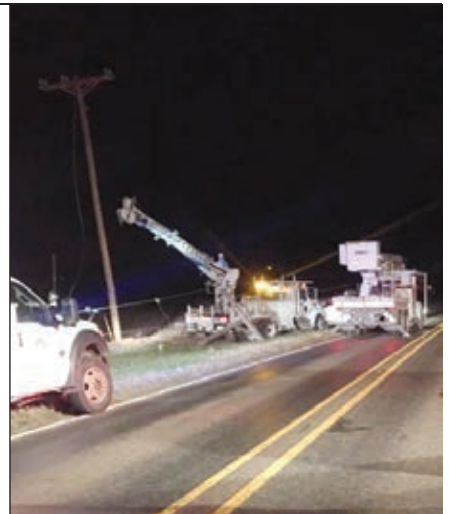
▶ If your vehicle comes in contact with a downed power line while you are inside, stay in the vehicle. Honk your horn to summon help, but direct others to stay away.

▶ If you must leave your vehicle because it is on fire, jump out with both feet together and avoid contact with both the vehicle and the ground at the same time. Shuffle away from the vehicle.



Avoid the area and call 911 if you see someone in contact with downed lines.

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Slow down and move over when you see a line crew working on the side of the road.

Make Room for Roadside Crews

WHEN THE POWER GOES OUT, so do Houston County Electric Cooperative's restoration crews.

Lineworkers are the first to respond after an outage occurs, and they work tirelessly to restore power to the communities we serve. If you see one of our line crews on the side of the road, we kindly ask that you move over if it is safe to give them a little extra space to work.

If you approach a crew on a road with multiple lanes, and if safety and traffic conditions allow, move over into the far lane. If moving over is not an option, we ask that you slow down when approaching roadside crews. We care deeply about everyone's safety, and this extra precaution helps ensure just that.

Also, emergency responders, such as police officers, firefighters and EMTs, often find themselves working near busy roadways. Texas law requires drivers to either vacate the lane closest to a stopped emergency vehicle or slow down to 20 mph below the speed limit. If the speed limit is below 25 mph, the driver must slow down to 5 mph.

There's plenty of room on the road for everyone. Let's work together to keep our local roadways safe.