



POWERLINES

November 2021

Official Newsletter of Tri-State Electric Membership Corporation



Tri-State EMC Hosts 73rd Annual Meeting

Tri-State EMC (TSEMC) once again held a virtual Annual Meeting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent guidelines regarding large gatherings prompted the member-led Board of Directors to hold this year's Annual Meeting entirely online.

Member registration was open from 7:15 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday, September 16, and Friday, September 17, and the video presentation of the Annual Meeting was available on the TSEMC website September 16-19. TSEMC Directors Tom Stiles and Bill Joe Postell were reelected to serve three-year terms.

There were 195 members who registered for the Annual

Meeting. Typically, at the conclusion of each Annual Meeting, TSEMC holds a drawing for gifts among those in attendance and registered. Since the meeting was held remotely this year, that was not possible. However, on the Monday following the virtual Annual Meeting, 73 of the registered members were randomly drawn to receive a credit toward their power bill in the amount of \$73. One member also received a Kindle Fire donated by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Congratulations to those members who received this credit and the Kindle Fire, and thank you to all who attended the virtual 2021 Annual Meeting.



Thanksgiving Closing

Tri-State EMC will be closed Thursday, November 25, and Friday, November 26, for the Thanksgiving holiday.

The Difference Between Overhead and Underground Power Lines

Whenever a hurricane, wildfire or other natural disaster causes a widespread power outage, people ask a logical question: Why don't utilities put the power lines underground? The question seems to have an easy answer—until you start looking at the details.

There are pros and cons to “undergrounding” power lines. But one of those cons tends to drown out other considerations—cost. When people hear that burying power lines could more than double their electric bills, that tends to end the discussion.

When a state experiences a major power outage, it often appoints a commission to study ways to reduce the chances of another major outage. Those studies typically cite the process of undergrounding lines as prohibitively expensive.

But states keep studying whether to bury power lines, and people keep asking about it because power outages are expensive, too. In fact, outages cost the U.S. an estimated \$150 billion annually.

Wouldn't burying power lines save some of that money?

Undergrounding lines would protect them from wind, fire, ice and tree branches, but there are other benefits. There wouldn't be poles for cars to crash into or overhead lines for squirrels to chew up. It also would keep poles and wires from obscuring the natural scenery.

Overhead lines do have advantages. While underground lines are less prone to damage, finding and repairing a problem in the air can be a lot easier (and faster) than locating and digging up the exact spot of an underground malfunction.

Also, underground power lines aren't immune from natural disasters. They can be overwhelmed by flooding, and digging or other construction can slice into underground service. But again, it all boils down to cost.

A study by the Edison Electric Institute in Washington, D.C., estimated that burying existing power lines would cost between \$93,000 and \$5 million per mile of line, depending on the type of service and the terrain. The study also included a survey that found 60% of respondents said they would be willing to pay up to 10% more on their energy bills to have their power lines buried. The actual cost, however, would be more than 100% higher, and with that information, more than 75% of the survey respondents said “no.”

Underground lines also require specialized training for lineworkers, says Harry Reeves, Tucker-based Georgia Electric Membership Corp.'s vice president of training, education and safety. “We have an underground school at the Electric Cooperative Training Center in Smarr every year, and we also offer in-house underground training for co-ops. This covers things such as splicing of underground cable, tagging, troubleshooting and making sure they understand proper shoring equipment.”

Some people are served by underground lines. One estimate places that number at two out of every five utility customers. In some cases, utilities are placing new electric service underground, even though it can cost three times as much as building overhead lines.



Workers install a section of underground power lines.

“Forty-five percent of our electrical system is underground, but a larger percentage of customers are served [through] underground,” says Chris Fettes, CEO of Midway-based Coastal Electric Cooperative. “In general, customer density is greater in subdivisions and neighborhoods with underground lines.”

All the new subdivisions in Coastal's territory are supplied by underground lines, Fettes says, but residents in those neighborhoods don't have higher rates. “Our rates are based on the most economical method of service for everyone,” he says adding that developers contribute toward the cost of installing lines underground.

While underground service is often impractical due to cost, utilities are finding other ways to increase reliability by using modern smart-grid technology and drone patrols, as well as old-fashioned tree trimming to keep limbs from touching power lines and causing power blinks. 🍷