

Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Sullivan County REC

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**Board Leadership Certificate
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Office Hours
Monday through Friday
7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

From the CEO



A tough July

By Craig A. Harting

JULY WAS a tough month for electric utilities in north-central Pennsylvania. Day after day and night after night, the weatherman called for severe storms and, unfortunately, most of the time he was right.

How bad was it?

In June, we averaged one hour of outage time per member, but in July alone, we averaged 10 hours per member. In most years, we average 10 hours or less of outage time for the entire year.

Causes?

What were the causes of the July outages? The two biggest things were power supply and trees. Outage times for both doubled over last year's numbers. So what can be done?

As noted in the article on the following pages, Penelec supplies power to most of our substations. We do not buy power from them, but they do bring our power to us from the main transmission grid. Therefore, no power into a substation equals no power out of it.

Penelec had a number of problems with broken lines, a broken switch, communication and fallen trees that knocked out power to our substations. While it continues to address these problems, we will monitor Penelec's progress along with Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc, our co-op wholesale power supplier.

Trees

A constant problem for us over the years has been tree-related outages.

In spite of our best efforts, trees will always be a problem in our wooded service area. Over the past 20 years, we have been aggressive in approaching right-of-way clearing and spraying, and it has helped greatly.

However, many of the trees that affected us in July were outside of the right-of-way. Although we cut danger trees outside of the right-of-way, the ones that got us looked healthy, but they ended up breaking or being uprooted by the wind.

We continue to cut and trim trees and spray areas to prevent regrowth. With our current program, we are cutting 12,000 to 14,000 trees every year and trimming an additional 6,000 to 8,000 trees each year. We also have a contractor spray 200 to 400 acres per year to help slow regrowth.

Plans

We place a high emphasis on maintenance of the system. Each year, we have more than 1,500 poles inspected by a contractor, and our own crews change out circuit breakers to be tested and maintained. In addition, our crews inspect 150 miles or so of the electric system to find and repair any potential outage issues.

We have nine lineworkers to service our 900 miles of line. I want to thank them for all of their efforts to find and repair problems. I also want to thank all of you for your patience and understanding as we continue to work through these severe weather events. 

Power supply issues, storms cause recent outages

By John Zelewicz
Penn Lines Writer

JUNE and July this year were unpredictable ... at least weatherwise. On any given day in June, you might have had to turn the heater on in your car to warm up. The next day, you had to crank up the air conditioning in the hope that it would help prevent you from melting.

Then July rolled around and what a month that was. There were a lot of days when it got hot ... I'm talking really hot ... like 90 degrees. Even if it was in the 80s, the humidity was so high that it was the air that you wear. Every day there was the chance of thunderstorms — and not just your average, garden-variety type of storm. Oh no, each day brought the risk of severe thunderstorms, damaging wind, flash flooding and even hail.

On Wednesday, July 7, almost all of Pennsylvania was under a severe thunderstorm watch. Storms were supposed to move into the area a bit later than most days. Instead of the typical early-afternoon thunderstorms, these

weren't supposed to hit until 7 p.m. or so. Around 6:30 p.m., while the sun was still shining with not a flicker of lightning to be seen or a rumble of thunder to be heard, almost everyone in Sullivan County lost power.

As I've explained before, power outages can occur for any number of reasons. Weather, falling trees, animals, vehicle accidents, equipment failure ... the list goes on and on. On this occasion, Pennsylvania Electric (Penelec), which supplies power to all of Sullivan County, including our three substations, had some issues resulting in a loss of power.

Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) has five substations. Mill Creek Substa-

tion is supplied power by Pennsylvania Power and Light (PPL). Our Estella, Dushore, Kellyburg and Laporte substations are all supplied power by Penelec. These utilities deliver power to our substations over their power lines, and when they have problems and are unable to supply power to the substations, our members have no power either.

Your co-op has spent a lot of time and effort working to make it possible to backfeed power from one substation to another, if the need arises. Once it becomes evident that power will not be



RESTORING POWER: When problems arise, lineworkers can backfeed power to a substation in some situations, but it normally takes around an hour and a half. Here, linemen Tyler Worthen and David Kepner switch power back to the normal feed at the Estella Substation.

restored quickly, crews are dispatched to backfeed the substation.

Backfeeding a substation takes time

Some may think that the co-op simply throws a switch to backfeed from one substation to another. And while we wish it were that simple, there's a lot more involved. It takes two, two-man crews to go to the different switching points to be able to do it swiftly and safely.

Of course, the most important thing is to ensure the safety of our linework-



DON'T MOVE: Power lines can come down due to vehicle accidents, trees, snow and ice, etc. If you come across a downed power line, assume it's still energized, and do not attempt to move it. (Laporte Volunteer Fire Company)

ers. To this end, each service truck has a copy of the switching procedures with them. There is also a copy of the procedures in each substation so it's readily available, if needed.

According to Walt Tubach, manager of electric operations for Sullivan County REC, there's a lot to consider before backfeeding a substation.

"We need at least an hour and a half to switch the feeds around after normal working hours," he notes. "Naturally, it takes less time during normal hours. If Penelec tells us that they'll be back online in an hour or less, we don't switch feeds. But if they can't give us an idea of when power will be restored, we'll go and backfeed to shorten the outage time to our members."

They say lightning never strikes the same place twice. Unfortunately, this proved not to be true when power to our substations was dropped once again around 3:30 p.m. Thursday, July 15, when a tree fell on Penelec's lines.

And then again on Friday, July 16, around 6:14 p.m., Penelec once more dropped power to our Estella and Laporte substations when severe weather moved through the area.

To complicate matters even more,



NO RELIEF: In addition to dealing with a loss of power supply to substations in Sullivan County, line crews had to deal with damage caused by severe storms that struck our area almost daily for much of July.



SULLIVAN SUBSTATIONS: Sullivan County REC has five substations. Mill Creek Substation is supplied power by Pennsylvania Power and Light (PPL). Our Estella, Dushore, Kellyburg and Laporte substations are all supplied power by Penelec.

severe storms struck our area during those times when the substations were down. When a substation is out due to issues from an energy provider, crews are unable to determine if a member is out due to there being no power to the substation or if they're out due to issues such as downed trees and power lines.

Work to repair power in unfavorable conditions

When the wind is howling through the trees, you're told to stay out of the woods. When you hear thunder or see lightning, you're told to seek shelter someplace safe like a car or building. But when you're a lineworker, you are heading out into the storm to work while people are running indoors for safety.

"When everyone goes inside to be out of the storm, our linemen are heading out into hail, lightning, snow and torrential rain," Tubach notes. "And, certainly, it takes more time to repair damage during a storm than on a nice day."

Sullivan County REC and Penelec weren't the only electric utilities affected by storms hitting the area. Other electric co-ops also had to deal with the damage caused by the severe weather.

For a while in July, severe storms struck the area every day. This meant that crews were out making repairs day after day. Many people have jobs where they work their normal shift, head home and don't worry about work until the next day.

But that's not the case for lineworkers, who work during the day on a wide range of tasks, from updating equipment, replacing poles or hooking up power to new members ... the list goes on and on. With the strong storms that impacted our area, there were days when our line crews worked all day and most of the night. Sometimes, they worked all night before returning to work the next day and again the following night when the next round of storms moved through.

"We usually have the men work a day, night and a second day, and then pull them in for a good rest," Tubach explains. "We do this for safety and to ensure they get the rest they need and can come back to work with a clear mind."

During a normal outage, things usually aren't as hectic as they are when lineworkers have to address the loss of power to a substation, but it still takes time to find the cause of an outage,

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Power supply issues and storms

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make repairs and restore power to members. The amount of time required to fix an outage varies from outage to outage. Every outage is an unknown issue until the problem is found. As Tubach explains, what lineworkers find when working on an outage plays an important part in when power is restored.

“In the event a pole is broken from a car wreck or a tree falling on it, this will affect how long it will take for restoration,” he says. “Depending upon the situation, the crew may need to call in more linemen for additional help. They may need a pole, crossarm or transformer. Outages can occur from something as simple as a bird on

the line. Once the problem is found, it may only take a few minutes to correct, but if it’s more serious like a broken pole, it may take five hours or so to repair.”

We would like to thank our members for their patience and understanding when an outage occurs. Lineworkers work as safely and as quickly as possible to restore power.

We want to remind members not to report an outage using email or Facebook as these are not monitored regularly.

During a power outage, members are asked to call our outage number at 570-924-3418 or 800-596-8397 to report it. If you’ve changed phone numbers or switched from a landline to a

cellphone, we ask that you contact our office Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., so we can update your information and serve you better. ☀

OFFICE CLOSING
SULLIVAN COUNTY REC'S
OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED
MONDAY, SEPT. 6, IN
OBSERVANCE OF
LABOR DAY.

More than just an electric company

YOU MAY think that all Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative does is build line, maintain rights-of-way, replace equipment and provide electricity. While that is the primary function and responsibility of your co-op, we have more to offer our members.

Our members are able to purchase security light service, water heaters ... even a device to hook up your generator to your meter when power goes out. Here’s a little information about what your co-op has to offer.

GenerLink

You may be asking yourself what exactly is a GenerLink? GenerLink is a device that eliminates the use of extension cords and other connections that can be hazardous to members and utility personnel. GenerLink detects when a power outage occurs and automatically disconnects from the utility grid, eliminating the possibility of dangerous feedback. GenerLink is equipped with GenerLok, a unique interlocking power-cord system that provides a quick and easy



connection to your portable generator.

Once GenerLink is purchased, lineworkers — at no charge to our members — come out and attach the device. There is only a brief power interruption when lineworkers do this (20 minutes or less). GenerLink fits between your meter base and existing meter.

GenerLink can only be sold to co-op members. The cost for GenerLink (with tax) is \$583. GenerLink is also available in 40 amps. Please contact the office for current pricing.

Rheem Marathon water heater

Marathon water heaters are top-of-the-line units with a lifetime warranty on the tank and a six-year warranty on parts. The tank is a polybutene inner tank with 2½ inches of insulation and a polyethylene outer shell resistant to rusting, denting, and scratches.

The co-op currently offers two sizes: a 50-gallon water heater for \$1,026.28, including tax, and an 85-gallon water heater (call



for pricing). For more information, visit the Rheem website at rheem.com/group/rheem-Residential-Electric-Water-Heaters-Marathon. This is a cash-and-carry service. We do not install water heaters.

Security lighting

Living in a rural area, we don’t have any streetlights to illuminate the road or our yard. One way to help ensure convenience and security is to install security lighting. The cooperative offers a security light program as an additional service to members.

For a monthly fee, the cooperative will install and maintain the outdoor lighting equipment on a treated pole at a location mutually agreeable to both the cooperative and the consumer. The lighting equipment must be electrically connected so the power for the operation of the light does not pass through the member’s meter. We currently offer a 48-watt LED security light at \$16 per month.

If you would like more information concerning GenerLink, Marathon water heaters or security lights, contact the office Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. ☀