

Clearance Safety Notice for FreeState Members

FreeState Electric Cooperative's priority is safety. We want to keep everyone safe from electrical hazards. Whether you are working in the field, moving oversized items, or building something new, FreeState should be a part of your plans for your safety.

Overhead power lines are necessary to deliver electricity, but they can also be deadly if not treated with caution and respect. FreeState urges everyone to watch out for electrical hazards.

It is the members' responsibility to let FreeState know if power lines or electrical equipment need to be moved to accommodate oversized equipment. Contact the cooperative at 800-794-1989 or customerservice@freestate.coop to discuss line clearance, safety, and projects that require oversized equipment, digging, or moving.

SAFETY FIRST

Be aware

- Farmers and their equipment should always be 10 feet away from power lines on all sides. Field cultivators and sprayers can often reach as high as 12 feet in the air. Practice extreme caution and use a spotter to make sure you stay far away from power lines when you use tall equipment.
- If you have purchased new equipment, be aware of antennas or other attachments that may pose new hazards. A newer, bigger piece of equipment may no longer clear a line. Shifting soil may also affect a

machine's ability to avoid power lines each year.

- Power lines also may sag over the years. If power lines on your property are sagging, contact your electric cooperative to repair the lines. Never try to move a power line on your own.
- Overhead power lines are not the only electric hazard on the farm. Pole guy wires, used to stabilize utility poles, are grounded. However, when one of the guy wires is broken, it can become charged with electricity. If you break a guy wire, call the co-op to fix it. Don not attempt to do it yourself.

Follow these other tips:

- Look over work areas carefully for overhead power lines and utility poles. Make sure you, your family and employees know the location of overhead power lines, and use routes to avoid the lines when moving equipment. Do this every year, as equipment sizes and soil conditions may change.
- Be aware of increased heights of equipment, especially new equipment with higher antennas.
- Avoid moving large equipment alone. Have someone watch as you move equipment to ensure you are clear of all power lines
- Be extra careful when working around trees and brush as they can often times make it difficult to see power lines.

Visit www.freestate.coop to learn more about clearance safety.

FreeState's Statement of Nondiscrimination

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and

complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027,

found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form.

To request a copy of the complaint form, call 866-632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: 202-690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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District Offices

East District
P.O. Box 70
McLouth, KS
66054-0070

East & West District Office Hours:
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1100 SW Auburn Rd
Topeka, KS 66615

FROM THE CEO

Your Cooperative Advantage

The cooperative difference is at work in being able to give back to each of our member-owners last month with a consolidation savings adjustment.

If you weren't aware, FreeState Electric Cooperative (FEC) credited \$400,000 to our members in the form of a bill credit that appeared on your February bill. Each member's portion was based on the individual member's usage for the entirety of 2017.

This credit is not to be confused with capital credits. This credit is paying back a portion of excess margins, rather than allocating and waiting to pay them back. Capital credits are allocated yearly and retired later when the financial health of the cooperative allows. Capital credits typically take years to be paid to members and the recent consolidation saving credit is a payback now due to the consolidation savings that were realized this year.

The average member using about 1,100 kWh saw an approximate bill credit of \$20.33. That may not seem like a large number, but that rebate comes from the cooperative advantage.

It comes from ownership in a locally owned and locally controlled co-op that works extremely hard to balance the challenge of providing safe, reliable, and affordable service to areas where members are truly concerned with the rising costs of everything.

We were able to see a significant increase in our proposed savings due to our consolidation a year ago.

So How Did We Do That?

One significant avoided cost was the upgrade of the metering system and implementing an internal line clearance program in the West District service territory. The East District was able to leverage their system to keep the cost of the new system as reasonable



Steve Foss

FreeState Electric Cooperative refunded \$400,000 to our members in the form of a member rebate.

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We Are FreeState

Communications, Marketing, and Public Relations

As a member-owner of FreeState Electric Cooperative, your knowledge and engagement with our cooperative is our priority. We strive to help you better understand the services available to you while getting to know those who are continuously working to provide you with safe, reliable, and efficient power. FreeState will bring our members a year-long series focusing on our individual departments and the employees that are member-driven. This series will be published monthly in The Outlet, on our social media channels, and on our website www.freestate.coop. Our goal is to help our members relate to our employees and to put faces and names behind your electric service because we work for you. We are FreeState Electric Cooperative.

Within the various departments at FreeState Electric Cooperative that work together to bring you power, one department's purpose is to help bridge the gap between our cooperative and the communities and members we serve—our communications team.

Although the communications department is one of the smallest consisting of only two employees, their role in reaching out to our membership is vital to FreeState's success. In between planning community and member apprecia-

tion events, the annual meeting, managing social media and website content, writing and sending newsletters, our communications team strives to ensure our members remain the priority.

"Our top priority here at FreeState is transparency. We want to ensure we let our members know what exactly is going on and how they are being impacted by the decisions made in the board room," said Sarah Farlee, public relations and marketing specialist. "We develop and discover ways

to do that effectively by creating strategies that will help our members understand why the cooperative difference matters and why being a member-owner is a benefit."

The strategies Farlee mentions include reaching various audiences within our membership.

"Utilizing all of the different tools given to us, we focus on ways we can reach our target audience and get the information out there while remaining easily accessible for questions, concerns, and feedback," said Whitney Turek, communications specialist. "This is why you will see the same information promoted on social media accounts, our website, billing statements, and monthly issues of *The Outlet*. We want to reach as many of our members as we can."

In addition to effectively communicating to the membership, the department represents the co-op when sponsoring community events such as food drives, the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour and Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp, and Operation Round-Up.

"Getting involved in the community directly and including our membership in this impact on our community projects a major factor of what makes a cooperative," Turek said. "We dedicate ourselves to upholding the seven cooperative principles, one of which is concern for the community. We want to help our communities thrive."

Operation Round-Up, the newest program FreeState launched, was created with the intention of making a positive impact. This program is an opt-out program where members' bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar each month and placed into a community fund to later be distributed to area organizations who help those in need. It is completely voluntary and any member wanting

to opt-out can at any time.

"This program shows that every member is involved in a small way using spare change to make a major impact on their communities," Farlee said. "It is our hope that as we move forward, we will be able to see just how powerful the cooperative network can be."

FreeState has more than 80 percent of participation from members and in 2017 alone, donated \$16,500 to seven organizations throughout our service territory in an effort to further improve the quality of life for our membership.

"Everyday includes something new and exciting for us to do," Turek said. "Reaching our members and bridging the gap between our cooperative and our membership is a rewarding goal to be a part of."

No matter what a member's concern may be or what event they

It is our hope that as we move forward, we will be able to see just how powerful the cooperative network can be.



FEC Communications Specialist Whitney Turek representing cooperative initiatives at the Topeka Capitol.

attend throughout the year, our communications department strives to ensure our members stay well-informed and know the power of being a cooperative member.

Be sure to check our website for more information on the benefit of being a FreeState member at www.freestate.coop. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to give us a call at 785-478-3444.

Updating Time of Use Meters For FreeState Members

FreeState Electric Cooperative will begin a meter update for all East District members currently enrolled in the Time of Use (TOU) program. FreeState expects these updates to begin in mid-February and be completed by May 1.

This will be a non-invasive update and members will experience a brief power outage during the update.

FreeState will be making every effort to contact members directly. We realize there is a broad time frame for the update, so members requiring an update will likely receive a phone call when our technician will be in your area.

Members with questions can contact FreeState at 800-794-1989 or customerservice@freestate.coop.

Cooperative Advantage

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as possible by eliminating outside contract work. The cooperative avoided additional expense by sharing resources such as equipment and staff.

The cooperative was also able to leverage two existing software systems from both the East and West Districts to implement and optimize a new workforce mobile management system.

Additionally, consolidating two cooperatives eliminates duplication of expenses to outside organizations and associations.

Eliminating duplicate functions and expenses has allowed us to redistribute our capital to bring more departments in-house, such as IT, human resources and communications. These costs attribute to our increased savings, and could only be done by finding efficiencies in each department staff's everyday processes.

Trustees have also worked diligently to make this consolidation a success. They have worked together and guided this consolidation. Members are truly fortunate to have leaders like this in the board room.

If you have any questions about the information in this column or this publication, contact us at customerservice@freestate.coop or 800-794-1989.

Digging Safe Protects Members

Damaging underground utilities can be costly, dangerous and disruptive. Before picking up your shovel for your next digging project, plan ahead to be safe or you just might dig up trouble or even tragedy.

When you call, 811 will route you to a local utility locating service. Make sure to tell the operator where you plan to dig and what type of work you will be doing. A professional will come and mark your utilities with flags or spray-paint within a few business days, so make sure to call in advance.

If you have any private utilities, you will need to hire a private utility locator. Some examples of private utilities include underground sprinkler systems, invisible fences, data communication systems, private water systems, or gas piping to a garage.

Once all utilities have been marked to indicate the location of underground utilities in the area, respect the boundaries and dig carefully. Keep at least 24 inches away from the utility line markings. If you need more control to maintain a safe distance, try excavating by hand, if possible.

Before starting your digging, FreeState Electric Cooperative encourages members to keep these additional tips in mind:

▶ If an area has been tested previously, have it retested. Erosion

and natural processes can lead to shifting in the lines.

- ▶ If you hit a line in the process of digging, report it, even if it appears to be undamaged. Small dents and microscopic damage can lead to major problems.
- ▶ Always wear gloves and other protective equipment while digging.
- ▶ Keep a first-aid kit on hand.

If you make contact with an underground line, stop work immediately. Your first priority should be evacuating the area for safety and then call 911 to notify emergency personnel and the affected utility. Even small nicks in underground lines can be expensive, but necessary, to fix.

If you make contact with an underground line, stop work immediately.

If you think you may have damaged an electrical line, warn those nearby that the ground and any nearby equipment may

be energized. Individuals should take precautions to prevent becoming electricity's path to ground by remaining still with both feet together. If the area must be evacuated, keep your feet together and hop to safety. Do not resume work until the electric utility confirms the area is safe.

For more information about digging safety, visit Call811.com and SafeElectricity.org.



PR and Marketing Specialist, Sarah Farlee (right), and Director of IT, Brent Edgecomb (left), with 2017 Youth Tour Delegates, Sierra Staatz (middle right) and Allison Williams (middle left).

FreeState
Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Inaugural
Annual Meeting
April 24, 2018
7 p.m.

Perry-Lecompton High School Theatre
404 Lecompton Rd, Perry, KS 66073