

Schedule Change for the Development of the 2023 National Electrical Safety Code

Key Highlights

- The National Electrical Safety Code (NESC) is required to be followed for overhead and underground electric distribution and transmission construction. The code is updated through a set process every five years.
- The next update was scheduled to be issued in 2021 and become effective in 2022. The 2021 version would replace the current 2017 version of the NESC.
- Travel restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the ability of the stakeholders to meet to review and discuss draft updates to the NESC.
- NESC has decided to defer the process by a year, leaving the current version in effect.

What has changed?

The United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) construction practices require the use of the latest edition of the NESC (National Electrical Safety Code) in all of their Specifications and Drawings for construction of both overhead and underground electric distribution and transmission. The NESC is updated through an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accreditation process on a five-year cycle.

The process begins the year following the latest edition, with a request for Change Proposals (CPs) followed by a review and meeting by the Technical Subcommittee (SC) to which the CP is assigned. These meetings were last held in the fall of 2018, and usually occur at the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) headquarters in Piscataway, NJ.

Currently, there are seven Technical SC's as follows:

SC 1- Purpose, Scope, Applications, Definitions and References

SC 2- Grounding Methods

SC 3- Electric Supply Stations

SC 4- Overhead Lines- Clearances

SC 5- Overhead Lines- Strength and Loading

SC 7- Underground Lines

SC 8- Work Rules

(Note: SC 6 is an inactive subcommittee.)

The following year, a Preprint of the CPs is published for public review and comment, followed by review of the comments and subsequent meetings of the respective Technical SCs to resolve and vote on any final changes to the NESC. After that, the Main Committee votes on acceptance of the updated version of the NESC prior to submission by ANSI. Assuming that ANSI has no objections, the new edition of the NESC is made available for sale and distribution in August of the year prior to its effective date. The current version of the NESC is the 2017 edition, which was first published in August 2016. The original schedule published in the 2017 edition called for publication of the 2022 edition on August 1, 2021.

Normally, this means that all Technical SCs would be meeting this fall, in order to review comments and cast final votes for changes to the 2017 edition for publication in the 2022 edition. The pandemic has changed the ability to follow the schedule.

Travel is heavily impacted, making in-person meetings extremely difficult and mostly impossible. Virtual meetings were extensively considered and debated, but the NESC Executive SC felt that IEEE and many members of the Technical SCs would not be able to meet the schedule. Based on input from NESC chairs and secretaries, the Executive SC felt that delaying publication by one year was the best option and recommended that to the Main Committee. This action would also delay the meetings for one year, during which time the hope was that the pandemic would either have sufficiently subsided (allowing for travel) or the IEEE could be ready for the type of virtual meetings necessary to review the comments and vote on changes. By extension, this means that publication will be delayed by a year, so **the 2017 edition will remain in effect until 2023.**

What is the impact on cooperatives?

Unless cooperatives are experiencing some problem with full compliance under the current edition and expect the new edition to change it, the impact is minimal. Co-ops accustomed to acquiring new editions of the code as they come out may be troubled by the absence of a 2022 edition next year, but they can continue to follow the 2017 edition without concern since this is the decision of the NESC's Main Committee.

The NESC sets limits for safety of the public and workers. As long as a cooperative meets or exceeds those limits for safety, there is no compliance issue.

What do cooperatives need to know or do about it?

Cooperatives' Engineering and Operations Departments and their consulting engineers should be aware of the change and understand that they should **continue to use the 2017 edition of the NESC for related activities through 2022.** NRECA published a review of major changes being considered for the NESC in a [related February advisory](#), which still stands. Any comments which were submitted prior to the deadline are in the Preprint already and IEEE, as Secretariat of the NESC, will not accept further comments.

Beyond that, cooperatives may continue conducting business as usual with the 2017 edition of the NESC until replaced by the 2023 edition.

Additional Resources

- [ANSI C2-2017 National Electrical Safety Code](#) (NESC)
- Related Advisory: [NESC Preprint for Revising 2017 NESC to 2022 NESC](#) (February 2020)

Contact for Questions

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