
Commitment to Zero Contacts:

What Cooperatives Can Do To Eliminate Serious Injuries

What has changed?

A recent study completed by NRECA and Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange, with the support of statewide safety professionals, reveals that while electric cooperative safety programs overall have greatly reduced days lost to workplace injuries, the record of serious injuries while on the job has not improved. The majority of these serious accidents involve human contact with an energized power line or equipment.

The Serious Injury and Fatalities study analyzed the workmen's compensation records covering close to 90 percent of electric cooperative employees over a ten-year period (from 2006–2016). While overall recordable injuries were down by approximately 50 percent in that timeframe, the number of serious incidents (defined as trauma leading to permanent life-altering affects and incurring medical expenses in excess of \$100,000) did not decline, and rose significantly as a percentage of all events.

Of the 233 serious injuries and fatalities (SIF) cases reported in the study, the leading cause was employee contacts with energized power lines. In response, NRECA, working with Federated Insurance and statewide safety professionals, launched the nationwide Commitment to Zero Contacts initiatives at the NRECA Safety Leadership Summit in April. The initiative includes a leadership commitment campaign and a toolkit of the resources cooperatives can use to help reinforce the right behaviors and procedures (available on Cooperative.com) and reduce the chance of future SIF cases.

What is the impact on cooperatives?

Further analysis revealed that a majority of electrical contacts occurred during small restoration efforts with downed power lines and were deemed to be “completely preventable.”

The problem, Parr says “is not about tools and rules, but about culture.” And the solution, says Branham, lies in a campaign to “strengthen our job planning on all jobs and reinforcing the habit of using our life-saving rules every single time.”

Branham and Parr note that brain science and cognitive psychology show that people undertake repetitive and routine tasks through the “fast response” center of the brain, action taken without conscious thought. While many of the procedures taken by utility line personnel may become routine, intentional effort must be taken to engage the “slow response” part of the brain to consciously think about each step in a work situation where safety procedures must be followed.

The Commitment to Zero Contacts campaign reinforces the principle that “what is important is safety not speed,” says Parr. “We can be efficient, safe, and get the lights back on, all at the same time.”

What do cooperatives need to know or do about it?

The campaign's **toolkit** on Cooperative.com includes:

- **CEO Commitment Form** Since the April launch, more than 300 cooperative CEOs have pledged to assess their co-ops and implement the protocols of the Commitment to Zero Contacts campaign where needed. “We need to make a change in performance,” says Parr. “We can make this a permanent change only with senior leadership stepping up to hold their staff accountable.” CEOs are asked to reinforce the four “Golden Lifesaving Rules,” which include wearing personal protection equipment, using proper clearance procedures, to always test and ground lines, and the use of adequate cover-up.
- **S.A.F.E. Job Planning App and Guide** developed by Federated. The app delivers a job briefing process that emphasizes engaging analytical thinking and reasoning in safety procedures. To date, the app has been downloaded 511 times by cooperatives, with more than 1,800 registrations for user names and log-ins from line crews. The app has also registered 17,095 completed job briefings.
- **Introductory video** to the initiative
- **Employee Commitment Form template**
- **Implementation Guides for Senior Leaders and Field Personnel**
- **Logos** and other graphics



More resources are in development and will be added to the toolkit soon. These include videos on clearance procedures, dedicated observers and adequate cover.

Contacts for Questions:

Bud Branham

Director, Safety and Loss Prevention, NRECA

bud.branham@nreca.coop

561.670.3502

Corey Parr

Vice President, Safety and Loss Prevention, Federated Insurance

cparr@federatedrural.com

913.541.0150