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Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Guest Column



Members lighten each other's burdens through grant programs

By Doug Roles, *Vice President of Member Services*

AS THIS issue of *Penn Lines* magazine is reaching you, we're entering the final weeks of 2019. With the turn of the calendar to November, many of us are already eagerly anticipating the bounty of Thanksgiving and the winter holidays ahead. We're looking forward to special foods, seasonal decorating, festivities and time with family.

While this is a season of celebration, it's also a time of reflection and counting blessings. We all know of folks for whom the past year has been one of hardships, of one sort or another. That's why we're thankful that we were able to make some positive impact in our region this year and exercise the cooperative principle of "Concern for Community."

One way this is accomplished is through our Members Helping Members (MHM) program. As a result of your generosity, we were able to help families in our communities.

Valley REC members can contribute to the Members Helping Members program by having the amount of their monthly bill rounded up to the nearest whole dollar amount or by having one dollar automatically added to their total bill each month. Contributions can be ongoing or a one-time donation to the fund. And you can give any amount you choose.

The program is designed to pro-

vide financial assistance to Valley REC consumers unable to meet their utility bills due to financial hardships brought on by unemployment or under-employment, which can result from a variety of causes. Through mid-October, MHM has assisted 30 members and awarded nearly \$5,000 in funding. And the program will have additional disbursements prior to the end of the year.

Also, we've provided nearly \$14,000 in energy assistance in the form of Community Service Grant Program (CSG) funds. This program provides help to those struggling to pay bills because of illness and related medical expenses. It is funded through unclaimed capital credits, the patronage capital the co-op returns to past and present members. When we can't find a former member, or the estate of a deceased member has closed, those unclaimed monies go back to members through the CSG Program, which also funds scholarships and other educational programs and a variety of civic projects. In total so far this year, the program has awarded more than \$36,000 in grants. And it's all because of our member-owners.

If you have questions about these or any other co-op programs and services, please contact us by calling 800-432-0680. Happy Thanksgiving. ☀

Rubber goods testing ensures quality of lineworkers' safety gear

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

WHEN working around energized power lines, crews need to have confidence that their protective gear — along with safe-work practices — will drastically reduce the risk of injury. To ensure the quality of materials used in energized work, Valley REC conducted mobile high-voltage testing of the co-op's rubber goods and hot sticks in September.

The annual testing weeds out rubber and fiberglass tools and equipment that have become defective. The vendor conducting the testing uses a specially equipped trailer as an on-the-go lab that brings testing services to Valley REC's Huntingdon, Martinsburg and Shade Gap districts.

"Once a year, we have our rubber goods and our hot sticks tested on site," says Todd Ross, Valley's vice president of operations. "Our rubber gloves and sleeves we send away to be tested every 60 days."

The sleeves and gloves worn by lineworkers are made of a thinner, more flexible rubber. Because they are less rugged and are a lineworker's first line of defense, they are subjected to more frequent testing.

The on-site testing in September focused on rubber materials used to cover live wires, materials used to divert the flow of current and the fiberglass poles (hot sticks) lineworkers use to manipulate wire and power line equipment while energized.

To conduct the testing, items are first inspected visually. Then, line coverings (hoses and hoods) are draped over a copper bar. Current is passed through the bar at 20,000 volts for one minute. Blankets are tested in a similar fashion by being spread out on a grounded metal table. Blankets are tested at 40,000 volts. Fiberglass hot sticks and rubber-coated grounding wires and jumpers are also subjected to the dielectric testing. Items passing the



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

SAFETY CHECK: John Summers, owner and general manager of Versatile On-Site Laboratory Testing Services (VOLTS), LLC., tests a rubber blanket. To conduct the test, the orange blanket is spread out on an energized metal table and a wet and grounded towel is placed on top of it. The spark in the center of the table indicates a tear or puncture in the blanket.

procedures are cleaned and stamped with the date of inspection.

"In a nutshell, we're here to find the bad stuff," says John Summers, owner and general manager of Versatile On-Site Laboratory Testing Services, LLC.

Summers has 30 years of experience in electrical equipment inspection. He started his own company, VOLTS, two years ago. The outfit is based in Morgantown, W.Va. VOLTS trailers are on the road from Ohio to Florida and throughout the Northeast providing testing for electric cooperatives,

municipal systems and investor-owned utilities.

Summers explained that failure rates are impacted by several factors. The top cause of failures is improper storage, particularly for rubber blankets. If a line crew in a hurry stows a blanket on the bed of a truck, contact with bolts, spools of wire, or debris can create the small holes and tears, which render it unsafe.

"Another factor would be typical wear and tear during use, like dropping a hot stick and causing it to chip," Summers says.



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AT RIGHT: John Summers, right, VOLTS owner and general manager, shows Valley REC Vice President of Operations Todd Ross a fault found in a rubber blanket. Below: Materials that pass inspection, including insulated fiberglass hot sticks, are stamped with the date of inspection.



PHOTOS BY DOUG ROLES



An insidious threat to the integrity of rubber goods is exposure to chemicals. Spilled chainsaw gas or leaking hydraulic fluid can degrade rubber.

“The fourth impact is weather, prolonged exposure to the sun,” Summers says, “though the equipment is designed to be UV-resistant.”

Rubber goods that fail are taken out of use. VOLTS trailers carry the most common parts for making repairs to hot sticks, so some fiberglass tools can be repaired during testing.

It may sound strange that the workflow is to clean the materials after testing. But Summers says the process should increase the confidence line-workers have in their safety gear.

“I test materials on the worst-case scenario, on how clean or dirty they’ll be after repeated use in the field,” Summers says.

He explained that a normal failure rate, for blankets as an example, is 3-5%, though he’s seen utilities with rates up to 20%. Proper care and storage go a long way. Summers commended Valley’s crews for a failure rate of just 1%. It’s his job to focus on failure. But that number also indicates a 99% rate of success. 🌟

Jump start your holiday shopping

VALLEY REC GIFT CERTIFICATES make great gifts for the co-op members on your list.

To purchase one, complete the information below. If you’d like to surprise more than one person, please list the names, addresses and amounts for each on a separate sheet. Then mail this form with your check or money order for the total amount to: Valley REC, PO Box 477, Huntingdon, PA 16652-0477.

After we receive your payment, the co-op member’s account will be credited in December with the amount you’ve specified. The certificate may be mailed directly to the recipient, or it can be sent to you for personal delivery.



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County events keep electronics out of landfills

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services
THE COMPUTERS, cellphones and televisions we use all have one thing in common — eventually they wear out. And purchasing an electronic device can be easier than getting rid of it when its life is over.

One way to responsibly discard such items is to mark your calendar for your county's next electronics collection day or call your county recycling office. County events collect everything from lightweight flat screen TVs to wood-encased televisions and stereos that doubled as furniture decades ago.

Many items can be disposed of free of charge, while a per-pound rate may apply to certain devices. Collection events reduce the temptation of discarding electronics by hiding them in other garbage or throwing them over the banks of back roads.

"It's to keep all this material out of landfills and out of the woods," says Brad Seville, Fulton County's building and grounds director and a Valley REC member.

He served as the on-site supervisor for a county-sponsored collection in McConnellsburg in September. Seville said his county's collection events continue to draw a large number of participants.

"All these electronic appliances get shredded," Seville explained as a work crew sorted items prior to loading them onto a box truck. "Then the valuable materials are eventually recovered."

Electronic products are made from metals, plastics, and glass, all of which require energy to mine and manufacture. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports recycling consumer electronics conserves natural resources and avoids air and water pollution, as well as greenhouse gas emissions that are caused by manufacturing virgin materials.

According to the EPA, recycling one million laptops saves the energy equivalent to the electricity used by more than 3,500 U.S. homes in a year. For every million cellphones recycled, 35,000



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

ABOVE: Jody Hann, a Valley REC member from Fort Littleton, drops off a printer to Fulton County's building and grounds director, Brad Seville, a Valley REC member from Harrisonville, during the county's electronics recycling day Sept. 4. Below: Huntingdon County residents drop off items at the Huntingdon County Fairgrounds on Sept. 28.

pounds of copper, 772 pounds of silver, 75 pounds of gold and 33 pounds of palladium can be recovered. And the volume of electronic devices being recycled has been trending upward.

"For the past two years, we've had four electronics recycling events each year," says Lou Ann Shontz, recycling coordinator for Huntingdon County. "Last year, we recycled 124,560 pounds, 62.28 tons total, in the four collections. Trash haulers aren't allowed to take electronics anymore. Those items are banned from landfills."

The Huntingdon County program, like others in the area, is administered through the commissioners' office, and county officials seek grant funds from the state Department of Environmental Protection to offset some expenses, such as advertising costs associated with the program. Several counties in Valley REC's service area use the services of E-Loop, LLC, a recycler with a facility in State College, Centre County. Shontz noted that the company offers for a \$10 fee a certificate of

destruction for those who are disposing of personal computers and want to ensure the security of personal data.

Pennsylvania's Covered Device Act of 2010 mandated recycling of e-waste in the Commonwealth. The Electronics Takeback Coalition reports that some electronics manufacturers have takeback programs even in states where e-waste recycling is not mandated. Acer, for example, has an agreement with Best Buy for takeback, while Canon has a mail-back program for all its products.

A by-county listing of upcoming collection events is on the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources website, at dep.pa.gov/Business/Land/Waste/Recycling/Electronics. Huntingdon County's next collection is at the Huntingdon County Fairgrounds on Nov. 9. ☀



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES