

# Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## Somerset REC

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### Office Hours

Monday through Friday  
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

### Emergency Outage Number

814-445-4106  
800-443-4255

## From the General Manager



# Major ice storm hits system

By Ruston Ogburn

THE FIRST major ice storm since Hurricane Sandy in 2012 hit our area the week before Christmas. The impact across our system varied significantly with rain across the western two-thirds of our system and up close to an inch of ice across the eastern third of our system.

Because of these differences, many of our members were surprised we had any outages. But the members around Indian Lake, Fairhope, Callimont and Glencoe saw the extent of the damage when daylight arrived Tuesday morning. Thousands of ice-laden trees had been uprooted, snapped, or had lost limbs. The debris spread across the roads and power lines throughout those areas and power outages began.

Our crews started the around-the-clock restoration as soon as outages began on Monday night. By Tuesday morning, we supplemented our crews with tree-clearing crews and contractors. Additionally, three neighboring electric cooperatives sent linemen to help with this work.

I cannot overstate the amount of effort that goes into days of clearing downed trees, replacing broken poles, and repairing torn wires. The only down time was to get a quick meal and enough sleep to be ready for work before daylight arrived the next day.

By Friday night, which was just under 100 hours after the first outages started, the power was restored across our system. During this time, we received nearly 4,000 phone calls and approximately 1,500 members were without power for some duration. Many of these

members had their power restored multiple times as more trees fell on lines that had already been restored.

With the ice continuing to cling to the trees for several days and increasing wind arriving, a specific answer could not be provided for outage restoration times. We prioritize our work to restore as many members as possible, as quickly as possible. The diagram on page 12d helps to illustrate how this works for our system.

I want to thank the members who were impacted during this past storm for being so gracious to our employees as they worked through this event. Even though we live in an area prone to weather that can bring down the trees that surround us, we are fortunate to have dedicated people who work tirelessly to get your power restored as quickly as possible.

As always, if you have any questions about the storm, or anything else we do at the cooperative, please feel free to stop by or give me a call. ☀



STORM DAMAGE: This scene on South Shore Trail near the Indian Lake Marina is an example of the damage suffered by Somerset REC from the Dec. 16 winter storm.

# Behind the scenes: co-op utility poles

By Emily Baer

WHEN DRIVING down a back-country road or even a road travelled by many, you may notice the many utility poles stretched alongside the road. Often the line of poles stretches off into the right of way over a wide variety of terrain. Maintaining that right of way is a crucial job that must be done properly.

Throughout Somerset REC's territory, 99.9% of the utility poles are wooden, while the remaining are fiberglass. The wooden poles throughout our power system are Southern Yellow Pine that grow in the southeastern region of the country. These trees are between 35 and 40 years old before they can be cut and processed. Only about 15-20% of pole-sized trees are of high enough quality for possible use for utility poles. After the trees are cut,



**POLE INFO:** When calling into the office, this is an example of the metal tag you will be asked to locate. Under the barcode, the five-digit number is a vital piece of information to the operations department.

they are taken to a processing facility for debarking and machining. After being cut to the desired length, they are measured to determine the proper size class. The pole's class determines the appropriate load capacity.

Poles are dried and sterilized to kill any bacteria that may be present in the wood. This process can take between one and three days. After the poles are dry, they are spread out on skids for framing and inspection. Framing will remove any excess bark, put required gains on the poles and bore holes necessary for equipment attachment. The last step is attaching inset metal tags to the face of the pole. The tags iden-



**PLUMB BOB:** Somerset REC lineworker Tanner Smith demonstrates using a plumb bob, or plummet. This tool, which consists of a weight on a string, is used when setting a pole to make sure it is straight.

tify the producer, date of treatment, preservative, required preservative retention, length and class of the pole.

After this process, poles are inspected and loaded into long, metal, treating cylinders that are sealed prior to the poles being exposed to a pressure vacuum-treating cycle. After

treatment, sample borings are taken from the treated poles to determine if all requirements have been met. If a pole meets all physical and treatment requirements, it's shipped to Somerset REC and stored in the cooperative's pole yard until needed.

New poles are needed during pole

replacements or when setting a pole for new construction. The co-op purchases roughly 400 poles a year, and the average cost is \$300 per pole. Most of the co-op's utility poles are between 30 and 40 feet. Poles stored in the pole yard are inspected twice a year. Poles that are already set in the ground do not have routine inspections; however, staking engineers are always checking poles on their daily routes and keep a lookout for leaning, split, or rotting poles.

After a utility pole is replaced, the property owner may express interest in keeping the damaged pole. If the property owner is not interested, the poles are disposed of properly. In a situation where a new pole has been set, and the old pole is remaining off to the side, some wires may still be attached to it. Other communications companies, such as Verizon, Comcast, Somerfield Cable, etc., have pole attachment agreements with the co-op. Once the communications company transfers all necessary equipment to the new pole, the old pole can be removed.

Out of the roughly 40,300 poles on our system, around 25 are fiberglass. Fiberglass poles, which average \$1,200 per pole, are used to replace wooden poles damaged by woodpeckers. When the damage was discovered, the co-op tried patching the holes, only for the birds to move to another spot on the pole and continue the damage. An example of a fiberglass pole on co-op lines can be found along Route 31 West heading toward Bedford.

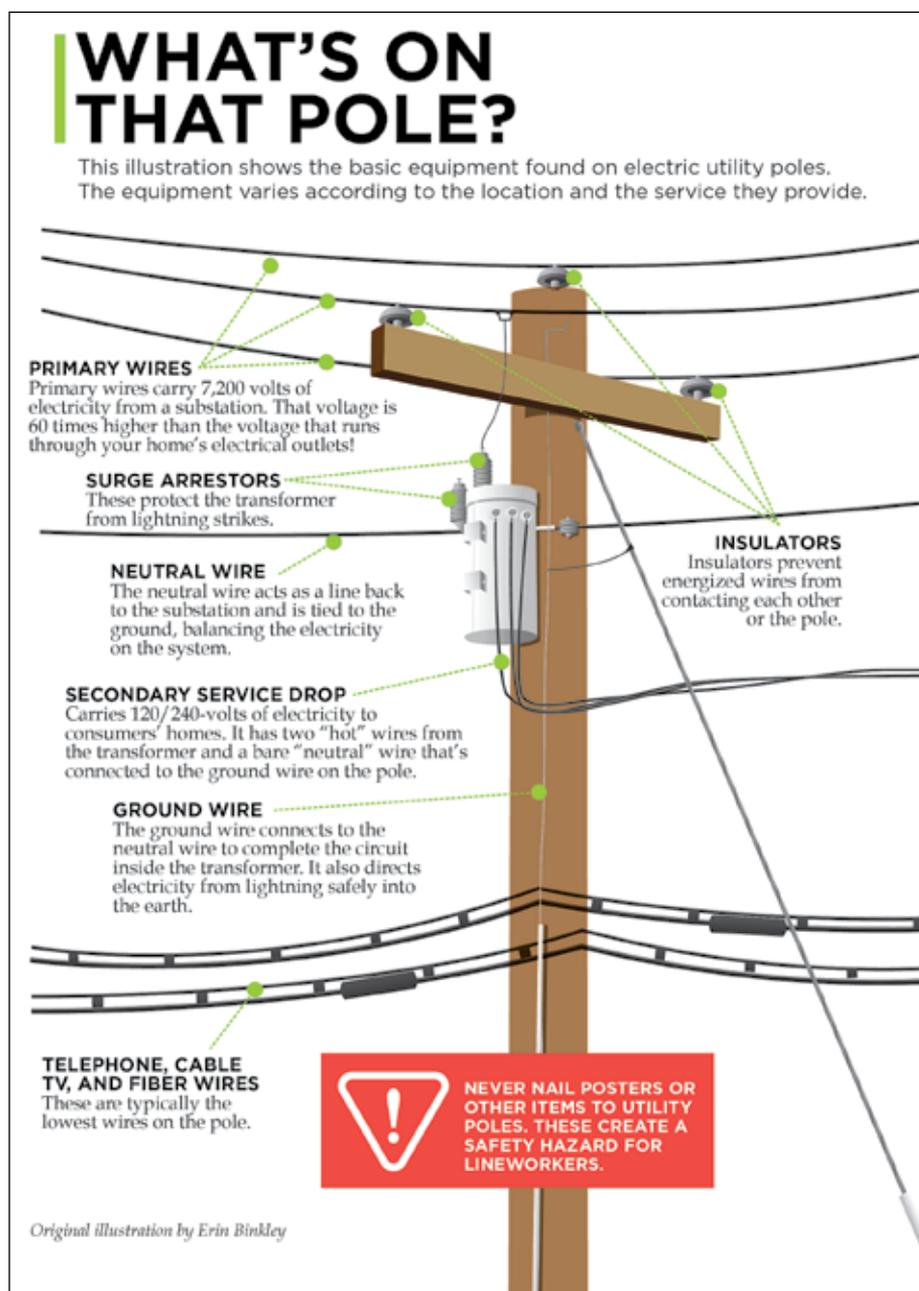
When calling in to the office to report an outage, yard light repair or damaged pole, you may be asked to provide the five-digit pole number. The five-digit number listed under the barcode will help locate your utility pole within seconds using our mapping software. This metal tag can be one of the most helpful pieces of information to the operations department. No matter if the pole is wood or fiberglass, all Somerset REC poles will be labeled with a metal tag.

Aside from the eye-level metal tag, there are also numerous pieces of equipment installed at the top of the

pole. These include primary lines, surge arrestors, a neutral wire, insulators and transformers. Often, a member reports a "loud bang" or "gunshot" sound and assumes a transformer blew up. In most cases, it is a fuse that is attached to the transformer near the surge arrestors. In any case, the lineworkers will determine the cause of the outage when they arrive. Please remember to stay back from downed lines, damaged poles and hazardous situations.

Also, please keep in mind that utility

poles are not bulletin boards. They are the property of Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc., and it is a crime to attach your advertisements, including yard sale and no hunting signs, to these utility poles. Section 6905 of the Pennsylvania Crimes Code states, "A person is guilty of a summary offense if he drives a nail or tack or attaches any metal or hard substance to or into any public utility pole line." This creates a safety hazard for not only cooperative lineworkers, but cable and phone lineworkers, too. 🚫





**CO-OP CHEER:** Office assistant Mindy Luteri, left, accepts toys donated by members Jerry and Donna Smith, Buffalo Mills. Members had the opportunity to donate a new, unwrapped toy in exchange for a pack of four LED lightbulbs. This was the second year the co-op offered the program and it was again a success. The co-op collected around 140 toys this year. Toys were distributed to the Marines Toys for Tots, Salvation Army, Community Action for Partnership Somerset, and the Shanksville and Salisbury school districts that were also collecting toy donations. We look forward to providing this opportunity again, and thanks to all of you who contributed.

## 25 Years of Service



**OPERATIONS ASSISTANT:** Tawnya Zorn, operations assistant at Somerset REC, accepts a gift for 25 years of service from General Manager Ruston Ogburn. She started at the co-op in 1994 as a front office assistant and moved to the outside operations department in 2008.

### Powering Up After an Outage

When the power goes out, we expect it to be restored within a few hours. But when a major storm or natural disaster causes widespread damage, extended outages may result. Our line crews work long, hard hours to restore service safely to the greatest number of consumers in the shortest time possible. Here's what's going on if you find yourself in the dark:

#### 1. High-Voltage Transmission Lines:

Transmission towers and cables that supply power to transmission substations (and thousands of members) rarely fail. But when damaged, these facilities must be repaired before other parts of the system can operate.

#### 2. Distribution Substation:

A substation can serve hundreds or thousands of consumers. When a major outage occurs, line crews inspect substations to determine if problems stem from transmission lines feeding into the substation, the substation itself or if problems exist further down the line.

#### 3. Main Distribution Lines:

If the problem cannot be isolated at a distribution substation, distribution lines are checked. These lines carry power to large groups of consumers in communities or housing developments.

#### 4. Tap Lines:

If local outages persist, supply lines (also known as tap lines) are inspected. These lines deliver power to transformers, either mounted on poles or placed on pads for underground service, outside businesses, schools and homes.

#### 5. Individual Homes:

If your home remains without power, the service line between a transformer and your residence may need to be repaired. Always call to report an outage to help line crews isolate local issue.



**CHIEF LINEMAN:** Rus Ogburn, general manager, right, acknowledges Phil Martz Jr. by giving him a thank you gift for 25 years of service. Martz started his career at the co-op as a summer employee on the right-of-way crew. He was then hired as a full-time employee on the right-of-way crew, advancing to a lineman and is currently a chief lineman.