**Stay Safe Exploring the Great Outdoors this Summer**  
By Abby Berry, Special Contributor

Summer is in full swing, and that means it is time for fun in the sun! As you find yourself spending more time outdoors, Choptank Electric Cooperative reminds you to stay safe.

Planning a home improvement project? When working outdoors, you may be using tools, such as ladders, power tools, shovels – or even paintbrushes with extendable arms. These items help you get the job done but have the potential to be dangerous if used improperly.

Pay attention to where you place metal ladders or dig for fence posts. Before you start any project, always look up and avoid overhead power lines. Keep a minimum of 10 feet between you and overhead lines.

If you are planning a project that requires digging, remember to dial “811” first to find out if the area you will be working in is clear of underground power lines. Power tools should be kept away from wet surfaces, and outlets should not be overloaded.

Exploring the great outdoors is a great way to spend time with the family, but keep these safety tips in mind.

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Safety Tips for Portable, Standby Generators

Hurricane season started on June 1 and continues until November 30. While many people only think of generators during disastrous weather situations, generator safety is a year-round topic and the growing popularity of emergency generators has resulted in several million being placed in homes and small businesses across the nation.

However, only a small percentage are hooked up or used correctly. SafeElectricity.org urges consumers to understand proper generator safety steps.

“Generators can be a lifesaver for some and can improve the quality of life after a natural disaster such as a hurricane, tornado, or earthquake,” explains Molly Hall, executive director of the Safe Electricity program. “However, it’s critical that proper safety precautions be taken to prevent accidents that could affect you, a family member, neighbor, or utility lineworker.”

Generators can be temporarily or permanently installed. A permanent generator is wired into a house by a qualified electrician using a transfer switch. This protects you, your neighbors, and repair crews from electricity backfeeding onto power lines. This can seriously injure anyone near those lines, especially co-op crews working to restore power. A temporary generator fired by gasoline or diesel fuel should not be attached to a circuit breaker, fuse, or outlet.

The improper use of a standby generator can lead to injury or death. When using a generator, SafeElectricity.org urges you to follow these tips to keep you and your family safe:

- Read and follow all manufacturer operating instructions to properly ground the generator. Be sure you understand them before starting it up.
- Standby generators should have a transfer safety switch installed by a professional. Portable generators should never be plugged directly into a home outlet or electrical system—use an extension cord to plug appliances into an outlet on the generator.
- Never operate a generator in a confined area, such as a garage. Generators produce gases, including deadly carbon monoxide. They require proper ventilation.
- Remember, when venturing outside after a severe storm, stay away from downed power lines and be alert to the possibility that tree limbs or debris may hide an electrical hazard. Assume that any dangling wires you encounter are electrical, and treat all downed or hanging power lines as if they are energized. Warn others to stay away and contact the electric utility.
- Generators pose electrical risks, especially when operated in wet conditions. Use a generator only when necessary when the weather creates wet or moist conditions. Protect the generator by operating it under an open, canopy-like structure on a dry surface where water cannot form puddles or drain under it. Always ensure that your hands are dry before touching the generator.
- When you refuel the generator, make sure the engine is cool to prevent a fire, should the tank overflow.
- There should be nothing plugged into the generator when you turn it on. This prevents a surge from damaging your generator and appliances.
- Be sure to keep children and pets away from the generator, which could burn them.

For more safety information on the use of portable and standby generators and safety after a storm, go to SafeElectricity.org.

Safe Electricity is the safety outreach program of the Energy Education Council, a non-profit organization with more than 400 electric cooperative members and many others who share the mission of educating the public about electrical safety and energy efficiency.
May Trust Awards 2015

- Phillips Wharf Environmental Center, Inc. –$1,000 for a vehicle wrap
- Ridgely Cemetery Association –$340 lawn maintenance for the cemetery
- Talbot County Department of Parks and Recreation –$1,000 camp registration fees for participants
- Eastern Shore Hospital Center Auxiliary –$300 installation of a fence for the garden area
- Destination Imagination – Talbot County –$500 travel expenses
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Easton Conference –$1,000 purchase of a freezer for their Food Pantry
- Bennett Middle School Destination Imagination Team –$500 travel expenses
- Delmarva Discovery Center & Museum, Inc. –$599.99 purchase of an iPad and case
- Brown Box Theatre Project –$700 for wireless microphones
- Chapel District Elementary School PTO –$500 for playground structure
- Snow Hill Ecumenical Food Pantry –$1,000 for replacing the roof on their facility
- Chesapeake Bay Girl Scouts Troop #228 –$200 the purchase of material for picnic tables for Silver Award Project

The total of approved applications for May was $20,949.49, which included $13,309.50 for individual home and medical expenses.

Electric Trust is a 501-c-3 charitable foundation funded by Operation Round-Up donations from members of Choptank Electric. Funds from the Trust are distributed in all nine counties of Maryland’s Eastern Shore.

Stay Safe Exploring

- Children should never climb trees near power lines – always assume a wire is live. Fly kites and remote controlled-airplanes in large open areas like a park or a field, safely away from trees and overhead power lines.
- Planning to take a dip in the pool? Electrical devices, such as stereos, should be kept at least 10 feet away from water sources, and outdoor electrical outlets should always be covered. If you hear a rumble of thunder, exit the pool right away.
- Speaking of thunder, summer storms can be dangerous if you’re caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. If you find yourself outdoors during a storm, move toward suitable shelter with covered sides, and stick to low-lying ground if possible.

These are just a few tips to remember when you are spending time outdoors this summer with your family. Have some fun out there, and always keep safety in mind!

Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation’s 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.
Electric Cooperatives Earn Top Scores for Customer Satisfaction
by Mark Hayes, NRECA Senior Communications Manager

Consumer-members of not-for-profit electric cooperatives are more satisfied with their utility services than customers of investor-owned (IOU) or municipal utilities, according to the 2015 American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). Touchstone Energy cooperatives have consistently held the top ACSI ranking, receiving a score of 80 this year. IOUs and municipals scored 74 and 73 respectively.

Across all 43 industries measured by the ACSI, electric co-ops have the 10th highest customer satisfaction score.

"Cooperatives work hard to put consumer-members first, and the success of the co-op approach is reflected in these scores," said National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO Jo Ann Emerson. "Co-ops are member-owned, which makes them especially involved in their communities and dedicated to the satisfaction of their members."

The ACSI establishes satisfaction benchmarks by surveying U.S. residents about their energy utilities, including residential experiences with reliability and restoration services.

Touchstone Energy is a national alliance of 750 local, consumer-owned electric cooperatives providing high standards of service to members large and small.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association is the national service organization that represents the nation’s more than 900 private, not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric cooperatives, which provide service to 42 million people in 47 states.

Choptank Electric Cooperative, a Touchstone Energy Cooperative, is an electric distribution co-op located on Maryland’s Eastern Shore serving approximately 52,000 members. Choptank Electric Cooperative exists to provide reliable and cost effective electricity that improves the quality of life for our member-owners.

Rate Adjustment for Co-op Members is Announced

The Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) has approved a rate adjustment for all of the Cooperative’s rate classes effective July 1, 2015. The overall system increase is 6.07% with variances based on rate schedules and usage. The Cooperative filed to revise its rates and charges for electric service in October 2014. The last distribution rate increase took place over six years ago. The primary reason for the rate increase is from infrastructure investments made to increase the reliability of the system.

Over the past six years Choptank has increased electric plant by over $39 million throughout all nine Eastern Shore counties to improve the reliability of the system. The Cooperative has also strengthened the vegetation management efforts and budget in order to decrease storm related outages. President and CEO Mike Wheatley said, “These capital investments and vegetation management efforts have been paying off as evidenced by industry reliability metrics. Our average number of outages per member and the average duration of these outages have decreased to all-time lows.”

“We have been mitigating our need to have a rate increase by improving operational efficiencies and productivity over the past several years, but the cost of materials has continued to rise. We are certainly cognizant of the need to keep rate increases at moderate levels. This rate increase averages about 1% a year over the past six years which is well below overall price indexes in the country. It is a tribute to our Board and employees that we are able to keep these increases to a minimum,” said Mr. Wheatley.

All rate tariffs may be found on the Co-op's website at www.choptankelectric.coop under Member Services, Rates.