

# SOUTHEAST COLORADO POWER ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER 2020

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**Our primary mission** is to provide high-quality, reliable electric service at a reasonable cost to our members, improve their quality of life through new technologies and services, be a visible and active member of the community and serve our members with respect, courtesy and responsiveness.

SOUTHEAST COLORADO  
POWER ASSOCIATION IS  
AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY  
PROVIDER AND EMPLOYER



## POWER ON: October is National Co-op Month

BY JACK JOHNSTON CEO



JACK JOHNSTON

**A**s an electric cooperative, our top priority is always to provide reliable, affordable energy to you, the member-owners we serve. Because we are a co-op, our mission is to enrich the lives of our consumer-members and serve the long-term interests of our local communities — and this mission has never been more critical than in recent months. One of the seven principles that guides all electric co-ops is *concern for community*. To me, this principle is essential to our DNA.

October is National Co-op Month, and electric cooperatives across the country are highlighting the many ways we “Power On.” Keeping this theme in mind, I recognize the essential role we play in serving special communities like ours. Who would have fathomed in March that the COVID-19 virus would amount to a test of our communities and our nation? The changing circumstances due to the pandemic have created both challenges and opportunities. Over the past several months, we’ve all been challenged to operate differently, and we have proudly stepped up to help our members and strengthen the safety net for our neighbors.

As an essential service and to ensure reliability of your power supply, we adapted our internal operations to safeguard business

continuity to all members. Any modifications focused on keeping our staff, and members we’ve had contact with, healthy. That said, we’ve proudly maintained “business as usual” to the greatest extent possible, which significantly distinguished us amongst our statewide peers. And while we certainly missed visiting with you in person at our April annual meeting, we’ve attempted to stay connected via all other means including social media and community sponsorship of events that were still able to occur.

We’ve seen other local businesses rising to meet similar challenges during this time, because that’s what communities do. While the challenges caused by COVID-19 have been daunting, I’m heartened to see how everyone is pulling together. Although this month’s celebration is not just about electric cooperatives but all types of companies that serve under this business model, I believe this year it should recognize the community cooperative because that is how southeastern Colorado has successfully managed through these tough times.

In 1937, we were established by the community to serve the community, and that’s what we’ll continue to do: Power On — because we live here, too!

From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric cooperatives are proud to serve 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation’s landscape.



# Increase Your Brain Power: Fun Energy Facts



**D**id you know that, although Americans account for 4.25% of the world's population, we use at least 17% of the world's energy? Fossil fuel sources — coal, petroleum, natural gas — provide the most energy; they “fuel” 80% of our nation's energy consumption. Nuclear electric power accounts for approximately 8% and various types of renew-

able energy provide around 11%, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Most Americans own cars and getting around in them accounts for a large part of our energy use. Less than 10% of Americans use public transportation. Worldwide, more than 20% of energy consumed is used for transportation.

Here are some other energy facts:

- Heating and cooling our homes account for about half of the average utility bill.
- To help reduce your utility bill, find and fix sources of air leaks in your home and replace inefficient windows, especially those that are single-paned. Energy-saving related fixes add up to a more efficient home, thus saving on energy costs. (These are only a few ways to use less energy. Home energy audits can also shed light on sources of inefficiency.)

- Lighting accounts for approximately 10% of home utility bills. Like your dad always said, don't light an empty room. Also, put high-efficiency lightbulbs to work for you.
- The typical U.S. family spends \$2,200 or more on home utility bills each year.
- Using a smart or programmable thermostat to adjust your thermostat 10 degrees for eight hours a day could lower your heating and cooling costs by 10% per year.
- Despite previously being touted as energy saving, closing vents in unused rooms can put a strain on your heating and cooling system, which typically uses more energy, not less.

For more information on ways to save energy in your home or about a home energy audit, contact Southeast Colorado Power Association.

Sources: Energy Resource Center, Energy.gov, Energy Information Administration.

## Emmalie Byrne Wins Essay Contest



**W**ashington D.C. Youth Tour winner Emmalie Byrne was unable to experience the trip this year, but she was offered a chance to win a \$500 scholarship by submitting an essay of what she would ask congressmen and senators if she were given the opportunity. Her essay was one of the winners and was sponsored by the Colorado Electric Educational Institute, Colorado Rural Electric Association and Southeast Colorado Power Association.

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# Co-ops and the Local Communities They Serve

BY PAUL WESSLUND

**W**e like the word “local.” We like it because it’s the nearby hardware store where we can get what we need. It’s where we meet friends for coffee. It’s the shop where they look us in the eye and smile. It’s a word of warmth that makes us feel known.

Local also means your electric co-op. It’s as local as you and your neighbors because it is an integral part of the community. It’s grown and changed with you, possibly starting before you were even born. Because it’s made up of you and your neighbors, it’s as unique to each part of the country as you are. And it changes to help with what’s going on in your community, whether that means bringing electricity to farmsteads 80 years ago, providing the community with access to high-speed internet or helping to navigate COVID-19 social distancing today.

October is National Co-op Month, and this year it makes sense to use this time to recognize and celebrate the variety that is the essence of being local.

That local heritage for electric co-ops started in the 1930s with neighborly visits, often on horseback, from one farm to the next, talking about the lights they could see in the city but didn’t have themselves. They weren’t likely to get those modern conveniences because no company saw a profit in stringing wires to power a few lightbulbs in a remote farmhouse.

## NO SUCH THING AS A TYPICAL CO-OP

So, the local farmers and ranchers took matters into their own hands. They pooled \$5 startup fees; organized member-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives; and convinced local politicians to create a federal loan program to help with the rest of the cost. They created what others didn’t see: one of the most efficient agricultural economies in the world and communities based around a variety of businesses and industries from manufacturing to tourism.

Today, 900 electric co-ops provide electricity to more than 20 million businesses, homes, schools and farms. They cover more than half the land in the United States. They employ 68,000 people and invest \$12 billion a year in local economies, generating \$88.4 billion to the nation’s gross domestic product.

Because electric co-ops are so uniquely local, it’s difficult to describe a typical co-op. They’re big and small. The largest electric co-op serves nearly 350,000 members; the smallest, 113. They’re in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. While the electric co-op rural heritage meant they didn’t serve cities, many of their communities grew over the decades. About 40% now serve counties classified

as rural and 60% classified as metropolitan. Another way to look at that variety is by the average number of members served by each mile of a co-op’s power lines. The co-op with the densest population serves 78 meters for each mile of line. Southeast Colorado Power, your co-op, averages less than 2 meters per mile of line. While those numbers reflect the variety and uniqueness of who co-ops serve, what they do also matters.

## LESS POLLUTION, MORE RENEWABLE ENERGY

Today, environmental concerns are among co-op priorities and co-ops are focused on reducing power plant emissions. From 2009 to 2016, co-ops reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 8%, nitrogen oxide emissions by 24% and sulphur dioxide emissions by

66%. Co-ops also launched energy efficiency programs, many offering home and business “energy checkups” to make sure members got the best value for their energy dollar.

Electric co-ops are helping power the growth in alternative energy. They pioneered the development of community solar, which allows co-op members to participate in renewable energy without the expense and effort of installing solar panels on their own property. Co-op solar capacity has more than quadrupled in the past five years. Seventeen percent of co-op electricity now comes from hydroelectric power, solar, wind and other renewable sources. For Colorado co-ops, that percentage is over 30.

High-speed internet service is increasingly required for a vibrant local economy, so co-ops around the country are exploring ways their members can get connected.

And now that we’re all faced with the fallout from the effects of COVID-19, electric co-ops are again on the job as the virus changes everything from the national economy to how we say hello to our neighbors.

Electric co-ops are developing payment plans for people out of work. They’re socially distancing line crews. They’re setting up drive-in or virtual membership meetings, and offering virtual energy audits.

The world keeps changing and electric co-ops will continue to adapt. Each co-op’s approach may differ, but they’ll do whatever it takes to adapt in ways that make the most sense for the people in their community. That’s what it means to be a local electric co-op.

Paul Wesslund writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.





# KNOWING WHAT TO DO AROUND A DOWNED POWER LINE COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

Fall rains can come with severe storms and winter's not far behind. All of this weather can interfere with power distribution or even bring down lines. So, what is the most important thing to remember about a downed power line? **DO NOT GO NEAR IT.** For any reason.

After a storm causes damage in or alongside a roadway, be alert and slow down. Do not attempt to drive over downed lines, or through water, snow or debris that could be covering downed lines. Driving over a line can pull more lines or related equipment down. If you encounter a downed line, pull over and report the location to 911. (Gail Crawford acct #308460000)

Here is some additional information about downed lines, which can occur after a severe storm or an accident involving a power pole.

**Q: Can I tell if a downed line is energized by looking?**

A: No, there is no way to tell. Always assume a downed line — or any line — is live, even if it is not buzzing or sparking.

**Q: What should I do if I am in an accident involving a power line or other electrical equipment?**

A: Do not get out of your car or truck. It is always safer to remain inside a vehicle, which acts as an insulator and keeps you out of the path of stray electricity. Call 911 and tell the dispatcher a downed line or other electrical equipment is involved. Southeast Colorado Power Association personnel will be dispatched to the scene to de-energize the power.

**Q: Is there any reason I should get out of the vehicle?**

A: Yes, but only when your vehicle is on fire or if you see smoke. If that is the case, make a clean jump from the vehicle without touching it — cross your arms closely to your chest — and then hop with feet together as far as you can, preferably 50 or more feet away.

**Q: What happens to the electrical current when a line is down?**

A: Once a power line is in contact with a car or truck, the ground or other objects, it energizes the area. The electrical current spreads to the vehicle and ground, and it ripples out. Each “ring” of the ripple represents a different voltage. Stepping from one voltage to the next can cause your body to become a path for electricity and electrocute you. This is why you should hop or shuffle once you make a clean jump from the vehicle. Always keep your feet together, like a bunny hopping or a penguin shuffling.

**Q: What else can I do?**

A: Put your window down and yell to others not to approach the scene. They could be shocked or electrocuted if they walk or run over the energized area or touch anything that is energized.

**Q: What if I can't tell what type of line is down?**

A: It doesn't matter. Remain in your vehicle and wait for the utility personnel to arrive.

**Q: Are there any other instances when these same safety tips apply?**

A: Yes, the same rules apply to any type of equipment, such as farming and construction equipment, that comes in contact with overhead lines or electrical cabinets or equipment.


**Q: What should I do if the windshield is broken and the downed wire is in my car or truck?**

A: Stay in the vehicle and do not touch or try to move the wire or attempt to use other objects to move the wire.

**Q: What if I hit a pad-mounted transformer (metal cabinet or green box) in a yard?**

A: Pad-mounted transformers house electrical equipment connected to underground power lines. The same safety precautions apply to all to these cabinets and the voltage that could stray when they are damaged.

For more information about staying safe around electricity, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).



**You Could Be A Winner This Month**

If you find your name in this issue, please contact Southeast Colorado Power Association at 719-384-2551 or 800-332-8634 to receive a credit on your next power bill.

**Last month's winner was Donald Koehn.**