



## Members should call SEC before cutting trees



Cutting trees near SEC lines can have major impacts, including equipment damage, loss of electricity and serious injuries.

*By Mark Thomas, Community Relations Coordinator*

Before getting the chainsaw out of the garage to cut a tree near a Southside Electric Cooperative (SEC) power line or pole, members are asked to stop and make a call.

Doing so could prevent some unwanted consequences.

Gary Gibbs, SEC's district operations supervisor in Crewe, says his office has investigated seven incidents since last July in which someone cutting a tree adjacent to a line or pole had an unexpected outcome. In one case, a large pine tore down primary and neutral lines, while in another, a falling tree landed on a wire, breaking the top of the pole. In a third incident, a dead tree being cut fell into and lodged in a live oak. When the person doing the cutting tried to

remove the dead tree by sawing into the oak, it fell into a line, leading to a blown fuse on the pole.

“They might not even think about a power line being there.” Gibbs adds that the person doing the cutting might not be a member, but a contractor or logger hired to remove trees.

Gibbs and Dennis Bell, the Cooperative’s district operations supervisor in Altavista, note several problems can occur when cutting trees. They include possible damage to poles, lines, transformers or other SEC equipment, which will have to be repaired or replaced, possibly after regular working hours that means overtime charges. Members are liable for the damage and repairs. Gibbs says that could run into thousands of dollars.

Damage could also lead to a member or an entire neighborhood losing electricity. Needless to say, that’s an inconvenience to everyone affected.

And then, there’s the chance that someone gets hurt. No one was injured in the three incidents cited above, but it could happen.

“We want all of our members to stay safe,” Gibbs says.

Adds Daron Hanson, SEC’s director of safety and loss control, “If we can be involved, we can help avoid safety issues.”

Gibbs’ advice is to “look up and contact us.” He says the Cooperative will send an employee out to look at the tree the member wants to cut, evaluate the situation and offer some suggestions. There’s no charge for the service.

“If it doesn’t look right, we’re going to tell you,” Bell says.

Now, SEC isn’t in the logging or treecutting business; the Cooperative doesn’t have the staff to go out and cut all of the trees members want to take down. However, being able to offer some input to members about tree removal near lines and poles could prevent future problems. Members are asked to call SEC several days in advance.

“We’d rather meet with them before they start cutting,” Gibbs says.

Members should call 1-800-552-2118 about tree issues.

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Navigation: [Back to Newsletter](#)