

Safety First



By Joe Ticheli
SLECA Safety Coordinator

Critter outages and other safety hazards

There's a war going on between all sorts of critters and electric utilities—and the varmints are usually winning.

As strange as it may seem, squirrels, raccoons, possums, snakes and birds have caused more bizarre electrical outages, blinks, power surges and service interruptions than the public would believe possible, and trying to put a stop to the problem is not only expensive, but nearly impossible.

Weather remains the leading cause of power interruptions so electric utilities spend vast amounts of money and time every year keeping trees and limbs out of power lines, but critter outages aren't that simple to prevent. As subdivisions invade what was once natural habitat, more and more wildlife ends up with human neighbors. And that inquisitive wildlife is stirring up trouble by turning power lines into highways and power poles into perches. (Acct. No. 2053475500)

This situation is not limited to rural states such as Louisiana. A recent story in the Wall Street Journal related how a Washington, D.C. utility serving 1.8 million urban consumers reported 999 squirrel-related outages last year, a big jump over the 702 reported outages the year before. The animals kept getting themselves fried while climbing on transformers by creating a "short" between live wires and connectors on the transformers. The utility tried to reduce the problem by installing special insulators (\$5 each), but officials frankly admitted "there's nothing squirrels can't get by" when they want to.

Elsewhere, a municipal system in Tennessee spent \$25,000 putting "varmint shields" on "hot spots" where critters were causing the most trouble,

but had only "limited" success. Other utilities apply expensive plastic "barriers" around power poles or spray predator urine around substations to spook invading pests.

SLECA installs guards and barriers to prevent wildlife such as squirrels, raccoons and snakes from shorting out electrical equipment. Guards are attached to the tops of utility pole crossarms to keep birds from landing on the pole and causing a short in the system.

Some squirrels have developed a taste for the insulation on wires or even gnaw on the wire itself, resulting in crispy critters and lots of mad consumers.

Large birds using poles as a perch can also cause problems, as do raccoons, possums and even snakes that have crawled into substations and managed to short out equipment affecting thousands of consumers.

Customers often find "critter outages" hard to believe, especially when they cause power surges that can damage home appliances. Laws that protected "endangered" animals or discouraged fur trapping has resulted in beaver infestations so large that they often topple trees into power lines in Ohio, Texas and elsewhere.

For utility employees, critters make every day an adventure, from the meter reader dealing with the family dog protecting his turf to the lineman who just discovered there's a hornet's nest attached to a transformer he's working on. Utility field workers have to deal with bee, wasp and hornet stings, spider bites and even fire ants that invade underground transformers. And let's not forget snake bites, ant nests or wild animals flushed out by right-of-way crews clearing lines.

SLECA SWEEPSTAKES

Did you know that each month SLECA gives away CASH just for reading LOUISIANA COUNTRY? It's true. Every month, four lucky SLECA consumers have their account numbers randomly selected by computer. The numbers are then hidden in the articles in the SLECA News section of LOUISIANA COUNTRY. Then it's up to you. If you see your account number, call SLECA and win \$25.00 in cash or have your winnings applied to your bill. It's that simple. So, if you are not reading LOUISIANA COUNTRY you're missing out on great local articles and the possibility of winning extra money.

SLECA News



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Alexander Doyle, President
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Don't miss SLECA's Farmers' Market and Craft Festival

South Louisiana Electric Cooperative Association's 21st annual Farmers' Market and Craft Festival expects clear skies and fair weather during the much anticipated event to be held Saturday, Sept. 26 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at SLECA's Houma office, 2028 Coteau Rd. (Hwy. 660).

The popular and well-attended event established in 1988 that attracts thousands of visitors will again feature a "pumpkin patch." The popularity of crafts and farmers' markets where consumers can benefit from a wide selection of locally produced goods and support local craftsmen has been on the rise across America.

Not only farmers benefit from old-fashioned, open air, European-style markets. The proliferation of craft and farmers' markets has been a boon to local communities as people flock to them in search of arts and crafts as well as fresh produce, homemade sauces, jellies, cheeses and much more.

Festival Coordinator Elaine Robertson notes "Once again, this event is a tribute to the many

SLECA employees who give up their free Saturday to work at the fair. Unfortunately, last year we had to cancel the Farmers' Market because of Hurricane Gustav, but we're excited to get back on track this year and offer this fun-filled event to the community."

Robertson, SLECA's Member Services Supervisor, reports over 200 craft booths along with produce of every sort as well as



music, educational exhibits and much more will be offered at this year's event.

Few markets are on a par with SLECA's annual harvest event. Many vendors and farmers look forward to it all year.

SLECA's Farmers' Market is also the site of the annual 4-H

Seafood Cookery Contest held in SLECA's Coteau Room. This year's annual Seafood Cookery Contest ends with the local director of the 4-H handing out trophies to winners who come up with the best recipes for preparing oysters, crawfish, shrimp, fish, crab and appetizers in elementary to high school age groups.

Admission is free and there's lots of parking. Shoppers have a wide variety of items to choose from with plenty of vendors on hand with barbecue, seafood, onion mums, po-boys, plate lunches, sweets and much more. Colorful seasonal decorations of hay, pumpkins and other fresh produce add to the festive atmosphere and the weather is usually ideal.

Live entertainment will be provided and local volunteer firefighters are also scheduled to recognize Fire Prevention Month and pass out tips and safety coloring books.

There will also be a petting zoo and pony rides to entertain the children. (Acct. No. 3550046205)

Vendor space remains available. For more information, call Robertson at 876-6880 or 800/256-8826.

Vendors sought for Farmers' Market and Craft Festival

South Louisiana Electric Cooperative Association's (SLECA) Annual Farmers' Market and Craft Festival will be held Sept. 26 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., at SLECA's Houma headquarters, 2028 Coteau Rd. (Hwy. 660). The popular and well-attended event established in 1988 has attracted thousands of visitors.

Festival Coordinator Elaine Robertson notes "The success of the event is a tribute to the many SLECA employees who give up their free Saturday to work at the fair."

Robertson, SLECA's Member Services Supervisor, reports over 200 craft booths along with produce of every sort as well as music, educational exhibits and much more is offered at the annual event.

SLECA's annual Farmers' Market & Craft Festival

September 26, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
SLECA office grounds
2028 Coteau Rd., Houma, La.

- ✓ Free admission and supervised parking
- ✓ Fresh-picked local produce
- ✓ Entertainment
- ✓ Annual 4-H Seafood Cookery Contest
- ✓ Fire prevention and electrical safety demonstrations with exhibits

Would you like to be among the over 200 vendors offering food, arts and crafts at this year's SLECA Farmers' Market & Craft Festival? Contact Festival Coordinator Elaine Robertson at 985/876-6880 to reserve space or for more information.

Utility rights-of-way make dangerous playgrounds

For electric utilities, service reliability starts and ends with rights-of-way.

South Louisiana Electric Cooperative Association (SLECA) alone has 1,392 miles of power line rights-of-way in Assumption, Lafourche, St. Martin, St. Mary and Terrebonne parishes.

Electric utilities spend millions of dollars every year maintaining thousands of miles of rights-of-way by spraying, trimming trees and clearing brush to prevent outages and to enable crews rapid access to power lines whenever necessary. Some rights-of-way run through dense woods. Others may cross open fields or run next to roads and highways.

The land these rights-of-way go through is not owned by the utility. The land is usually private property on which a property owner pays taxes. The utility only has permission to enter the property to service and maintain power lines in the course of providing service. That

right of access is limited only to the utility or its contractors and is not extended to the general public.

Unfortunately, the same process that ensures service reliability and provides easy access to power lines makes them ideal driving ranges for golfers, temping mud-tracks for off-road vehicles and race courses for 4-wheelers.

Whether on public or private property, a utility right-of-way exists solely to ensure reliable utility service, and any action that interferes or prevents that function has serious consequences.

Those who misuse rights-of-ways may not only be criminally and financially responsible for any damage they cause to the land itself or the utility's property located in such rights-of-way, they also can be financially responsible for any damage to private property caused in homes or businesses served by those lines because of misuse of a right-of-way.

When rights-of-way are used as driving ranges, golf

balls can damage insulators, allowing power lines to come into contact with each other or the ground, causing damage to utility hardware, appliances or electronics.

Off-road vehicles or 4-wheelers making unauthorized use of rights-of-way can snag guy-wires or hit power poles, damaging the utility equipment attached to them, and disrupting service to thousands of homes and businesses.

Rutting due to off-road vehicle usage can cause erosion requiring expensive control measures to be undertaken to preserve the land. Those responsible can be held financially liable for the damage and financial losses they cause.

Utility rights-of-way may look like an inviting playground, but that's not what they're intended for and misuse of a right-of-way can be very expensive in the long run. It can also be deadly because damage that causes a power line to fall puts everyone in deadly peril.

Foret obtains CPR and First Aid instructor certification

SLECA employee Ronald Foret, right, recently participated in a First Aid and CPR Instructor Certification Course at the offices of the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives in Baton Rouge.



The 16-hour program was conducted by the American Safety and Health Institute (ASHI) and prepares participants to teach First Aid and Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation to their fellow co-op employees. (Acct. No. 8050370600)

SLECA is dedicated to providing the highest level of training and continuing education classes in order to equip employees with the skills necessary to operate safely.

Foret has been employed at SLECA for over 28 years. He serves as the lead field representative for the co-op's meter reading department.

Across the Board

July 6, 2009

Present were directors Alexander Doyle, president; David Luke, vice-president; Brian Rivet, secretary; Terry Trahan, treasurer; Tracy Duval, J. D. Boudreaux, Eroy Acosta, Roger Dale DeHart, Larry J. Daigle and Lloyd Gibson, advisor. Also attending were Michael Guidry, general manager, James Funderburk, attorney and Elaine Robertson, member services supervisor.

After the invocation and pledge, the board approved the minutes of the June 1st regular board meeting, 183 new members and the ALEC report.

The financial report, approved by the board, highlighted interest earnings, cash on hand, rate comparison showing SLECA having the lowest rates compared to other area utilities, line loss, kilowatt hour sales for the month, cumulative sales to date, cost of service, equity, TIER, electric and total revenue versus cost per kilowatt hour. (Acct. No. 4400964903)

Following an update on upcoming schools, meetings and events, Mr. Guidry reported on the following: (1) SLECA continues to have the lowest rates in the area; (2) Investor-owned utilities and municipalities get far greater assistance while serving far fewer customers per mile of line despite their complaints that electric cooperatives receive low interest loans from the RUS; (3) H.B. 2454 passed in the House on June 26th with all of the Louisiana delegation voting no but the future of climate change legislation is very much in doubt in the Senate due to opposition of the "cap and trade" provision; (4) The House will now turn its attention to health care reform; (5) The steel pole line was completed on June 11th and the Lake Decade line was energized to the point where you turn to go to the Raccourci; (6) When the generators are operating at Chabert Medical Center, electric usage registers on SLECA's meters apparently due to an error in the connection; (7) Some employees such as meter readers who do after-hour reconnects and linemen and helpers who are on-call take vehicles home and servicemen have the option of taking their trucks home; (8) Record breaking temperatures should result in higher sales for the month of June; (9) There were no NERC/SERC violations during the period and Form OE-417 was created by SLECA to report major electric system emergencies to the Department of Energy; and (10) A news article prompted by a news release from Congressman Melancon's office included a report of FEMA reimbursing \$5.46 million to SLECA for Gustav repairs.

Next, the board chose Mr. Rivet and Mrs. Duval to vote for the ALEC directors and Mr. Rivet as the voting delegate and Mrs. Duval as the alternate to vote for the Louisiana director.

The board then approved the low bid to replace the engineering vehicle used by the manager of engineering, the manager's report and expenses, the safety report and the attorney's report and fees.

The meeting was then adjourned.

You may obtain copies of the minutes by contacting SLECA, P.O. Box 4037, Houma, LA 70361 or by calling (504) 876-6880 or 1-800-256-8826.

Your Cooperative Connection

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It's that time of year once again, folks!

DON'T MISS IT!

SLECA's 21st Annual Farmers' Market & Craft Festival



Saturday, Sept. 26, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

SLECA office grounds

2028 Coteau Rd., Houma, La.

Don't miss this great opportunity to do your Christmas shopping early and support local craftsmen, artists and producers



- ✓ Free admission and supervised parking
- ✓ Pumpkin Patch
- ✓ Over 200 vendors offering food, arts and crafts
- ✓ Fresh-picked local produce
- ✓ Music
- ✓ Annual 4-H Seafood Cooking Contest
- ✓ Fire prevention and electrical safety demonstrations with exhibits