

Staying Safe in an Electrified World

Whether driving or digging, what every WEC member should know about power line safety

By Will Lindner

Most Vermonters are only vaguely aware of the electricity infrastructure that surrounds them every day, wherever they are. It's up in the air (distribution and transmission lines strung from pole to pole); it's right beside them (roadside poles, or in WEC's case, poles perhaps hidden from view amid the tree trunks).

Sometimes, though rarely in WEC territory, it's on or underneath the surface of the ground, when homes and subdivisions are tied to the electric grid by buried service lines, with ground-surface "pads" that house the connections and transformers.

Under normal circumstances we can safely ignore this envelope of electricity we live within. But it is electricity, and it has the power, in an instant, to kill or maim us. Risk of contact with live electric wires can come as a result of a storm that knocks trees into the power lines, whether they fall to earth or not, or a vehicular accident such as a car or truck hitting a utility pole, perhaps breaking it and knocking the lines askew. Contact can result from some everyday activity like raking or shoveling snow off a roof, carrying a ladder around the yard without paying heed to what it might touch,

No matter what the cause, Stergas has one dominant message for people who see power lines on the ground: Assume they are energized and stay at least 30 feet away.

or cutting down trees and losing control of where they fall. WEC's culture of safety extends to its membership, and the Co-op is committed to sharing with its members what to do – and not do – when electricity becomes dangerous.

Car-pole accidents and downed wires on or near vehicles

Operations &

Engineering Director Dan Weston has become particularly concerned about drivers looking at their cell phones and running into utility poles – which, he says, is not as uncommon an occurrence as it should be since Vermont passed a law in 2014 prohibiting the use of hand-held devices while operating a motor vehicle.

"This is getting to be a monthly event, not necessarily for the Co-op but somewhere in the area," says Weston. "Texting and distraction while driving, whatever the cause, seems to have increased."

There are other causes of car-pole accidents, too, such as the vehicle skidding on ice or wet pavement. The most important thing people must know is that if the power lines come down, drivers (and

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Stan Fitch of Calais, 96, was a teenager when Governor Aiken flipped the switch that electrified WEC's lines for the first time.

When the Lights Turned On: Stan and Elaine Fitch Remember Co-op and Community History

Stanley and Elaine Fitch still live in the tidy farmhouse in Kent's Corner where he was born 96 years ago. Their home reveals rich and expansive intellectual and creative lives, as well as their love for this close-knit Vermont community where they both grew up.

Over the course of an hour, three different groups of visitors stop by the house. There are fresh copies of *The Atlantic* and *Foreign Affairs* by Stan's chair, as well as Calais author Rick Winston's book *Red Scare in the Green Mountains*. In the front room, art covers the walls, and adorning the piano are the high school portraits of their three

daughters, Donna, Diane, and Judy. Next to a window looking out on the snow-covered sloping yard hangs a picture Elaine painted 20 years ago of that snow-covered sloping yard. Through the window, there is a ridge of new trees that doesn't exist in the painting. Other than that, everything looks pretty much the same.

That's one of the beautiful things about Calais – while the world has changed so much over the Fitches' long lives, the spirit of the community hasn't seemed to change much at all. Other than a little more traffic on the road where they live, up the hill from the old Robinson Sawmill,

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

Board considers broadband. Read more in the President and General Manager's Message, p. 2

Meet the candidates running for WEC's Board of Directors, p. 4.

Moments in WEC history: A timeline feature throughout the year commemorates 80 years of cooperative power. See a few highlights on p. 7.

Reserve your spot at WEC's 80th Annual Meeting: see the form p. 8.



Forest Service, USDA

The emerald ash borer, about the size of a grain of rice, was discovered in Orange last February. Since then, it has spread throughout central Vermont and elsewhere in the state. For the past year, WEC has been working on a mitigation plan, which includes increased right of way spending to cut ash trees that could become hazardous to the lines. Read about it on p. 5.

President's and General Manager's Message

Board, Budgeting, and Broadband

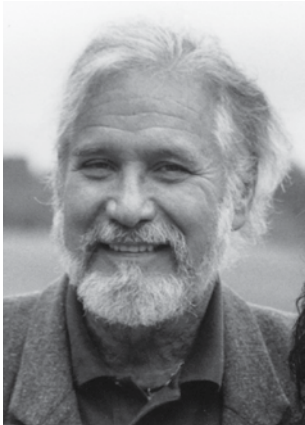
Barry and Patty discuss the upcoming election and the open seat on WEC's board of directors, budgeting for better reliability, looking into broadband, and the current legislative session

Annual meeting

Barry: We've both been really excited about the 80th anniversary of the Co-op, which we'll celebrate at the Annual Meeting on May 2 this year.

Patty: We're happy to host the Annual Meeting at the Operations Center again this year. Having it on our home turf really brings WEC together – members, those on the board, and everyone on the WEC team. We had it there last year and we just loved it.

Barry: Meeting in the Operations Center is also a recognition of the hard



work our line crews do. It's where people come in to work at six in the morning and sometimes they don't clock out until 24 hours later.

Patty: Or seven days later, during a bad storm!

Barry: Right. It's the heart of the Co-op's work and a great opportunity

to peek behind the scenes. We're hoping as many members as possible will come.

Patty: The annual meeting is part of what makes the Co-op special. We get to come together as a community to discuss face to face what your electric

cooperative is doing on your behalf. Plus we have a pretty good time.

Members own the Co-op. This is really a stakeholder event. When you come to the meeting, you get information firsthand about what we're doing, and you get to ask questions. And of course, if you really want to get involved, you can run for a seat on the board!



in – they were frustrated and fried. It was so many days without power. And it seemed like the storms affected the same areas again and again.

Barry: Patty, I know we keep track of the location and duration and total dollar expense for these storms.

Patty: Yes, we track all sorts of storms statistics, from locations to frequency and duration. We budget for both major storms and regular storms, and we blew our major storm budget this past year. We had two FEMA-level reimbursed storms in 2018, which is unheard of. To qualify for FEMA, it has to be a state-declared storm event. The damage costs have to meet a threshold dollar amount to trigger the state's declaration. Last year that number was a million dollars. Then each county has to meet the damage cost threshold in order to qualify. We cover four counties, so sometimes some counties we serve qualify for FEMA reimbursement and others don't.

As a not for profit electric cooperative, we are eligible to be reimbursed by FEMA for the damage we incur during those storms. The FEMA dollars are extremely helpful – it ends up being about 75 percent of the damage costs. It's a ton of work to apply, but it's worth it because it has a significant effect on our revenues.

Barry: In 2019 we put additional money into the right of way budget to begin to target areas we know go out most frequently and for the longest duration. Based on staff recommendations we're going to begin more intensive clearing in target areas. Our expectation is we'll limit outage severity and duration over the next several years. WEC's management

Board of Directors election

Patty: WEC is a democratically run organization, and electing board members is a critical part of that process. Every year three seats open. If you're interested in running, call the Co-op today, we'll connect you with Dawn Johnson, WEC's Administrative Assistant. She'll get you all the materials and answer any questions about running for the board.

Barry: This year Annie Reed and I are running for reelection. Roy Folsom, who's been a director for 15 years, has decided to step down. I want to thank Roy for his many years of dedication to WEC. Hopefully, he and his wife Jackie will get to do some more traveling in their camper.

All three directors' seats are open. We know there are some candidates who are stepping forward, and we encourage everyone who's interested to run. If you're passionate about what the Co-op is doing – or not doing – this is a chance to really make an impact.

Storms and right of way budgeting

Patty: In order to talk about how we're budgeting going forward, we need to look back. 2018 was a record year for storms. During the barrage of storms near the end of the year, we heard a lot from members calling

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Board of Directors

President	BARRY BERNSTEIN <i>(May 2019)</i>	1237 Bliss Road, Marshfield, VT 05658 Bbearvt@myfairpoint.net	456-8843
Vice President	ROGER FOX <i>(May 2021)</i>	2067 Bayley-Hazen Rd., East Hardwick, VT 05836-9873 rfox@pivot.net	563-2321
Treasurer	DONALD DOUGLAS <i>(May 2020)</i>	21 Douglas Rd., East Orange, VT 05086 dondougla@gmail.com	439-5364
Secretary	ANNE REED <i>(May 2019)</i>	3941 Hollister Hill Rd., Marshfield, VT 05658 annereed48@gmail.com	454-1324
	ROY FOLSOM <i>(May 2019)</i>	2603 US Rt. 2, Cabot, VT 05647 RoyGrmsy@aol.com	426-3579
	JEAN HAMILTON <i>(May 2020)</i>	3499 East Hill Road, Plainfield 05667 Jean.myung.hamilton@gmail.com	777-6546
	STEPHEN KNOWLTON <i>(May 2021)</i>	160 White Rock Drive, #2, Montpelier, VT 05602 knowlsf@auburn.edu	223-2230
	RICHARD RUBIN <i>(May 2021)</i>	3496 East Hill Rd., Plainfield, VT 05667 richardirubin@gmail.com	454-8542
	MARY JUST SKINNER <i>(May 2020)</i>	P.O. Box 412, Montpelier, VT 05601 maryjustskinner@gmail.com	223-7123

PATTY RICHARDS General Manager patty.richards@wec.coop	KATIE TITTERTON Editor katie@clearspotvt.com	WILL LINDNER Contributing Writer	TIM NEWCOMB Layout
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Editorial Committee

Patty Richards Donald Douglas Jean Hamilton Anne Reed Katie Titterton

The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson, at 224-2332.

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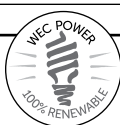
Notice: Omission in Energy Efficiency Charge Bill Insert

Recently, WEC members received a bill insert explaining 2019's energy efficiency charges. The insert was coordinated by Efficiency Vermont and distributed by WEC.

The insert omitted a line relevant to WEC members with security lighting. Per the Public Utility Commission, unmetered street and security light customers have a 2019 EEC rate of \$0.01091/kWh times the nominal wattage of the light times 360 hours per month.

Got something to say?

Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: *Co-op Currents*.



team is taking a serious look at our whole service territory based on where outages have occurred.

Patty: Last year was a tough year for everyone. It was important to hear from members where the outages were occurring. We heard loud and clear from members that they were frustrated. We mapped it out, and the majority of the long duration outages were on the ends of our lines. So when we looked at all the outages during a given storm, we saw that there were a lot of outages, but those outage points affected small numbers;

about 10 members at a time. We had hundreds of breaks, and every one of them had to be repaired, but we picked up a handful of homes at a time. It was a clear signal to us that we need to focus right of way dollars at the ends of our lines to clear up all those overgrown areas where tree contact is causing repeat outages.

Barry: One thing I learned is that when we have a lot of outages we have two criteria, generally, for how the crews treat them: one is we try to bring up as many people as possible at once. But we also look at where people have been out for the longest. For instance, if our crew is in an area and there's one larger group that just lost power, and a smaller group of people who have been out for several days, we'll shoot over there to help out the group that's been out a long time. There's an art to how these decisions are made.

I had a conversation recently with a member who said, "You really need

In 2019 we put additional money into the right of way budget to begin to target areas we know go out most frequently and for the longest duration. Based on staff recommendations we're going to begin more intensive clearing in target areas. Our expectation is we'll limit outage severity and duration over the next several years.

– Barry Bernstein

beef up the right of way budget. We added another 100,000 dollars – we're at almost a million dollars now just for increased right of way clearing.

Barry: The staff and Patty will be coming back in 2019 and will make a recommendation to the board for increased right of way budgeting over the next several years. We're going to make it very clear in rate increases, which will be hopefully few and far between, what portion of any increase is allocated to right of way clearing. We're keeping reliability as our primary focus.

Broadband

Barry: At our board meeting in January, several board members and our manager met a dozen people from around our territory who have all been trying to get broadband to their homes. The board voted to try to seek out grant funds to do a feasibility study and business plan to determine whether broadband makes sense economically

to put more money into these right of way issues. People are going to support that, even if it means another rate increase. People want the reliability." I heard that. We want the reliability, and given the climate and changing weather patterns, we always have to take a fresh look at how we deliver that.

Patty: Whenever we survey people about what they want from us as an electric co-op, reliability is always first. With the intensity and frequency of storms happening, we've got to

and if it will provide any advantages for dealing with storms. We'd also need to determine whether it would make sense for WEC to provide broadband directly or to expand service into our territory through a third party. This is just the first step, trying to secure funds to get more information to help the board and membership decide if this is a venture we want to pursue.

Patty: Over the last several years, periodically people will call in and say, "WEC, can you give us broadband? We live out in the woods here and we have really poor internet service." So, we've been talking conceptually about this for a few years. If we do it, we know it will be an expensive build-out. We need to know: what would it cost, what is the break-even for members, and can we do it? And if we can't do it economically, can we get grants to do it?

If we were to get into this space, there would be a separation between broadband revenue and electric revenue. So as Barry said, in order to do the study, we need some grant dollars to get a consultant in and find out how many members per mile we'd need to sign up.

Barry: We've talked to members down in Corinth and down in central Vermont who've tried to get broadband to their area, and farther south. It was a really good meeting and we'll keep you posted. Again, to underline, it's not an instantaneous process. Even if we got all the grant and loan money today, it would still be a several decade build-out through the whole service area.


We've been talking conceptually about [broadband] for a few years. If we do it, we know it will be an expensive build-out. We need to know: what would it cost, what is the break-even for members, and can we do it? And if we can't do it economically, can we get grants to do it?

– Patty Richards

Legislative session

Patty: I was recently in Montpelier meeting with the House Energy and Technology committee. Over a two day period, all the utilities and anyone in the energy space, environmental groups, all the interest groups and stakeholders, had an opportunity to talk. It was like a 101 to introduce each organization to the committee. I'm not sure yet what new initiatives

lawmakers will be considering, but we'll be participating throughout the legislative session.

Barry: Our former general manager, Avram Patt, was elected to the House representing the Lamoille-Washington district – Morrisville, Elmore, Worcester, Woodbury. He's on the House Energy and Technology committee. I do know that committee has taken a long look at broadband and telecommunications. 



Where's WEC?

Roundup of where Right of Way crews are currently working to keep your power reliable:

- Loop Road in Northfield
- Moretown to Middlesex feeder
- Baker Pond in Brookfield (in advance of reconstructing the line)
- Center Road in East Montpelier (in advance of reconstructing the line)
- South Walden transmission line
- French Road in Middlesex (in advance of reconstructing the line)
- Adamant Pond area in Calais (in advance of reconstructing the line)
- Hot spot trimming (limited sections of line) West Hill Pond feeder in Walden/Cabot; Worcester 2 phase near Route 12



Annual Meeting Call for Photos and Contest

Submit your photos for WEC's 80th Annual Meeting photo contest! Categories are: **Historic WEC** and **WEC Today**. Please send hi-res images to currents@wec.coop, or send to the Co-op's East Montpelier headquarters. Winning photos will be displayed at the Annual Meeting and in *Co-op Currents*. Check the January and March issues of *Co-op Currents* for more details.

WEC in the News

General Manager Patty Richards appeared on "Along Those Lines," the podcast of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, or NRECA. She spoke about the "evolving grid," and how electric co-ops are positioned to use new technologies to lead the industry into the future. Check out Episode 5 of "Along Those Lines" on www.electric.coop or your preferred source for podcasts.

Two Incumbents, Two New Candidates Run for Three Board Seats


Vote by mail or at the 80th Annual Meeting:
Thursday, May 2 at WEC's Operations Center in East Montpelier

Every year, WEC's membership elects three fellow members to serve on the Co-op's nine-seat Board of Directors. The members who serve in these critical roles oversee management and staff and make policy and leadership decisions for the member-owned electric utility. This year, Roy Folsom of Cabot, who served on the board for 15 years, has decided to step down, leaving one seat vacant. The incumbent candidates are Barry Bernstein and Annie Reed. To date, WEC has received materials from two new candidates: Steven Farnham and Glenn Goodrich.

Each candidate has submitted a brief biographical sketch, printed below. The April issue will feature their responses to questions about issues related to board service, providing readers a broader sense of their interests, viewpoints, and

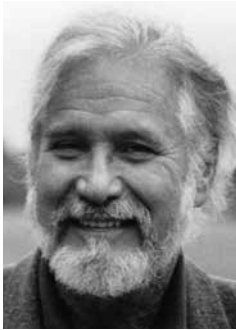
experience. Any other candidates whose paperwork arrived after this issue's deadline will be profiled in April's issue as well.

WEC members may write in names of unofficial candidates on ballots if they wish. All board candidates run at-large, since WEC is not divided into districts. Your ballot will arrive in the mail: check to make sure when the deadline is to post your votes by mail. You may also vote in person at the Annual Meeting.

The 2019 Annual Meeting will be Thursday, May 2 at WEC's Operations Center on Fassett Road in East Montpelier. All members are invited to attend the meeting. Reservations are required for dinner, which is provided at no cost to the membership. Please see the reservation form on p. 8. More details will follow in the April issue of *Co-op Currents*. 

Barry Bernstein

Residence: I live on Bliss Road in East Calais, and have owned a home there since 1976. I have been an owner-member of WEC since 1971. WEC members should feel free to call me at 456-8843 or email me at bbearvt@myfairpoint.net if you have any questions.



Barry Bernstein

Steven Farnham

Residence: Five generations of my family have been WEC members since WEC first strung power lines across our farm in Plainfield, which has been my home since I was born in the sixties. The farm's WEC membership has been in my name since the late nineties. I may be reached at Steven4WEC@gmail.com, or 802-917-2581.



Steven Farnham

Background: After graduating from the local school system, my education came from VTC, from which I secured an Associate's in Electronics, with honors, and subsequently furthered my studies in Business Administration at UVM, and the International College of Cayman Islands. My early engineering career consisted of work in quality assurance, manufacturing, technical support, not to mention a summer job servicing substation equipment at Green Mountain Power. My more recent endeavors have included bus, truck, and heavy equipment operation, selling agricultural products, carpentry, and machinery repair and restoration.

Community Involvement: Present or past member of boards of Hunger Mountain Food Co-op, the Vermont Philharmonic, and the Cutler Library, leading the latter through the process of installing a new heating system, and bringing that local institution back from the brink of closure. Served on the Cutler Friends of the Library, the Plainfield planning commission, and as Justice of Peace. WGDR-FM: Fifteen year stint hosting weekly community affairs local issues/politics program. Volunteered for Vermont State Science and Math Fair (now Vermont STEM Fair), Barre Opera House, Lost Nation Theater, and

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Glenn Goodrich

Residence: Cabot. Son of Walter and Sally Goodrich of Cabot, Vermont, I was raised on Molly Brook Farms.

Background: I attended Cabot School, graduating as a member of the National Honor Society. I attended UVM in Burlington, Vermont with a Bachelors of Science in Industrial Education. I taught at St. Johnsbury Academy for 6½ years. I taught at Danville High School for 6½ years.



Glenn Goodrich

In 1990 I retired from teaching to devote more time to several businesses myself and my wife Ruth had begun: construction of conventional and timber frame homes, roadside mowing for municipalities and the state of Vermont, as well as starting up a fair-sized maple production operation. I also became a professional maple sap tubing installer from Wisconsin to Northern Maine.

In 1990 the sugarhouse located at 2427 US Route 2 in Cabot was built and we began the production of maple syrup on a large scale, as well as opening a retail outlet for maple syrup and maple products. Presently I created a state of the art, high tech sugaring operation in Eden, Vermont with the capacity for up to 200,000 taps. My wife Ruth and I employ up to 30 employees and have created a business that has become well known as a tourist attraction that attracts thousands of customers each year.

Community Involvement: I have served in a wide variety of state and local community boards and organizations: member of the Cabot Board of Selectmen, 13 years – many as Chairman; Vermont Maple Promotion Board; Vermont Maple Industry Council; Vermont Maple

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Annie Reed

Residence: I have lived in Marshfield for 43 years and on Hollister Hill for 41 years. I have been a member of the Washington Electric Cooperative for 19 years. You can contact me by mail at 3941 Hollister Hill, Marshfield, VT 05658, by phone at 454-1324, or by email at annereed48@gmail.com.

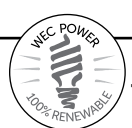


Annie Reed

Background: I graduated from Beloit College in 1970 with a B.A degree in Anthropology. In 1997 I earned a M.S in Conservation Biology from Antioch University New England. In 1996 I began a career as a freelance ecologist, retiring in 2015. In 1997 I began teaching hands-on courses in college science, most recently for the Community College of Vermont. A selection of these courses includes; Introduction to Environmental Science, Freshwater Ecology, Wildlife Ecology, Fundamentals of Earth Science, Forest Ecology, and this year, The Natural History of Vermont.

Community Involvement: I am Chair of the Marshfield Conservation Commission, former member of the Planning Commission, former President of the Friends of the Jaquith Public Library and have served on its Board of Trustees for the past 6 years. For three years I served on the Goddard College Board of Trustees and am former chair and current member of the Floral Advisory Group (FLAG) to the Vermont Endangered Species Committee. For 10 years I volunteered as an EMT for the Cabot Ambulance and the Plainfield Fire and Rescue Squad. I am a member of the Hunger Mountain Co-op, member and current employee of the Plainfield Co-op. I am a member of the NorthCountry Federal Credit Union and the Vermont State Employees Credit Union.

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“Our territory is ground zero” for the emerald ash borer in Vermont

WEC Takes Action Against A Destructive Bug

The first confirmed infestation was a year ago: in February, 2018, evidence of the emerald ash borer was found in the woods of Orange, in the heart of WEC country.

Since then, as the invasive insect has spread and communities throughout Vermont consider what to do with their ash trees, WEC has been developing a plan of its own. The Co-op needs to act fast. That’s because the bugs act fast: they spread rapidly, and infested trees die after only a few years.

Operations & Engineering Director Dan Weston put a point on it: “Our territory is ground zero for this.” After it was discovered in Orange, the emerald ash borer, or EAB, has been found in Groton and Plainfield, as well as neighboring Barre and Montpelier. Outside central Vermont, it’s been confirmed in Bennington and Grand Isle counties.

The ash borer

The tiny emerald ash borer is only a few millimeters long. It’s native to eastern Asia, where it evolved alongside that continent’s ash population – so Asian ashes are resilient to the bug. But how did it get to Vermont?

EAB is thought to have arrived in the US by hitching a ride on wood packing material sent to Detroit. Discovered there in 2002, it’s rapidly spread since to 35 states and into

What we’re doing is reassessing areas we’ve gone through to take ash trees we left before they become infested. It cuts the price of removing those trees and cuts the danger to anyone who might be in the right of way.

– Rick Stergas

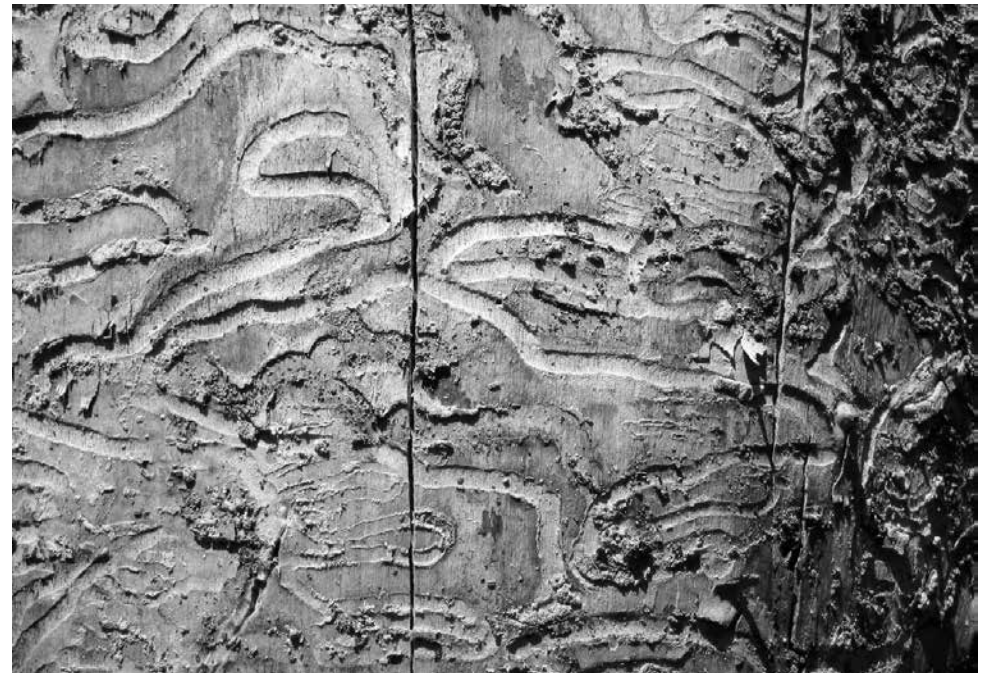
Canada. The bug flies from tree to tree on its own, but it’s likely human interference caused it to move far more rapidly. Experts believe one major contributing factor is people transporting firewood. A camper moving wood could unwittingly cause an infestation hundreds of miles away.

There are three species of ash native to North America – green,

white, and black – and the EAB feasts on all of them. Adult bugs chew out of the tree they were hatched in, fly to the canopy level of another tree, eat leaves, then bore in and lay eggs. Those eggs hatch into larvae with a voracious appetite. Under the bark, larvae eat through the wood of the tree, carving serpentine tunnels, called galleries. The larvae’s tunneling cuts off the tree’s vascular system, which moves water and nutrients from the roots to the leaves. Trees exhibit signs of stress, and then effectively starve to death. Communities infested by EAB see their trees die within just a few years.

Signs of EAB

Safety & Environmental Compliance Specialist Rick Stergas researched and reported on EAB for WEC’s board and operations team, and contributed to the Co-op’s action plan. He pointed out there are borer bugs that are native to Vermont – so not every sign of stress or bark holes is a sign of EAB – but the bug has a few signatures.



John Hritz

The larvae of the emerald ash borer eat the tree underneath the bark, leaving distinctive S-shaped tunnels, or galleries, shown here. The tunneling cuts off the tree’s vascular system, effectively starving it to death.

For example: an ash tree with a high level of woodpecker activity is a potential EAB sign. The birds eat the larvae under the bark, and lots of woodpecker holes – called flecking – especially in the upper trunk of a tree may indicate an infestation. During spring and summer, when trees leaf out, EAB-infested trees may show stress by a thinning canopy or sprouting oddly along their sides. Splitting bark may also indicate the infestation underneath.

If a tree appears to have EAB, peeling away the bark to check for the larval galleries can confirm it. The undulating, S-shaped galleries are unique to EAB. A tree that’s already fledged adult borers will exhibit D-shaped exit holes. For bugs this small, the exit holes are particularly tiny, but the D-shape is a giveaway.

What EAB means for our ash trees

Five percent of Vermont’s forest is ash, and many municipalities and landowners planted the attractive tree to make our streets and yards shady and beautiful. Woodworkers love the ash for the fine texture of its dense wood; famously, baseball bats are made from ash. Other species depend on the ash for resources. Tragically, there is no way to save them all. The borer kills 99.7 percent of all infested trees.

It’s far more expensive – six to 10 times as expensive – to cut and remove a dead ash than a live, healthy tree. Crews can’t climb the brittle branches, weakened and unsafe after being starved of nutrients, and must bring in high-cost machinery to cut down tall trees. The wood dries out on the trunk causing splintering instead of cutting cleanly.

That leaves landowners and municipalities the bitter choice of cutting perfectly healthy trees now, or taking down dangerous, dead trees for a lot more money later. For the Co-op, whose primary concerns are safety, reliability, and using its members’ funds responsibly, the choice is unfortunate but clear. “We’re trying to get to the ash before it’s dead, because once it’s dead it becomes a much larger threat, not just to infrastructure but for personnel as well,” explained Stergas.

Vermonters can understand the stakes by looking to the dozens of states that have already seen EAB sweep through. “Not a single one of those states has been able to stop it or combat it,” said Weston. During Winter Storm Bruce, Stergas worked with a mutual aid crew from Pennsylvania and asked them about their experience with EAB. “They confirmed everything you’ve read,” he reported. “They’ve been dealing with it from around 2009, and they’ve had a lot of line damage from EAB damaged trees.”


Stergas went to a presentation where a National Grid forester spoke about EAB infestation in central New York. Images of forests of dead trees stuck with him. “We’re not going to eliminate it. It’s not possible,” he said, resigned. The problem is so bad, he said, that National Grid does outreach telling bow hunters not to put their tree stands in ash trees, to prevent them from getting hurt climbing weak and brittle branches. Utilities and companies in affected states have poured money into mitigating damage from the bug, he said, into the millions. Nationally, some statistics show nearly 11 billion dollars have been spent on treating, removing, and replacing trees.

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Steven Farnham


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Montpelier Senior Activity Center. As a Forest Pest Detector, I’m trained to recognize signs of various exotic invasive tree-eating insects.

In addition to WEC, I have current membership in good standing in two food co-ops, an insurance co-op, a banking co-op (credit union), and Onion River Exchange, a labor-exchange “co-op.” I have past memberships (in good standing) in four other co-ops. 

Annie Reed


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If re-elected, I will begin my ninth year serving on WEC’s board and my fifth year as Secretary. I serve on the Members and Markets Committee and the Editorial Committee. 

Glenn Goodrich

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Sugarmakers Association – Vice President; Washington County Maple Sugarmakers Association – President; Caledonia County Maple Sugarmakers Association – President. Bishop eight years of the Lyndon Ward Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; High Councilman many years of the Montpelier Vermont Stake of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; Counselor to the Mission President for seven years covering a regional area including Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, part of New York and Massachusetts Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

I have been a motivational speaker and presenter at lectures across the entire maple region (Wisconsin – Nova Scotia) and have mentored many in the maple industry as a consultant and friend. 

Emerald Ash Borer

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And yet, there's no federal source of funding to remove ash. States, communities, utilities, corporations, and homeowners are all figuring it out on their own.

WEC's plan

As soon as EAB appeared in Orange, Weston, Stergas, and other key staff at WEC began putting together a plan to minimize the Co-op's exposure to damage. The board approved an additional 50,000 dollars, earmarked for EAB mitigation and ash removal, above a 100,000 dollar increase to the right of way management budget to improve WEC's reliability. General Manager Patty Richards estimated that over the next decade, the Co-op will likely spend upwards of a million dollars on ash removal.

WEC's contract tree crews are constantly clearing and trimming the rights of way around Co-op lines. At the same time, the operations team is constantly attuned to which lines are experiencing an uptick in tree-related outages and need immediate attention. The work plan is dynamic when it comes to improving reliability.

So the team has gone back to look

What to look for:

- Flecking
- Thinning canopy
- Side sprouts
- Damage starts high & works down
- D shaped exit holes
- S shaped galleries

at transmission lines it recently cleared, and marked ash trees that previously passed muster. Ash that show signs of becoming hazardous, like those that lean toward the lines, will come down. "We need to eliminate the weak link," said Weston, adding that most of this work will be finished by the end of winter.

After transmission lines, the team will do the same work on select three-phase and a few single-phase lines. "What

we're doing is reassessing areas we've gone through to take ash trees we left before they become infested. It cuts the price

of removing those trees and cuts the danger to anyone who might be in the right of way," Stergas explained.

Then there are the lines coming up for right of way clearing on the Co-op's construction work plan. Going forward, the Co-op has simply folded ash into the list for maintenance cutting. It's not a "scorched earth" approach, said Stergas, but again, targeting trees that look likely to become a future hazard. "We're not mowing down every ash we see. We're doing what we do normally, it's just we're targeting a specific species," he said.

In this way, WEC is being proactive in the face of what will inevitably be a heartbreaking and difficult problem for the Co-op and for every other distribution utility in the state. Fortunately, WEC has a crack team with deep understanding of WEC's lines and the trees that surround them. Stergas pointed out that Larry Gilbert, Right



of Way Maintenance Coordinator, is a former veteran lineworker; Kevin Lanphear, First Class Lineworker, is a former arborist. "We have good eyes. We're doing what we can to reduce our exposure," Stergas concluded.

What you can do

One thing that the Co-op does not plan to do is to apply pesticide to ash in its rights of way. Some of that is its environmental commitment – WEC is

the only utility in the state that doesn't use herbicides on its rights of way. It's also because at the utility level, treating ash with pesticide would be cost prohibitive and, according to Stergas, wouldn't be effective enough to warrant the effort.

But at this moment, municipalities and individuals are weighing that cost. There are two options that have proved to work to save individual ash trees: soil drench and direct injection.

WEC's plan:

- Added \$50,000 to 2019 budget to address EAB
- Target trees near transmission line rights of way first
- Target trees near three-phase and secondary feeders next
- Target ash leaning toward or threatening lines
- Going forward, treat ash in rights of way like any other danger tree
- No "scorched earth" removal of all ash; no pesticide use


These methods "would be good if you had a tree planted by your family three generations ago, and you wanted to try to salvage that tree in your front yard," allowed Stergas.

Information is available through vtinvasives.org and the Agency of Agriculture. The state recommends homeowners contact a certified pesticide applicator, as over-the-counter soil drench pesticides contain pollinator-harming neonicotinoids.

Members can also keep a close eye on their trees, understanding what an ash looks like in full leaf and knowing the signs of the borer. If you think you have an infested tree, take pictures and send them to Vermont Invasives. They may not send an entomologist to visit if you're in a region already known to have confirmed cases – like Plainfield or Marshfield – but you'll help Vermont register the spread of the insect. Members may also want to call their county or regional forester.

As always, call WEC if you spot trees that appear hazardous to electric wires.

For more information:

- To learn more, visit Vermont Invasives: vtinvasives.org/eab
- Watch the "EAB Informational" video on Youtube: search for VT Agriculture EAB
- How some communities are preparing for EAB: "Vermont towns gearing up to fight emerald ash borer," vtdigger.org
- To treat a valuable ash: Contact a certified pesticide applicator. Find out more at vtinvasives.org/eab or call the Agency of Agriculture at 802-828-2430. 

When the Lights Turned On

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neither has the landscape. Stan recalled that in his youth the road used to close for the winter, and his family got their mail by a horse-drawn sleigh.

Cooperative values and community values are so tightly intertwined in this town it's near impossible to parse them apart. Neighborhood dances and card parties brought neighbors together for laughter and fun. During their childhoods, "Mrs. Kent used to have lawn dances, and she played the accordion. Everyone was invited. People from Plainfield would come over. It was a real get together," Stan described. During his teenage years, Stan remembered, after hours in the Maple Corner Store, he would set up a record player with his friends and dance in the aisles.

Neighbors also worked together to shore up resources for the community. "We used to have wood chopping bees, because the community hall up here didn't have any heat except wood. So people up here would have a big picnic and cut the wood for the next year," recalled Stan.

That community-minded way of doing things is what led to the founding of two important Vermont

cooperatives: Adamant Co-op in 1935 and Washington Electric Co-op in 1939. WEC's first public meeting took place at the Maple Corner Grange Hall in July of 1939, when Stan was in high school and Elaine was just 11. (Ask them when they met and they laugh. "Well, my aunt claims that he pushed me in the baby carriage, but I don't know if she made that up," said Elaine.) They're members who have been on the lines for the entire existence of the Co-op, who still remember what it was like before and after the lights came on 80 years ago.

The electric wires "stopped at Morse Farm on the County Road from Montpelier," remembered Stan. "There wasn't any anywhere around here. Some of the farmers had Delco plants," or generators, to produce electricity. "I knew one farmer had electricity in his barn but didn't have it in his house."

Homes and farms used icebox refrigeration. Dairy farmers, who needed to keep their products cold, were particularly interested in the advantages of electricity. "We used to cut ice up at Maple Corner, Curtis Pond, then we'd draw it down here, go down to the mill (Robinson Sawmill) to get sawdust to pack it in. Then when you wanted to cool your milk, you'd go up and get a cake of ice and put it in the milk cooler," Stan explained. "Some of the time we had a gasoline engine

to run the milk machine, but during the Depression, we couldn't even afford to buy gasoline, so we had to milk by hand."

Townpeople had asked the for-profit utilities of the time to extend the lines to Calais, but were turned down. "Green Mountain Power didn't think there was any money in running power out here, so we couldn't get them to do it. Of course, they didn't realize how much power farms were going to use if they had it," mused Stan.

In 1935 the first steps were made toward bringing electricity to farms like Stan's family's, with President Franklin Roosevelt's executive order creating the Rural Electrification Administration. In 1936, Congress followed up with the Rural Electrification Act. Governor George Aiken, before becoming US Senator in 1941, was a supporter.

"It started when Governor Aiken, who was a farmer, became governor and he could see all the problems the country had without power," Stan said, leading to Aiken working with the Rural Electrification Administration, which provided loans to Vermont's new electric cooperatives. The torch (or light bulb?) was then picked up by WEC's founders, including "the lady at the store up here (Elizabeth Kent Gay, daughter of the accordion-playing Mrs. Kent), my uncle down in East Montpelier (Clarence Fitch)..."


"And your father!" added Elaine.

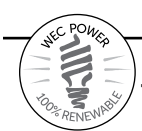
Stan thought about this for a minute. His father may not have been one of WEC's incorporators, Stan concurred, but became deeply involved – including serving on WEC's board of directors.

Stan watched as the first 55 miles of line were strung to serve the Co-op's first 150 members. "I remember when they were putting the lines in, they had a trailer with a team of horses, and they'd draw the poles up into the fields with a team of horses," he said. He also remembers when the first pole was erected in East Montpelier, behind what is still WEC's headquarters. "They just put it up there for show. There was never any electricity at that pole. Just to take pictures," he chuckled.

When WEC's original diesel generation plant switched on, "we were wired up, but there was only one outlet in the room, and we used a 25 watt bulb," said Stan. "And it was so bright! We'd never seen anything like that."

"It was wonderful! It was just light to do everything with," agreed Elaine.

But perhaps the biggest advantage of having electricity on the farm reveals a teenage boy's interest in getting his chores done with. "Well, we didn't have to cut ice anymore," Stan pointed out. Which, no doubt, left just a little more time and energy for dancing in the aisles of the Maple Corner Store. 



Staying Safe in an Electrified World

continued from page 1

passengers) *absolutely must* stay in their vehicles. There is an extreme risk of electrocution if they get out, because the car itself may be energized and very likely so is the ground around it.

“It may be frightening to sit in your car with power lines across your windshield and hood,” says Weston, “but that’s what you need to do. And if you see someone coming to help you yell at them to stay away, or they could get injured or killed. Make sure someone calls 911, then stay put until emergency personnel or utility workers tell you the line has been de-energized and it’s safe to get out.”

The exception to this rule is if you are in imminent danger – for example, if your vehicle is on fire. If you must

extricate yourself, WEC’s Safety & Environmental Compliance Specialist Rick Stergas, says, there is only one method that raises your chances of getting away safely. You must not touch the car and ground simultaneously. Electricity uses every path available, even redundant (“parallel”) paths, to flow to the ground, so if you’re in contact with both the car and the ground you will become such a path.

Instead, open the door, plant your feet on the door frame, and jump clear of the car, with your feet landing close together and at the same time. It’s not necessary to jump far from the car, as long as you don’t reach back and touch it.

Your escape now is just beginning. To avoid “step potential” – the chance that the electricity in the energized ground will enter your body through one foot and exit through the other – you must keep your feet beside each

other and shuffle-step away from the car, keeping both feet in contact with the ground.

“Our distribution lines carry 7,200 volts,” Stergas says. “With roughly every three feet of distance from the source, voltage decreases by half, so when you’ve shuffled three feet it’s 3,600 volts, and at six feet it’s 1,800 volts. You need to be below 50 volts before you’re safe, so that’s at least 25 to 30 feet. Shuffle until you get there.”

There’s a good dramatization of this procedure produced by Puget Sound Energy on YouTube. Search for “This Might Shock You: Downed Power Line.” “I think it would be a good idea for WEC members to go online and watch it,” says Stergas.

on utility-line safety in Calais, at a meeting organized by the Vermont Local Roads and Vermont Urban & Community Forest Programs. There, he discussed the kinds of incidents, besides storms and car-pole accidents, that WEC and other utilities have experienced, which have caused danger from downed power lines.

Even skilled workers like loggers, excavator operators, and highway crews, he said, sometimes break a pole or rip the power lines off poles because they’re concentrating on what’s in front of them and failing to look up when they pass beneath the lines with their dump bodies or digger shovels raised.

No matter what the cause, Stergas has one dominant message for people

Construction accidents

Stergas recently gave a presentation

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Get to Know Your WEC

Have you ever wondered who that is fixing the line up your road, or who you spoke to when you called in about an outage or a bill? Co-op Currents profiles Co-op staff in this feature.

Rick Stergas

Safety & Environmental Compliance Specialist

Learning to teach

Rick Stergas started at WEC in June, 2017 as the Co-op’s Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist. He’s been busy, working to keep the lines safe from trees that could come down in storms, leading flagger safety trainings for road work, developing WEC’s plan to mitigate damage from the invasive Emerald Ash Borer (WEC Takes Action, p.5) – and that’s just a sample of what *Co-op Currents* has asked him about this past year.

He’s a man with many interests and he loves to learn. That’s good, because his role at the Co-op is to learn and to teach. His job is “primarily pulling together training programs for these guys,” he said, referring warmly to his colleagues in the Operations department. Rick coordinates people with outside expertise, synthesizes what he learns from them, and tries to get in the field as much as possible to coach and work directly with crews. His job requires facilitation, teaching, and communication skills.



From muskrats to McNeil

Rick comes to the Co-op with vast experience in both forestry and in electric utility safety. He completed undergraduate and graduate studies at SUNY Plattsburgh with a focus in environmental science and forest and fire ecology, diving into topics as varied as muskrat population studies and the potential for hybrid poplars as an alternative biomass fuel source. Even though not a forester himself, he said, he got to meet a lot of people on the forefront of “a lot of cool research in the Northeast” through his studies.

When he moved to Vermont, he started as the forestry crew leader for a program serving at-risk youth, then worked as an environmental consultant before becoming the environmental specialist at Burlington Electric Department’s wood-fired McNeil Generating Plant. He was there for 22 years before coming to work at WEC.

Football family

Rick lives in Fairfax with his wife Kathy Stergas, a middle school counselor. Their kids Sean and Julia are in college. As the kids grew up, their athletic interests were a priority for the family. “Our fun was always going to their sporting events,” Rick said, and he and Kathy still make a habit of going to games. Sean plays football for Western New England College, so they keep fall weekends clear to travel anywhere from Maine to New Jersey for matches.

80 Years of WEC: Moments in Cooperative Electricity History

- **Dec. 2, 1939:** Gov. George Aiken throws the switch at WEC’s diesel power plant in East Montpelier, electrifying 55 miles of line and the homes and farms of 150 founding members.
- **April 8, 1972:** Fire destroys WEC’s garage across from the Co-op’s headquarters in East Montpelier. In 1973, the new operations center on Fassett Road was completed.
- **1994:** The Co-op contributed to a new solar installation in Middlesex that charged an electric vehicle during off-peak hours.
- **July 1, 2005:** WEC’s Coventry landfill methane generation plant begins full time operation, fulfilling 40 percent of the Co-op’s power mix.

Got a story about WEC’s history? Let us know!

Send a message to currents@wec.coop, drop by the office, or send to Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: Co-op Currents.



ENERGY COACH

Experiencing cold spots in your home this winter?

Call the Energy Coach. Through an energy audit with a qualified contractor, you can discover the most energy- and cost-efficient ways to weatherize.

On top of Efficiency Vermont incentives, WEC offers cash incentives through the Button Up program. Stay warm, keep your heat in your home, reduce your fossil fuel footprint, and save money. To learn more, contact the Energy Coach: 802-224-2329 / energycoach@wec.coop



Staying Safe in an Electrified World

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who see power lines on the ground: Assume they are energized and stay at least 30 feet away. Downed power lines don't writhe or hiss like snakes; they are silently deadly, and – as in the car-pole example – downed power lines can energize anything they touch.

In most places, there are also communication cables (telephone and internet) on utility poles. These lines are attached much lower on poles than the power lines; they are thicker, steel-reinforced, and harder to break. But they might be within reach of a raised dump-truck bed.

"We've had at least three broken poles caused by dump trucks that are out sanding roads," says Weston. "A dump truck will raise its body to sand, the body catches a communication cable, the cable is strong and doesn't break but it causes the pole to break instead, and that brings the electric lines down onto the truck; or the electric lines transfer their energy into the communication lines and they become dangerous. In one town a worker drove an excavator into our line with the boom up, and the line came down and set fire to a rubber tire."

Even lines below ground aren't necessarily safe from accidents that could expose people to the risk of electrocution. Weston recalls an incident when a driver with a snowplow clipped the green metal "pad" for an underground service line, which, fortunately, was not as serious a mishap as it could have been.

A greater risk comes with excavation. "A contractor broke a 7,200-volt primary underground line earlier this year," recalls Stergas. "And we had a near-miss recently with another contractor digging near a primary line underground."

Such risks don't come only from construction equipment. Planting

trees, building fences, or digging holes for piers supporting a new porch, for example, could pose the danger of contacting buried lines with a spade or a pickax. These risks can be minimized by calling DigSafe, at 811, before you start. It's the law, it's free, and it could save your life.

Look up and don't touch

Besides the blanket admonition never to go near downed power lines until utility or emergency personnel have made it clear that the area is safe, WEC warns its members not to touch anything that's in contact with power lines, even if the lines haven't fallen. Don't try cutting a tree that's leaning on the lines, no matter how great your skills with a chain saw. Trees conduct electricity. In fact, don't touch anything that's touching something that's in contact with the lines.

Precaution must be taken when doing necessary outdoor chores that can bring people into proximity to electric lines. For example, people may need to shovel snow off their roofs, yet they might not notice the service line bringing 240 volt electricity to the house from a pole nearby.

"240 volts is considerably less than the voltage on the distribution lines," says Stergas, "but it will still cause cardiac arrest in a fraction of a second."

So if you're using a ladder, whether it's wooden or aluminum, carry it carefully to the site – looking up! – and prop it against your house well clear of the service line. Then, when using your rake or shovel, be constantly mindful of the service line and its connection point to the house.

Final words: Particularly after a storm, downed power lines might be concealed by high grass, rubble, or snow. Keep children and pets inside until you're certain it's safe.

Weston can't help returning to the needless damage caused by distracted drivers who crash into utility poles.


"Besides endangering the public



Distracted driving is dangerous, and it's against the law.

when you do that," Weston says, "you're also causing inconvenience to people who lose their power. And here's something people should know: It's expensive – for them! Usually those incidents happen after business hours. Break one of those poles and it means bringing people out at overtime rates, plus the cost of the new pole and other equipment that might have to

be replaced. You're looking at a 5,000 to 20,000 dollar bill by the time that's done. That's not coming out of our members' pockets; it's coming out of yours."

That's not quite as good a reason as staying alive to exercise the utmost caution around power lines. But if it helps to prevent contact with lines, we'll take it. 

Did You Know?

The National Grid tells hunters to no longer hang deer stands in ash trees. EAB infestation happens so fast that a tree that was healthy last season could be dangerously weak to climb a year later.



Still Time to Run for a Seat on WEC's Board of Directors

Are you looking for a meaningful way to serve your community?

Are you interested in Vermont's energy landscape?

What do you envision for the future of your Co-op?

There is still time to run for a seat on WEC's Board of Directors. The firm deadline is Sunday, March 3. Contact WEC Administrative Assistant Dawn Johnson at 802-224-2332 for qualification details and to request a candidate's packet.

DINNER RESERVATION (BUFFET DINNER)

WEC'S 80th Annual Meeting

Thursday, May 2, 2019

230 Fasset Road, East Montpelier, VT • 4:30 pm registration 5:30 pm buffet begins

Cost: Dinner is free by RESERVATION ONLY. Walk-ins on 5/2 will be charged \$20 per meal if meals available. Confirmation postcards will not be sent, but confirmation emails will be.

Bon Temps Gourmet buffet will accommodate vegetarian and gluten free options. For other special dietary requests please contact Dawn Johnson at 802-224-2332 or Dawn.Johnson@wec.coop

RSVP with form below by Wednesday, April 17, 2019 to: WEC, PO Box 8, E. Montpelier, VT 05651
Email RSVP to Dawn.Johnson@wec.coop

	Member	Guest	Child/Age
Name: _____ <i>(Please print clearly)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Name: _____ <i>(Please print clearly)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Name: _____ <i>(Please print clearly)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Name: _____ <i>(Please print clearly)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Account # _____ Telephone _____ Email _____			

Please be sure not to put reservation RSVP in ballot envelopes

