SOUTHEAST ELECTRIC Cooperative
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives

PO BOX 369, EKALAKA, MT 59324 • PH 406-775-8762 • WWW.SEECOOP.COM

'WAR OF THE CURRENTS' TO RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

By **TYE WILLIAMS** | *Manager*

FEBRUARY has a few well-known holidays: President's Day, Groundhog Day, Valentine's Day, and, of course, the Super Bowl. So, I decided to see if any notable events from the history of electricity occurred in February, and I found a couple of interesting tidbits.

A lesser-known event is "Be Electrific Day," which is celebrated on February 11, and was created with the intention of people discovering more about electricity around them and within their bodies. It also happens to be on Thomas Edison's birthday. Edison played a pivotal role in the early stages of electric utilities, as his company developed a direct-current (DC) power distribution system. A rival company owned by George Westinghouse was pushing for an alternating-current (AC) power distribution system, and their feud was called the "War of the Currents." Another great inventor who was involved in this feud was Nikola Tesla.

The "War of the Currents" began in the 1880s, with these companies fighting over who would electrify large cities such as New York City. It was not until 1935 that the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was created, and electrification started to reach rural Americans. Southeast Electric Cooperative started with REA loans, and continues to serve our rural members. I am very grateful for this act of Congress, as without it we may still be a part of the estimated 800 million worldwide who do not have access to electricity.

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association International builds electrification projects for those without access to electricity. This month, a contingent of linemen from Montana will spend two weeks in Guatemala doing just that. Their work will electrify a small rural village, as we did more than 75 years ago. We hope to participate by sending a lineman on a future project.

The most notable event in February for Southeast Electric is our first meeting on February 12, 1946, at 2 pm at the Commissioners' Room in the Courthouse. Delmas Baird of Ekalaka called the meeting to order and was voted in as chairman. Those in attendance were Edward Sikorski of Willard, Fred Westrope of Willard, Ernest Bechtold of Baker, Dick Traweek of Baker, Faye Tooke of Ekalaka, Carson Griffin of Ekalaka, Irvin Richards of Ridgway, Lester Williams of Mill Iron, Henry Hepperle of Baker, Anton Quam of Ekalaka, and James Oliver of Albion. These men served as trustees of the Cooperative from the very beginning. RM

GENERATOR SAFETY

If your standby electric generator has been in storage since last winter, make sure it is working property BEFORE an outage. Always follow the manufacturer's recommendation on how to use your generator. Most important is the transfer switch that disconnects the farm or home from the power line and connects it to the generator. It must be a double-throw transfer switch which prevents the generator from feeding electricity back onto the power line. This protects the line workers who may be working to restore your service.

POWER OUTAGE Q & A

ALTHOUGH SOUTHEAST ELECTRIC (SECO) MUST OCCASSIONALLY SHUT POWER DOWN FOR MAINTENANCE, MOST OUTAGES ARE UNPLANNED AND UNAVOIDABLE.

2024 OUTAGES:

47 **Weather related events - high winds/frost/blizzards**

10 **Animals - Birds and raccoons are the usual suspects**

19 **Planned Maintenance - SECO is always upgrading and keeping lines maintained.**

3 **Human caused - When operating farm machinery look up to make sure you can clear the line.**

Q. How is power restoration prioritized?
A. SECO energizes 2322 meters, 1712 miles of line on the system. That's a lot of folks and a lot of ground to cover. The main goal Is to restore power safely to the greatest number of members in the shortest time possible. Transmission lines supply power to substations (which then distributes power to members), so these lines would receive first priority. Crews would make any needed repairs at those substations, followed by repairing transformers and distribution lines.

Q. Why does my power sometimes blink?
A. A "blink" is a normal part of a power delivery system.

- Despite our best efforts to keep trees near our lines trimmed the winds can cause the trees to make contact with wires. This will cause the lights to dim or "blink"as the system operates to identify and clear the problem.
- On hot summer days birds gather on the lines. When they all fly off at once it can cause the lines to slap together.
- Frost on the lines can be beautiful but wind has more surface area to push wires around. When the frost falls off the wires, they can slap together.

Q. My power is out, but my neighbor's isn't?
A. Homes may be fed by different service lines and/or the cause of the outage might be originating at the home and be unrelated to activity on the side of SECO.

Q. What should I do if my power goes out?
A. You should report it to SECO by calling 775-8762. Weekends and holidays the calls are transferred to the on-call person. Weekday after hours call:

Jake - 406-581-0884
Adam - 406-941-0861
Sam - 605-347-1687

Q. How long does it take to restore power following an outage?
A. It depends. Removing a branch from a line is quick and relatively simple. Searching for the problem is a longer process. Outages can last from minutes to hours, even days depending on the severity of a storm or other event. Your location also affects the time it takes to get power restored. If you live in a rural area, it might take SECO crews an hour or more to arrive on location. When arriving at the location they need to inspect equipment, determine the cause, and develop a plan to restore power safely. One thing that is consistent, however, is that Co-op crews, often braving hazardous weather conditions and working through the night, do everything they can to restore power as quickly and safely as possible. It's a critically important, dangerous job that SECO crews take very seriously. Safety (yours and ours) is our top priority.