



Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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A Message From The General Manager/CEO

By Daniel G. Laws

Lightening Strikes, Mosquito Flatulence and Power Outages...

As a young boy, spring rains often frustrated me because I wanted to be outside playing—not cooped up in the house. When I would complain about being stuck inside, both my mother and my grandmother (maternal), in sing song fashion, would repeat incessantly, “April showers bring May flowers”, “April showers bring May flowers”. I have to tell you that the expression never brought me much comfort at all.

Well, they say the more things change the more they stay the same. Unfortunately for me, I am afraid that expression is more true than I would like it to be. Today, my mother’s “rain mantra” has a slight twist and it goes like this, “April showers bring outages and May flowers.” Even though the expression has changed, the feelings it evokes are uncomfortably familiar.

Here at the Cooperative, we become very nervous when storm fronts begin moving into our service area. The discussions among the crew members at the close of a business day when these fronts are present revolves around them letting each other know where they are going to be that evening, in case the power goes off. They know you depend on them and they make personal sacrifices to be available when and if you need them. The level of dedication among our linemen is nothing less than stellar. I would suggest that while others may match their dedication, it is never exceeded.

Outages come in many shapes and sizes, and their causes can be just as diverse. However, based on detailed records kept by staff, extreme weather conditions are the biggest reason for outages. Recently, one of our members told an employee, “every time a mosquito farts out here the power goes off”. Naturally that is not true, however, I can sympathize because I know it probably feels that way during stormy weather.

The reliability of power in rural areas is going to be different than that experienced in the city. The reason it is different is exposure, pure and simple. In rural areas, you have more exposure on two fronts; first and foremost is the exposure that comes from the length of lines that supply energy to your home. Secondly, you have exposure due to the rural environment.

In town, it would be very unusual for someone to live more than five miles from a substation. In Rio Grande’s system, it is unusual if very many live that close. Every mile between you and the substation is that much more exposure. For example, the National Weather Service has performed studies that indicate how many lightening strokes per mile per year an electric distribution system like Rio Grande’s will suffer. In our area, that amount can be as much as forty strokes per mile per year. What that means in real terms is if you live five miles from the substation, you may experience 200 strokes. However, if you are in Rio Grande’s system, an average of twenty miles from the substation, you may experience as many as 800 strokes.

The majority of the rural environment that Rio Grande serves has very little in the way of trees or other structures. Therefore, with almost 9,000 miles of line, much of that line ends up being the tallest structure for miles. The result is lightening being drawn to our line simply because it is the tallest structure around.

We can and will do everything possible to minimize the impact that weather can have on you as a result of exposure, but we can not eliminate it altogether. When harsh weather hits, you can rest assured that out there in the night, there is someone taking care of you—a Rio Grande lineman. They call it doing their job, you can call it your **Home Team Advantage**.