

Members' Cooperation, Outage Evaluation Essential in Effective Right-of-Way Management Program

MEC Posts 99.96 Reliability Percentage Index for 2011

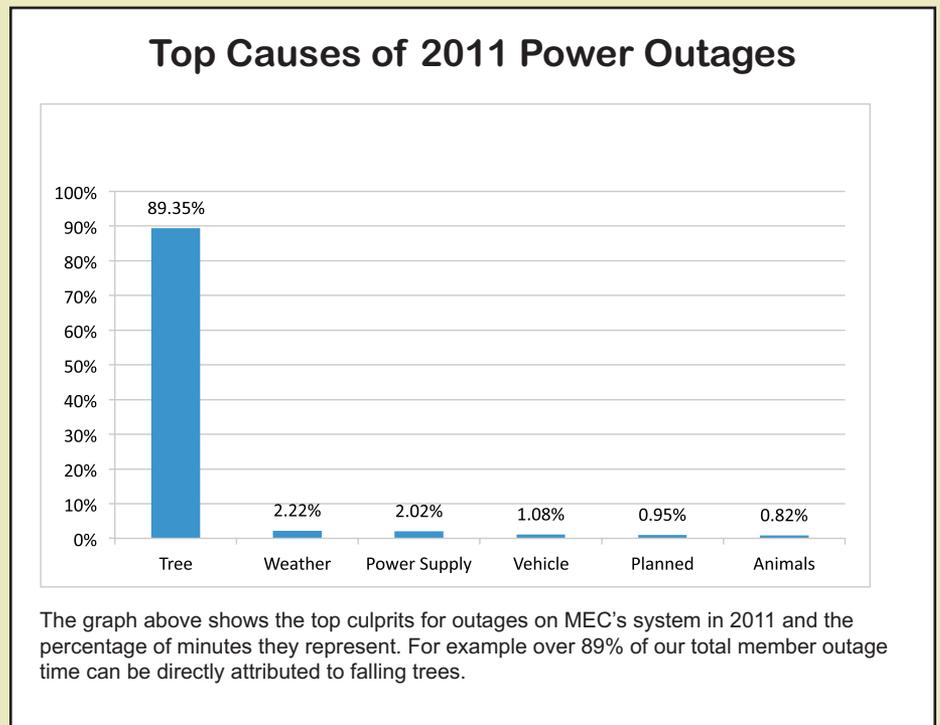
Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (MEC) has a proud legacy of providing highly reliable service to its members. Recently, we calculated the overall percentage of outage time experienced anywhere on our system during the year 2011, and we hope that you are pleased with the results. Our average member service reliability for the year was 99.96 percent, meaning that when our entire nine-county service territory is considered, electric service was not able to be provided to some of our members only four-tenths (4/10) of one percent of the time, even with two tornadoes, a hurricane and an earthquake. While that is a very respectable reliability figure as related to industry norms, we know and appreciate that our most important duty to you is to keep the lights on; and given that we take great pride in providing outstanding service to you, we continue our efforts to increase our reliability percentage even higher.

In seeking improvement, we carefully track outage causes and evaluate every event that occurs on our system. Occasionally, we have outages caused by vehicle accidents, farming and logging incidents, or squirrels, snakes and other wild critters coming into contact with wires, transformers or substation



Ray DeJarnette
System Arborist
and Manager of
Vegetation Services

equipment. But a far larger percentage of our outages are tree-related. As you can see from the chart above, tree-related outages are the number one culprit in interrupting service to your home or business, accounting for over 89 percent of your system's time off. These incidents occur most often when high winds, snow, ice, heavy rain, or any combination of weather causes trees or



limbs to fall, often creating extensive damage to your electric distribution system.

In our ongoing efforts to minimize tree-related outages, we have recently established a more progressive right-of-way program under the direction and leadership of our ISA-certified arborist, Ray DeJarnette. In the past, we maintained control of the ground cover of our rights of way by bush-hogging approximately every seven years to control tree and shrub growth to provide our men and vehicles access to your poles, wires, and distribution equipment. In 2006, we recognized that our bush-hogging measures alone were not creating the desired result because a more dense growth of brush and trees occurred each time the plants recovered from a cutting cycle. Additionally, and particularly in years where the weather was conducive to accelerated plant growth, the cutting alone did not sustain the goal we desired and believe to be achievable.

Following extensive research and discussion with industry experts on the

spraying process and its results, we added an herbicide-application program to our right-of-way management plan to begin converting the ground cover makeup in those areas from high-maintenance trees and shrubs to manageable weeds and grasses. That goal comes with a number of rewards, not the least of which are long-term cost savings, a neat, green right of way that provides food and cover advantages to wildlife, and more efficient access to the poles and lines reducing the time needed for both routine maintenance and outage restoration. We begin by bush-hogging the right of way and then applying herbicide during the next growing season. Follow-up spraying is then done periodically to eliminate trees and shrubs that survived or have established since the initial spraying and have the potential to grow, over time, into your power lines. Addressing vegetation early in its growth stage is the most cost effective, and spraying has proven to be the best option for accomplishing that goal.

DeJarnette, who serves as MEC's system arborist and manager of

vegetation services, has lived in Charlotte County his entire life and has over 30 years of utility right-of-way experience. He states, "Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative continues to modify and adjust its vegetation-management practices in order to better meet the perpetual challenges presented to reliability by vegetation. Other than a temporary browning of foliage from the herbicide program, the changes will basically go unnoticed by most of our members." DeJarnette continues by saying, "Effective right-of-way management is critical to providing quality customer service to our members and to meeting their expectations. It is work that I take very seriously and our organization takes very seriously."

Equally important to our program is managing the side growth of tree branches. We utilize bucket trucks and mechanical trimmers to remove branches that have grown into the right of way from trees adjacent to your power lines. Side trimming is especially important in areas that experience snow and ice on a regular basis as both of those can collect on tree limbs and can result in contact with your wires causing outages. Trimming limbs that have the potential of reaching power lines when they are weighed down with snow or ice, or break from the weight, greatly impacts our reliability numbers and the times that you are inconvenienced by an outage at your home or business.

Additionally, we identify and label as "danger" trees any dead or leaning trees located adjacent to our rights of way. "Danger" trees could come into contact with our lines when falling, and we make every effort to identify and remove them before they create an outage. Over the past 12 months we have removed over 2,000 danger trees throughout the 4,196 miles of line we maintain on your behalf. Often these danger trees are located further back than the edge of the right of way, but because of their height, would reach lines if they fell in the direction of the lines. This preventative measure reduces outage events that would most likely occur when it is least desirable to be without electricity — during a winter storm.

All of these proactive measures are taken to improve service reliability; and your cooperation is essential to the

BEFORE



AFTER



An effective right-of-way management program both prevents outages and makes your cooperative more efficient in outage restoration. The photos above show "before" and "after" views of a stretch of our right of way in Brunswick County. As you can see, the work greatly improves access and visibility with regard to the power line, which means that if the span were down, your cooperative could repair it more efficiently and safely and get your lights back on faster.

success of the program, especially with regard to yard trees. Yard trees, because of both the species and their location (subject to water and fertilizer from lawn care), tend to be the fastest-growing and present a substantial reliability risk, as well as a major safety issue for your cooperative and its members. Even so, it is still sometimes difficult, unfortunately, to receive cooperation from some homeowners in trimming yard trees that

have been planted in or immediately adjacent to the power line right of way. If you are a homeowner with a yard tree, or trees, growing under or near your cooperative's right of way, we respectfully ask that you cooperate with our crews who must properly prune trees in your yard to ensure reliability of service. Also, please remember that there are likely hundreds of other members who have allowed their trees to be



Ray DeJarnette, system arborist and manager of vegetation services, works with contract crews to clear danger trees away from our lines. Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative assists loggers by taking down border trees and showing them where to replant pines to establish our right-of-way boundaries.

pruned to ensure service that reliably reaches your home; and the line we are protecting by trimming your trees is most likely essential to providing electric service to your friends and neighbors who live nearby.

Also, when thinking about planting trees near the right of way on your property, please contact Ray DeJarnette or one of our district offices and give us the opportunity to assist you in planning for the right tree in the right location. Hopefully with our assistance, we can avoid disappointing you down the road when we are forced to trim trees that you may value. Well-planned decisions now can also reduce the cost of future right-of-way maintenance for you and your cooperative, and prevent later worries of ice-laden trees and limbs near power lines threatening to interrupt electric service to you and those served by the same line. The impact of your tree selection and management could affect several generations of cooperative members, since most trees outlive those who plant them. So please let us help. Take advantage of the resources provided on our website (www.meckelec.org) pertaining to tree selection, planting procedures, proper pruning, and tree care techniques.

Developing an efficient, cost-effective and manageable right-of-way program is

essential in continuing our reputation for keeping your lights on and getting them back on quickly during major storms. The program is not just about vegetation growth control to prevent contact with our wires, transformers and poles. It is also about access to our equipment, allowing us to respond rapidly and utilize our trucks to get your lights on faster and safer. Our linemen can climb poles with the best of them; and when that is the situation presented, you'll find none better. But when we can use our bucket trucks, your lights will be back on faster.

While a number of factors beyond our control contribute to outages from time to time, rest assured we are constantly exploring and seeking out potential solutions that might assist us in reducing the events that we are able to influence with proven, affordable right-of-way management techniques. Behind what your cooperative pays our wholesale power provider for the electricity you use, right-of-way management represents your cooperative's second-highest-cost item. As with everything that we do for you, and whenever we are spending your money here, we seek out options that allow us to strike the best balance between costs and results. Right-of-way management is a long-term and ongoing

investment that plays the most important role in preventing disruptions to your service and all the inconveniences that come with the loss of power, whether it's for minutes or days. Thanks to all of you who cooperate with us on right-of-way work and understand that many depend on the line that crosses your property and that you depend on many of them for the same.

In closing, DeJarnette explains, "While I have just recently joined the cooperative staff, it did not take long to see that this organization and its employees are focused squarely on taking care of their members. I intend to be part of that strong tradition and continue to make every effort for our work to be non-intrusive and to develop and oversee our right-of-way program in a way that meets the members' expectations for both reliable service and respect for their property. I welcome the opportunity to meet with any of our members who want to discuss our right-of-way work, or specific trees and locations, and will gladly answer any questions or address any concerns regarding the cooperative's vegetation management program." He can be reached at (434) 372-6155, or by email at rdejarnette@meckelec.org.

CHECK IT OUT



Vegetation Page on Website

You can find helpful information on Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative's website about tree selection, planting procedures, proper pruning, and tree care techniques to assure the best health for your trees.

www.meckelec.org