



Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Update



May 2010



A Message From The General Manager/CEO

By Dan Laws

“...spring is in the air!”

The unmistakable smell of freshly cut grass, fresh flowers and that outside smell in the morning you can't quite identify, but enjoy so much -- spring is in the air! I hope you have had plenty of rain where you live. It's been great here in Brackettville. We could use some more, but what we've had is most welcome.

As you know, with the advent of spring comes those ever-ominous spring thunderstorms. Inevitably, some will be severe enough that the lights will go out. I wish that were not the case and you can rest assured the linemen really wish that were not the case, but it will happen. There are a few conditions that make outages a painful reality here at Rio Grande.

First, is the severity of our thunderstorms. Throughout most of our service area, we are subject to lightning strikes in quantities that rival Florida, the lightning capital of the United States. Lightning strikes reach tens of thousands of volts in intensity above the basic impulse level (BIL) rating of our system. When a lightning strike occurs, the energy must be dissipated in some way. If there is not a mechanism provided, then it will find its own path to ground. So, we install lightning arrestors (transient suppressors is the technical name), to dissipate the energy of lightning. Unfortunately, there are times when the strike is too close or has too steep a wave front, or its energy exceeds the current rating of our lightning arrestor; that's when an outage happens. According to the National Weather Service, we can experience, on average, forty lightning strikes per mile of line. We have 9,500 miles of line; I'll let you do the math.

Coupled with the severity of the storms we experience is the vastness of our service area. We cover almost 35,000 square miles, including eighteen counties in Texas and two counties in New Mexico. Our service area encompasses some of the most rugged and rural country you can imagine. For linemen, rugged and rural equate to difficult and time consuming travel. Hopefully, all of you know that more than half our system is behind the gates and fences along the highway. When you drive down the highway after dark, look at the mountains; if you see lights, it means we have lines providing the supply. Then, think about how far it is to that mountain and the terrain that must be traveled over to get there. It's not hard to imagine why it takes so long sometimes to restore power.

An obvious problem that leads to difficulty restoring power is the fact that the work is being performed under the most difficult conditions. Rain, ice, snow, dark; you name it, and our linemen are in the middle of it when the lights are out. There are times when conditions are so bad, all they can do is wait it out. They can't return home because it causes too great a delay in restoring power, once conditions improve. So, they sit in their service truck and wait.

No one here at Rio Grande wants your lights to be off...ever. I am pretty sure none of our linemen want to be out in the conditions described above. No matter how we feel, conditions are going to combine in such a way that it happens. You can take comfort in the fact that some of the most dedicated and talented men I know are out there trying to minimize the outage you are experiencing. I thank you for your patience with us, and I assure you we are constantly making improvements aimed at reducing outages during storms. Have a great spring!

May is National Electrical Safety Month. For safety tips, visit our web site at www.riogrande.coop.