

Summer Problem Solvers

When an electric, gas or water line goes out, so do Graham County crews

When summer storms roll into the Gila Valley, it takes a lot of dedicated people to keep the power flowing to homes and businesses.

You are probably aware that linemen go out in the bad weather to make repairs, but have you ever wondered how they know where to go?

Dispatcher Jeannie Damron is one of three Graham County Electric Co-op and Graham County Utilities dispatchers that rotates answering calls 24/7.

The dispatcher on call will ask your name and the nature of the emergency. If it is a new issue, dispatchers will get your address, phone number and as much detail as possible about the situation, such as what you saw or heard just before the emergency happened. Dispatchers contact linemen, and gas or water crews that are on call.

In the event of a power outage, a lineman and groundman are called. In the event of a gas leak, the fire department and a gas crew respond to the emergency.

If the outage affects a large number of members, the dispatcher alerts the utility communications manager as soon as crews have been notified. This allows for prompt posting of the outage on GCEC's Facebook page.

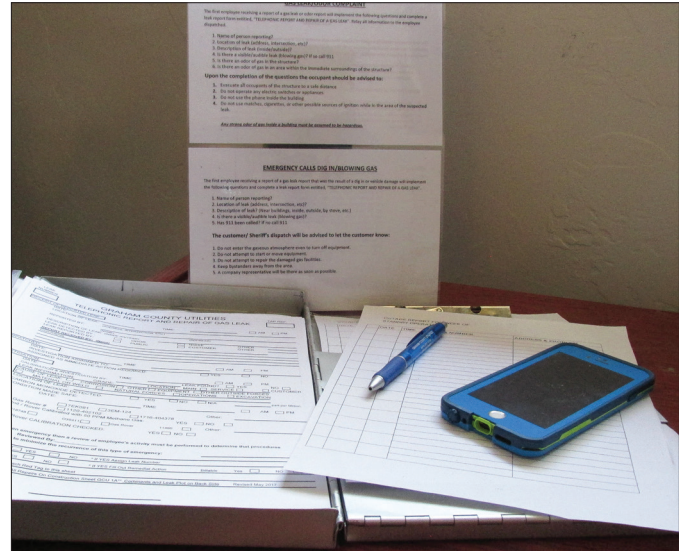
GCEC recognizes the importance of having local dispatchers who know the area, rather than contracting with a call center.

Jeannie has been a dispatcher for more than 28 years. She says in the early years, the wives of the linemen on call acted as dispatchers. When an emergency call came in, the women would tell her husband the location of the incident and communicate the issue. They would use portable home and truck radios to communicate any further issues.

"Things have changed since I very first started dispatching," Jeannie says. "Communication is better because of technology."

The phone system was recently updated to play an outage message. This lets members know GCEC is aware of an outage. It also gives members the opportunity to leave their name, phone number and address in case additional information is needed to help crews isolate the outage.

Once members know GCEC is aware of an outage and is working to restore the utility, members can check back on GCEC's Facebook page for updates and estimated times for restoration of the utility. Using Facebook for outage status updates means fewer incoming calls, which frees up dispatchers to communicate more efficiently with the crews. But remember, outages should never be reported through Facebook. Call



After-hours dispatchers carry a cellphone and a binder with all of the procedures and contacts they need during an outage.

928-485-2451 or 800-577-9266 to report an outage.

"It is important to report what you might have seen," Jeannie says. "That helps the crews determine where and what the problem might be."

The better prepared crews are when leaving the plant—with the materials they need to repair the issue—the quicker the outage will be restored.

As storm season approaches, please keep in mind the ways you can help dispatchers and crews. Sometimes patience is all that is needed. Crews work as quickly and as safely as possible to restore your utilities. ■

2019 GCEC Foundation Scholarship Recipients

Leigh Dona, Ft. Thomas High School
Caitlin Hinton, Ft. Thomas High School
Alexis Cassady, Mt. Graham High School
Michael Vining, Mt. Graham High School
Danika Derrick, Pima High School
Dante Bryce, Safford High School
Frederico Garcia, Thatcher High School



Summer Storms Are Dangerous

High winds, flash floods and lightning can cause a host of safety concerns

By Diane Junion

Summer monsoons often happen when you least expect them. In summer 2017, during a three-hour youth soccer camp at the Safford Middle School field, one of these storms rolled in.

Nichole Brown had dropped off her son at soccer camp and decided to stay to watch the kids practice.

“The rain and lightning came in so quickly,” Nichole says. “The coaches had to cancel the camp early. Many of the kids didn’t have rides, so everyone started calling parents.”

Nichole says the rain was pouring and lightning lit up the sky. She gathered up her kids plus a few more and they

all got into her vehicle. All of a sudden the lightning struck and she felt the power line fall on her car.

The energized electric line was draped over her driver’s-side mirror and on the car behind her.

“My dad taught us about power safety, and I remembered that you stay in your car if you can,” she says.

The mother of one of the boys in her car arrived. Nichole warned her to stay in her car, because the boys were safe as long as they remained inside the vehicle.

Police officers arrived and kept everyone else a safe distance away from the power lines. City of Safford linemen arrived and quickly de-energized the line.



Brent Wiltbank teaches electrical safety at Dan Hinton School.

Graham County Electric Co-op employees constantly provide safety instruction to the community. In March, Clint Woods and Brent Wiltbank provided an electrical safety demonstration to students at Dan Hinton School.

It is important for the public to be safe around power lines and know what to do in case of an emergency. Stay away from any downed power lines or remain in your vehicle until emergency personnel have deemed it safe to exit your vehicle. ■

Stay Clear of Electrical Hazards

Whether at work or play, be aware of electrical safety risks when outdoors

By Pam Blair

Warm summer weather draws people outside. Whether taking a dip in a pool, boating, playing outdoors, planting flowers or tackling home improvement projects, it is important to remember you are surrounded by electricity.

Practicing good habits around electricity helps ensure your family, friends and neighbors safely enjoy the outdoors.

Below are tips to help reduce the number of electrical deaths and injuries.

Power Lines and Utility Equipment

Before starting any project, identify the location of power lines. Look above for overhead lines. Be aware that some power lines are buried underground.

- Call 811 before you begin any digging project. A local call center will send out a crew to identify underground lines.

- Metal ladders conduct electricity, so use wooden or fiberglass ladders outdoors. Keep ladders at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines, and carry them horizontally.

- Always look up before raising any long piece of equipment—a ladder, irrigation pipe, antenna or pole—to make sure it won't come near a power line.

- Don't fly kites or drones near power lines. Reserve these for flight in wide-open spaces, such as a field or park.

- Do not attempt to retrieve balloons, kites or other objects stuck on power lines or other electrical equipment.

- Leave tree trimming to the professionals, particularly when the tree and its limbs are anywhere near a power line.

- Never play near or touch a power line with any part of your body, a toy, a stick or any other object. Assume all power lines are live and dangerous.

- Do not climb or play around a utility pole, an electric substation or a transformer box containing underground electrical facilities.

- Never climb a tree that is close to power lines. Even if lines do not touch

the tree, they could touch when more weight is added to a branch.

- Do not post signs, hang banners, or tie ribbons or balloons onto utility poles or other electrical equipment. This can be dangerous to you and utility workers.

- Never try to rescue a family member, friend or pet that has come into contact with electrical equipment. Stay at least 35 feet away from downed power lines, and call 911.

Swimming Pools and Boating

Water and electricity do not mix. Inside and outside, electrical devices and cords should be kept at least 10 feet away from pools, spas and other water sources.

- Have an electrician inspect the pool, spa or hot tub. Make sure all equipment meets local codes and the National Electrical Code, which specifies that all electrical wires and junction boxes must be at least 5 feet away from the water.

- Use battery-operated instead of cord-connected devices around water.

- Cover all outdoor receptacles to keep them dry. This is especially important around pools and other water sources.

- Use a ground-fault circuit interrupter on outside outlets, especially those near water. A GFCI will shut off power to the outlet if the circuit is compromised.

- Make sure all electrical equipment used for swimming pools—even the cleaning equipment—is grounded.

- Never touch electrical devices when you are wet, either from water activities or from perspiration.

- Do not swim or hang out near the water before, during or after a thunderstorm. Water and lightning are a dangerous combination.

- Know the location of all electrical switches and circuit breakers.

- Post a detailed emergency plan around the pool, spa or hot tub area, outlining what to do if someone is suffering from electric shock.



When moving irrigation lines, ladders or other tall items, look up and make sure you do not come in contact with overhead power lines.

Photo by Mike Teegarden



Warn youngsters not to play around or climb on the green transformer boxes that house underground electrical facilities.

Photo courtesy of Touchstone Energy Cooperatives

Boating and Open-Water Fun

Docks and boats carry sources of electricity. Faulty wiring or damaged cords and other devices can cause the surrounding water to become energized.

Just like your home, it is critical a licensed electrician inspects your boat and that you are familiar with its electrical system so you can identify hazards.

- The National Electrical Code requires marinas and boatyards to have ground-fault protection. Test GFCIs and equipment leakage circuit interrupters monthly. Make sure electrical current is not escaping from the vessel.
- Check for nearby power lines before boating, fishing or swimming.
- Never swim near a marina or a boat while it is running. Residual current could flow into the water, putting anyone in the water at risk of electric shock drowning. There is no visible warning. As little as 10 milliamps—1/50th the amount used by a 60-watt lightbulb—can cause paralysis and drowning.
- If you feel tingling sensations while in the water, swim back in the direction

from which you came, and immediately report it to the dock or marina owner.

- Know where main breakers are on both the boat and shore-power source so you can respond quickly in an emergency.
- If you see an electric shock drowning in progress, turn power off, throw a life ring and call 911. Never enter the water, or you also could become a victim.

Power Tools, Cords and Outlets

The U.S. Consumer Protection Safety Commission reports there are nearly 400 electrocutions in the United States a year. About 15% are related to consumer products, with 8% attributed to electrical accidents with electric power tools. Lawn and garden equipment and ladders coming into contact with overhead power lines account for 9% of consumer product-related electrocutions each year.

- Inspect power tools and appliances for frayed cords, broken plugs and cracked or broken housing. Repair or replace damaged items.
- Never use power tools near live electrical wires or water pipes.

- Check that each outlet has its own weatherproof outlet cover, and keep it closed when not in use.
- Use GFCIs with every power tool to protect against electric shocks.
- Do not use corded power tools in wet or damp locations.
- Use tools with insulated grips to avoid the potential of electric shock.
- Use only extension cords rated for outdoor use. Indoor cords cannot withstand outdoor weather conditions, and may become a fire or shock hazard.
- Before using an extension cord, inspect it carefully for damage. Discard cords with cracks or exposed wires.
- Use extreme caution when cutting or drilling into walls where electrical wires or water pipes could be accidentally touched or penetrated.
- If a power tool trips a safety device while in use, take the tool to a manufacturer-authorized repair center for service.
- Do not use power tools without the proper guards.
- Unplug outdoor tools and appliances when not in use. ■

What does natural gas smell like:

- * Natural gas smells like a rotten egg odorant that is added to the natural gas.

What to do if you smell natural gas inside a building:

- * DO leave the building immediately. Take everyone with you (including pets) and leave the exit door open if possible.
- * DO proceed to a safe location where you can no longer smell the odor of natural gas.
- * DO call Graham County Utilities emergency line from a safe location. The natural gas emergency line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Customers should call 928.485.2451.
- * DO call 911 from a safe location outside of the building if you hear or see natural gas blowing.

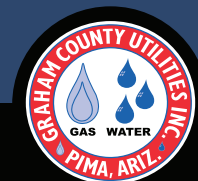
What to do if you smell natural gas outside a building:

- * DO call Graham County Utilities from a safe location, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if you smell or detect natural gas outside or near a meter. 928.485.2451
- * DO call 911 from a location outside of the building if you hear or see natural gas blowing.

What not to do if you smell natural gas in or outside a building:

- ⊘ DO NOT re-enter the building to open doors and windows.
- ⊘ DO NOT use phones (standard or cellular), computers, appliances, elevators, lamps, garage door openers, or electrical devices inside the building if a smell of natural gas is present.
- ⊘ DO NOT touch electrical outlets, switches or doorbells.
- ⊘ DO NOT smoke or use a lighter, match or other open flame.
- ⊘ DO NOT position or operate vehicles or powered equipment where leaking natural gas may be present.
- ⊘ DO NOT try to re-light a pilot light.
- ⊘ DO NOT e-mail us or post on social media if you smell natural gas or suspect a natural gas leak, PLEASE CALL GCU OR 911.
- ⊘ DO NOT re-enter the home or building until it has been thoroughly inspected by our service technician.

Always call **811** to have utilities marked before performing any excavation



(928) 485-2451
9 W Center St, Pima, AZ 85543

Linemen Dress for Safety

Shotgun

Hard hat

Safety glasses

Fireproof shirt

Leather gloves

Tool holster

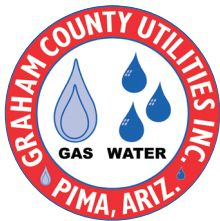
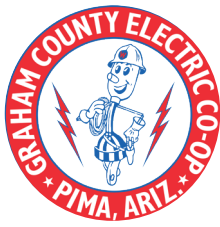
Safety belt

Lineman boots

Bucksqueeze

Climbing gaffs

Line Foreman Mitch Brown sports the latest in personal protection equipment.



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Manager's Message

We Are Always Here For You

By the time you read this we will be well into our official monsoon season, which begins June 15 and ends September 30. But as we have witnessed this spring, thunderstorms can develop anytime during the year. Rest assured, we are prepared to provide outage restoration and communications 24/7/365. We want to provide you with some tips and suggestions on how to be prepared for outages year-round.

It is a good idea to have a storm emergency kit available during extended outages. First, make sure you have drinking water available, at least 1 gallon per person, per day. Make sure you have easy to prepare nonperishable food. Make sure you have flashlights and extra batteries and/or candles. It is a good idea to have a fully stocked first-aid kit available. Keep several days' worth of prescription medications on hand, because your local pharmacy may be affected by outages. It is a good idea to have a cellphone and battery operated cellphone charger available. If possible, keep extra cash on hand in case the need arises, because your local ATM machine may be affected by outages.

Under all circumstances stay away from downed wires or electric equipment. Do not attempt to remove any trees or debris that you see in power lines or communications lines. If you happen to be in a vehicle that is in the vicinity of downed power lines, do not get out of your vehicle. Remain in the vehicle until emergency response personnel or cooperative personnel let you know that is safe to exit the vehicle. Do not use a generator in an



enclosed area because of the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning. Remind everyone of the National Weather Service's rule of thumb, "When thunder roars, go indoors." Lightning can strike 10 miles in advance of a storm.

Our phone system can handle a large volume of incoming calls during a large outage. In the case of large scale outages, please be patient while waiting to talk to dispatch personnel. Although our system will handle the call volume, the wait times may be substantial. Please listen to the voice prompts as options have changed. Unless you have an

emergency or have some information that will help our crews identify the cause of the outage, we encourage you to follow us on our Facebook page. We will continually update our Facebook page with pertinent information until the power is restored. By following us on Facebook, this keeps our phone system available for emergencies, such as gas or water outages and additional electric outages.

These are just a few tips and suggestions to help make outages a little more bearable. Regardless of the magnitude of an outage, our line crews and dispatch personnel work tirelessly to get as many member's power, gas and water back on as soon as possible. Our primary concern is the safety of our crews, the safety of the general public and the safety of you, our member-owners.

—Kirk Gray