

# Arkansas co-op crew flags stray voltage problem at local church

BY DERRILL HOLLY

Members of a small rural church are thankful for an Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (AECI) construction crew who discovered a potentially dangerous stray voltage issue while building distribution lines in Sheridan on Aug. 15.

“The crew was upgrading service lines and, in the process, a piece of wire touched a church storage shed and arced, alerting members of the crew that there was a problem,” said Kelly Goins, maintenance supervisor at C & L Electric Cooperative Corp.

The AECI crew handles construction projects for many distribution co-ops in Arkansas and several other nearby states, so they immediately contacted C & L Electric, and the co-op informed Lost Creek Missionary Baptist Church of the hazard.

“I didn’t want a kid or someone with a pacemaker to walk up on it and get hurt,” said AECI Construction Foreman Joe Fowler.

“The preacher, electrician and a C & L Electric employee came out to the church,” Fowler said. “We stayed with them and helped them diagnose the problem.”

Stray voltage can occur when underground electric lines are improperly installed or maintained, allowing for transmission of electric current between two or more points, energizing structures and posing potential risks of minor shocks, serious injury or death.

Utility industry analysts estimate that at least 1,500 such incidents occur in the United States each year. A study produced by an industry vendor projects that up to 250,000 structures nationwide are energized by stray voltage originating from underground conductor typically transferred between neutral ground wires.

“A member of the crew leaned against the shed and felt a minor shock,” said Scott Sander, director of corporate safety for Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corp. and AECI. “Meter readings taken at the site showed a good amount of voltage present, so Fowler contacted the co-op and brought it to the attention of



Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. Construction Foreman Joe Fowler (center) and his crew discovered a stray voltage problem at a Sheridan church and assisted with repairs.

church leaders.”

The situation could have resulted in more serious problems had it not been reported and repaired.

“The church recently had some electrical work done, and it was wired incorrectly,” Fowler said. “We just didn’t want anything to happen and anyone to get hurt.”

While low voltage can cause minor shocks, it raises health concerns for those with heart problems or other medical conditions managed with implants or monitoring devices. Stray voltage issues are often discovered after people experience shocks at swimming pools, marinas or community ballfields.

Stray voltage on farms and ranches can alter animal behavior, making them avoid water troughs and feed bins even when exposure is limited to less than 10 volts. It stresses animals, stifling growth and reducing egg and milk production, and it also can contribute to disease and livestock deaths.

Stray voltage can be transferred to any grounded object in a building, Sander said. “We all need to be aware of the problem because of its potential to cause harm to people and animals. Proper wiring periodically inspected and maintained by licensed electricians reduces risks and can help prevent problems before they occur.”

*Derrill Holly is a staff writer for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

# YOUR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE PAYS PROPERTY TAXES TOO!

Just as everyone who owns property pays property taxes in the month of October, C & L Electric is no exception. The Cooperative pays taxes on its various properties, such as office buildings, overhead power lines and substations. These tax payments are used to support such things as schools, roads, law enforcement and local governments. This year, C & L paid a total of \$1,075,357.54 to the nine Arkansas counties in which we have members. Here's what your Cooperative paid to each county:

Arkansas County	\$1,558.30
Bradley County	\$142,355.27
Cleveland County	\$135,398.62
Dallas County	\$4,360.11
Desha County	\$145,066.13
Drew County	\$184,764.46
Grant County	\$79,409.24
Jefferson County	\$60,933.94
Lincoln County	\$321,511.47



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## Winter is coming: Safeguard your home

BY MITCH ROSS

“Winter is coming.” It’s a phrase from a popular TV show to signify that difficult and troubled times lie ahead. One thing about the upcoming winter does inspire some foreboding — associated expenses! Big family meals, traveling to grandma’s house and Christmas gifts are common seasonal expenses, but another is energy bills! For many of us, the winter season is when we see some of our highest energy expenses. Here are a few tips that may help significantly reduce your energy costs this winter:

### Fix insulation defects

- Most attics have insulation defects. These are areas where insulation has been disturbed, leading to voids in your home’s thermal barrier. Although they may seem small and insignificant, these voids can have an exaggerated effect on your home’s heat loss. Carefully inspect the attic, and if you see any places where the insulation is notably lower than surrounding areas, fill them in.

### Insulate the attic

- When checking if you have any voids in your attic insulation, check the overall insulation levels. If, on average, you have less than 7-8 inches of insulation, it would be a wise investment to add insulation to the entire attic!

### Check air seals

- Check door weatherstripping, plumbing penetrations and other target areas for air leaks. Seal with new weatherstripping, expanding foam or caulk as needed.

### Check duct seals

- Duct leakage can have a huge negative impact on your home’s comfort and energy use. With the HVAC unit’s fan running, inspect the duct system for leaks. You should be able to hear and/or feel significant leaks. Repair and seal as needed. Duct mastic is the material of choice when sealing a duct system.



Adding insulation and sealing ducts are great ways to prepare your home for winter.

### Adjust the thermostat

- One easy way to save money in winter months is to maintain a low setting on your thermostat. Set it as low as you comfortably can during the winter. Dress warm when indoors to stay comfortable.

### Install a smart thermostat

- Smart thermostats can make reducing your HVAC’s runtime when the house is unoccupied much easier, leading to a real reduction in energy consumption. Another plus of these units is that if you have a heat pump, and program them correctly, they can maximize the efficiency of your heat pump usage, reducing expensive auxiliary heat.



Smart thermostats can help reduce your home’s energy consumption.

Reach out to your local electric cooperative to see if they can do an energy audit to help assess your home’s condition and give you further recommendations. I know that for me, having my home in order helps me focus on the good of the season, with less of the “Winter is coming” gloom!

*Mitch Ross is the energy efficiency manager for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas.*