

Teaching Safety

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by Brenda Kleinjan

AN ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE OF “YEAH” ANSWERS Emily McKay’s question of whether the fourth- and fifth-graders gathered around her like to have fun.

McKay is at the Wessington Springs, S.D., elementary school to present the “Story Behind the Switch,” an interactive electrical safety program presented by electric cooperatives.

Once the students have given their response, McKay explains that in the course of the next 45 minutes, students are going to have fun, learn about electrical safety and they’ll have to take a test. The last announcement is met with groans until McKay says she’ll give them the test answers in advance:

1. Electricity is lazy.
2. Electricity wants to go down to the ground.
3. Electricity travels on the outside of the wire.

McKay’s visit to Wessington Springs was coordinated through Central Electric Cooperative in Mitchell, S.D. The elementary school is one of 22 within Central’s eight-county service area.

Every year, Ken Schlimgen, director of member services and marketing at Central

Electric, brings in Basin Electric’s “Power Behind The Switch” program for a two-week swing through area elementary schools. Schlimgen tries to schedule the program at as many of the schools as possible.

“Our philosophy here has been that we’re a part of these communities and we think it’s very important to teach electric safety to our children so we can educate them and prevent them from having an electrical accident,” said Schlimgen.

McKay logs thousands of miles delivering the safety message to children at schools within Basin Electric’s nine-state region, including all cooperatives in South Dakota and many in western Minnesota.

Cooperative safety education does not end at McKay’s efforts.

At the Black Hills Stock Show held each winter, the safety presentation at the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth in Lacroix Hall is a perennial favorite with the youth – especially those barely able to look over the top of the barrier.

Little eyes peer intently over the safety rail and



watch as cooperative personnel use a Neon Leon farm safety display to demonstrate electrical safety practices around the farm and ranch.

As the employee cycles through the demonstration points of look up, look down and look around, the little eyes grow larger as the youngsters begin to recognize the need for safety. The eyes grow even larger as electrical sparks fly when the employee shows what can happen if equipment comes in contact with overhead or underground power lines.

Meanwhile, parents – who often a bit grudgingly accompany the child – are also drawn in to the presentation. As the co-op employee continues, the parents can be seen leaning toward one another saying, “I didn’t know that.”

Todd Eliason, assistant general manager of Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative in Rapid City, S.D., worked much of the 2006 stock show and said the safety display provided an opportunity to talk about electrical safety with members.

“Those are the residents we serve and it’s one way to get the message out there,” said Eliason. “This year we had a lot of people come up and talk to us about downed power lines, which was fresh in their minds after November’s ice storms.

Cooperative members are encouraged to contact their local electric cooperative about any questions they may have about electrical safety.

And, electric cooperatives deliver electric safety messages to adults through their publications and also through countless other fairs and festivals.

An increasingly popular offering by the cooperatives is high voltage safety demonstrations for fire departments and first responders.

For more information about scheduling an electric safety demonstration in your area, contact your local electric cooperative. Their address is on Page 3.

Opposite Page: School children and adults alike learned about electrical safety during the Black Hills Stock Show when the electric cooperatives’ high-voltage demonstration trailer took to the arena floor. Here, line workers demonstrate what can happen when object become entangled in power lines. *Photo By: Becky Pol, West Central Electric Cooperative* **Inset:** Sami Mentzer, a student at Wessington Springs Elementary School has some fun with a Van de Graff generator during a safety demonstration at the school. **Cover:** Sidney Neugebauer, a fourth-grader at John Paul II Elementary School in Mitchell, S.D., has a hair-raising experience with a Van de Graff generator as part of the “Story Behind the Switch” safety demonstration at her school this spring. *Photo By: Photo by Dave Sietsema, Firesteel Creek Photography*



PHOTO CREDIT: BRENDA KLEINMAN

Is Your Home Safe?

Kids – Use this checklist and do an inspection of your home with a parent or an adult. Circle “needs fixing” if you find hazards in your house and ask an adult to have them fixed.

- Electrical appliances are used away from water, and you always make sure your hands are dry before you use an appliance. True or Needs Fixing
- Electrical cords are in good condition--- not frayed or cracked. True or Needs Fixing
- Electrical cords are run safely through the house, not under rugs, furniture legs or near hot appliances. True or Needs Fixing
- Safety caps are placed in unused outlets to protect small children. True or Needs Fixing
- Electrical outlets are not overloaded with too many appliances. True or Needs Fixing
- All outlets have wall plates over them. True or Needs Fixing
- Electrical appliances that get hot (light bulbs, heaters, toasters) are kept away from things that could burn. True or Needs Fixing
- Small appliances are unplugged when not in use. True or Needs Fixing
- A multipurpose fire extinguisher is kept in the home. True or Needs Fixing
- Extension cords are used only temporarily and not plugged in and left in place. True or Needs Fixing
- People carry appliances by the handles, not the cord. True or Needs Fixing
- Appliances are unplugged by pulling on the plug, not the cord. True or Needs Fixing

For more safety tips, contact your local Touchstone Energy[®] Cooperative.