



## TWIN VALLEY ELECTRIC CO-OP

# NEWS

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#### OFFICE HOURS

Monday-Friday  
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## Twin Valley Sponsors SunPowered Student Challenge Team

A Twin Valley-sponsored team of Labette County High School (LCHS) students competed in the SunPowered Student Challenge in Topeka on Feb. 5. The development of this STEM learning opportunity was initiated by Pitsco Education in Pittsburg, Kansas, and several Kansas electric cooperatives. It was designed to educate future students about responsible energy consumption, local jobs in the electric industry (whether it's in the field, manufacturing, dispatch or even sales and distribution) and even degrees obtainable in our local colleges.

Last fall, each team was given a kit with parts to construct a miniature solar array, along with written materials outlining the competition.

To prepare for the competition, teams assembled and configured their solar kits to meet a targeted output, and constructed model homes on which to install their arrays.

Teams also prepared presentations, experimented with different configurations, and prepared for the different challenges during the competition.

In February, armed with newfound knowledge and hands-on practice obtained the prior semester, 11 student teams from across Kansas — as far west as Colby and as far east at Fort Scott — met to compete in real-time challenges, present findings and prove



The Labette County High School team, sponsored by Twin Valley Electric, included (from left): Advisor Marty Warren, Mason Hoppes, Kendall Green, Konnor LaForge, Aiden Martinez and Isaac Smith. Layton Vail contributed to the team early on, but was unable to attend the competition. Several of the team members live in Twin Valley's service territory.

their solar energy knowledge — all before industry professionals.

An integral part of the challenge was configuring the array to produce enough energy to power the model home without over-producing. Appropriate sizing of solar installations is critical to achieve cost savings.

LCHS team members agreed the experience was valuable and expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn and compete.

"We are happy to support this educational opportunity for local youth," Angie Erickson, Twin Valley CEO, said. "This program combines technical education in the rapidly growing and evolving industry of capturing renewable energy, with its real-world application. Additionally, cooperative involvement helps ensure an emphasis on consumer-member benefit."

## STEER CLEAR OF OVERHEAD AND UNDERGROUND POWER LINES



- ▶ Look up and look out for overhead power lines.
- ▶ Keep a 20-foot minimum clearance between you or an object you are holding and a power line.
- ▶ Remember, power lines can be buried too. Call 811 or visit [www.call811.com](http://www.call811.com) before digging to get underground public utilities marked.

### BE MINDFUL OF POWER LINES WHEN COMPLETING THESE TASKS:

- ▶ **HOME MAINTENANCE** Cleaning gutters, being on the roof or using extended tools to wash windows or skim a pool.
- ▶ **YARD WORK** Trimming trees, carrying ladders and digging.
- ▶ **TRANSPORTING TALL OBJECTS** Ladders are not the only extended objects people use outdoors. Be careful anytime you are moving a tall object or tool.
- ▶ **CONTRACTED AND DIY PROJECTS** If you are planning any project that requires digging, ensure underground utilities are marked.

Look up and out for overhead power lines. **CONTACT CAN HAPPEN IN AN INSTANT.** If there is a damaged/downed power line or pad-mounted transformer (green box), do not go within 50 feet.

SOURCE: [WWW.SAFELECTRICITY.ORG](http://WWW.SAFELECTRICITY.ORG)

## Do Not Overlook Overhead Power Lines

It can be easy to overlook things that we see every day, including overhead power lines. However, failure to notice overhead lines can be deadly. If you or an object you are touching contacts or gets too close to a power line, you could be seriously injured or killed.

Overhead power lines require 20 feet of clearance in all directions. This distance rule applies to the power lines draped from pole to pole that line roads (distribution lines), as well as the drop-down lines that service homes or other structures.

If your job requires you to operate equipment in the vicinity of large transmission lines and towers, they require even more clearance than distribution and drop-down lines. That clearance is determined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). OSHA mandates line clearance distances for all types of power lines.

Be mindful of overhead power lines when completing the following tasks:

### HOME MAINTENANCE

Always be aware of the location of power lines, particularly when using long tools, such as ladders, pool skimmers and pruning poles. Lower long tools and equipment before moving or transporting them. Other safety tips include:

- ▶ Carry ladders and other long items horizontally whenever possible.
- ▶ Be careful when working on or around your roof.
- ▶ Never go on a roof in windy or bad weather.

### YARDWORK

When trimming trees, do not allow yourself or trimmers to come within 20 feet of overhead power lines, including service lines to your home or out-building. Also:

- ▶ Do not trim trees near power lines; instead, leave this to certified line clearance tree trimmers.
- ▶ Do not use water or blower extensions to clean gutters near electric lines.

### FARMING

Review power line locations and other potential electrical hazards with all workers at morning safety meetings. Equipment that could get too close or contact a power pole or line includes sprayer tips, tall equipment, dump trucks, augers and other extensions.

### AT WORK

Follow all OSHA distance requirements when operating dump trucks, cranes, concrete pump truck extensions and when working on a roof or in a bucket.

### OTHER REMINDERS

- ▶ Do not come within 50 feet of a downed or damaged power line. Warn others to stay away. Call 911 to report it.
- ▶ Never climb trees near power lines. Even if the power lines are not touching the tree, they could come in contact when weight is added to the branch.

Look up and look out for overhead power lines. Contact can happen in an instant. For additional electrical safety tips, go to [www.SafeElectricity.org](http://www.SafeElectricity.org).

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Looking for an easy way to manage home energy use? Smart plugs are inexpensive and offer convenient solutions for scheduling and controlling your favorite electronic devices. With smart plugs, you can easily manage your coffee maker, lighting, home office equipment, video game consoles and more. Smart plugs can help you manage devices through a smart phone app, your home assistant or voice control. By conveniently powering off or scheduling devices, you can save energy — and money!

SOURCE: [WWW.ENERGYSTAR.GOV](http://WWW.ENERGYSTAR.GOV)



# Restoring Power Safely and Efficiently

We do our best to avoid them, but power outages occasionally happen. For most Twin Valley Electric members, outages are rare and only last a few hours. But when major storms impact our area, extended outages are unavoidable.

When the power goes out, how do Twin Valley Electric crews know where to start working? How do you know if your outage has been reported? It all starts with a safe, efficient plan for power restoration.

When the lights go out and it's safe for our crews to begin the restoration process, they start by repairing power lines and equipment that will restore power to the greatest number of people in the shortest time possible.

This process begins with repairs to main distribution lines that serve many homes and businesses. Next, crews work on tap lines, which deliver power to transformers, either mounted on utility poles (for above-ground service) or placed on pads (for underground service). Finally, individual service lines to homes are repaired.

We can't control the weather, but we can prepare for it. Twin Valley Electric keeps a supply of extra utility poles, transformers and other equipment on hand so we can quickly get to work in the event of infrastructure damage. When widespread outages occur, multiple crews will be out in the field simultaneously working to repair damage at multiple

locations. We also coordinate with nearby co-ops to bring in additional crews when necessary.

A proactive approach to maintenance helps minimize the chance of prolonged outages; this is why you see Twin Valley Electric crews periodically trimming trees and clearing vegetation near rights-of-way. We love trees too, but it only takes one overgrown limb to knock out power for an entire neighborhood. Trimming improves power reliability for our entire community. In addition to managing vegetation, we regularly inspect utility poles, power lines and other critical equipment to maintain a more reliable system.

If you experience a power outage, don't assume a neighbor reported it. It's best to report the outage yourself. The quickest way to report an outage is to call our office at 866-784-5500.

If you have a medical condition that requires electrical equipment, please let us know, and always have a backup plan in place. This plan could include a portable generator, extra medical supplies or moving to an alternate location until power is restored. If you plan to use a generator for backup power, read all safety information and instructions before use.

As a member of Twin Valley Electric, you can feel confident knowing we're standing by, ready to restore power as quickly and safely as possible.



## DON'T PLUG THESE 15 THINGS INTO A POWER STRIP

<b>IN THE KITCHEN</b>	<b>IN THE LAUNDRY ROOM</b>	<b>THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE</b>
✗ Refrigerators	✗ Washing machines	✗ Sump pumps
✗ Microwave ovens	✗ Dryers	✗ Space heaters
✗ Toasters		✗ Portable air conditioners
✗ Coffee makers	<b>IN THE BATHROOM</b>	
✗ Blenders	✗ Hair dryers	
✗ Slow cookers	✗ Curling irons	
✗ Rice cookers	✗ Other hairstyling tools	

 Do not overload power strips by plugging in appliances that consume more watts than the cord can handle. This can cause the power strip to overheat or start a fire.

SOURCE: WWW.SAFEELECTRICITY.ORG

## Joe Brooks Retires



**JOE BROOKS** retired from Twin Valley Electric Cooperative after 21 years of service in February 2024. A reception was held for family, friends and co-workers. **CONGRATULATIONS JOE!**



# Storing Fruits and Vegetables Properly Helps Ensure Maximum Enjoyment

BY THE K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION NEWS SERVICE

K-State food safety specialist says different approaches are needed for different types of produce

Now that summer is here, fresh fruits and vegetables are available everywhere, bringing with them the challenge of proper storage so we can enjoy every bite.

Kansas State University food safety specialist Karen Blakeslee said storage methods depend on the types of produce that we keep and where we keep them.

Summertime favorites such as fresh berries, cherries, grapes and stone fruit including apricots are highly perishable and need to be refrigerated. Berries, especially, can become moldy in just a couple of days. Apples, on the other hand, can be kept at room temperature if they're going to be used within seven days.

Leafy greens, celery, carrots, broccoli, green beans and asparagus all need to be refrigerated as well. With asparagus, particularly, "it's a good idea to put the bottom ends in a cup of water and store in the refrigerator," said Blakeslee, coordinator of the Rapid Response Center in the university's Department of Animal Sciences and Industry. "It helps keep asparagus hydrated so they don't wrinkle up and dry out."

Some types of produce need a little more ripening when they're first brought home. Blakeslee recommends leaving nectarines, peaches, pears and plums on the counter so they can ripen and then put them in the refrigerator.

"If peaches are a little hard, put them in a paper bag, fold it together and let the natural ethylene gas help the

peaches ripen," she said. "Another trick is to place an apple in the bag to speed ripening."

The key is to watch those fruits closely because they can ripen quickly.

Plenty of other types of produce can be left at room temperature: bananas, melons, citrus fruits, pineapple, tomatoes, onions, garlic and potatoes.

Blakeslee offered a couple of tips for the trickier of these foods, though: If bananas are starting to show brown spots, they need to be refrigerated, frozen or made into a smoothie or banana bread. Onions and garlic should be stored away from potatoes because they can cause potatoes to sprout faster.

"With all produce, especially any of these that are at room temperature, once you cut them open — and if you have leftovers — you have to refrigerate them to keep them safe to eat," Blakeslee said.

## OTHER TIPS FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

When selecting melons at a store or farmers market, Blakeslee recommends looking at the bottom of a melon rather than thumping or tapping on it to judge its ripeness.

"It's better to look at the color of melon rind — where it sits on the ground — and look for a buttery yellow color," Blakeslee said. "The thumping? Some people swear by it, and it can be deceiving. It's better to look for that yellow color."

Likewise, when the stem area of a cantaloupe is no longer green and you can detect the signature smell of the cantaloupe, it's ready to be eaten. Rinse the outside of melons with water and scrub with a produce brush before cutting them into pieces.

Take advantage of the plastic bags available in the produce section of the grocery store. They provide a barrier between fresh produce and fresh meats to prevent potential cross-contamination.

Don't wash leafy greens or berries immediately after bringing them home and before putting them in the refrigerator. That could shorten their shelf life.

"In most cases it is usually better to wait to wash produce until you're ready to use them," Blakeslee said, pointing to an alternative. "One little trick that I like to do — and it seems to work pretty well with leafy greens — I place a paper towel in the container to help absorb any residual moisture. It actually helps them last a little longer."

Gardeners often end up with far more produce than they can eat or give away while it's ripe, and that's where proper food preservation techniques come in. Learn more about preserving food safely at [www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation](http://www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation).

**KAREN BLAKESLEE** publishes the monthly newsletter *You Asked It!* providing numerous tips on food safety. More information is also available from local extension offices in Kansas.