

OCTOBER–NOVEMBER 2022

SAVE THE DATE

- Oct. 11
Understanding Microgrids
Webinar
- Oct. 18–21
Advanced Pole Climbing School
Kaufman, Trinity Valley EC
- Oct. 25–28
Advanced Pole Climbing School
Franklin, Navasota Valley EC
- Nov. 1
2023 NESC Update
Georgetown,
TEC Training Facility
Workshop
- Nov. 2–4
Application and Use of the 2023 NESC
Georgetown,
TEC Training Facility
Workshop
- Nov. 15
Pole Buckling Prevention
Webinar
- Dec. 13
Strength of Pole-Top Assemblies
Webinar

ALWAYS THINK SAFETY
Gloves | Grounds | Cover Up

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A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION
FROM TEC LOSS CONTROL

Training Hits All-Time High

Competition for workers is a factor as demand for TEC's Loss Control schools remains hot

Tami Knipstein is the traffic cop of TEC's Loss Control program. As the nine instructors on the staff roam the state for schools and safety meetings, Knipstein keeps up with their countless concerns—jotting notes every time they have requests and changes for their appointments. Meanwhile, most every co-op in the state, plus some municipal utilities and contractors, check in with her daily as they add employees to TEC schools or move them from one school to the next.

The orchestration of the safety and training program peaked in 2022, with a record 1,193 students registered as of Sept. 23 for 59 schools. And it looks like 2023 could surpass that, Knipstein says, as more than 741 have already signed up, and registration has been open only since Sept. 1.

Knipstein calls the demand for training unheard of, even as school enrollment has steadily increased over the past 15 years. “I feel like a clerk at a Black Friday sale before Christmas,” she says.

Pinpointing the cause of the uptick is difficult. Except for a drop-off in 2020, COVID-19 itself hasn't had a major impact on school enrollment. Recent retirements, and the resulting influx of new employees, is a factor at some organizations, as is losing trained lineworkers to investor-owned utilities and contractors.

“I think the biggest reason for the large numbers is the quality of training that TEC provides,” says Danny Williams, TEC's Loss Control manager.

Many organizations use TEC's training in their apprenticeship programs, says Curtis Whitt, Loss Control assistant manager.

“It's very important to try to keep the employees we have now by explaining to them that we will enroll them in some of the best training put together by TEC that other organizations can't offer,” says Freddy King, electric distribution manager for the city of Seguin, a TEC school host site and regular participant in the Loss Control program.

Roddy Gandy, the line superintendent at Lyntegar EC, calls TEC's training “crucial for advancement” at the co-op.



A TEC hotline school at the San Bernard EC training field in Bellville.

Losing skilled employees to enticing offers from IOUs and contractors is a concern at some organizations.

“We invest a lot of time and money on our employees to get the proper training with TEC, so losing employees to contractors or other organizations puts us in a bind when we can't pay what others pay,” King says.

James Jouett cites retirements and poaching for attrition at San Bernard EC. The electric system manager and chief operating officer says the co-op lost eight lineworkers to IOU recruiting in 2021. “However, we have had a few employees who thought the grass was greener on the other side of the fence ask to come back after a few months,” Jouett says.

Donnye Richardson, operations manager at Bailey County EC, says his co-op faced the salary challenge head-on. “To try to combat the poaching, we got with our CEO, and he was able to go to our board of directors, and they raised our wages up some,” he says.

BCEC also tries to recruit new employees from within the co-op's service territory. “We have found that they are more likely to stay committed to our area if they have close family here,” Richardson says.

Jouett says SBEC tries to be transparent during the

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hiring process. “We have a crew foreman sit in on the interviews and tell the candidates what a typical workday is like and generally what they can expect if they are selected to join our workforce,” he says.

SBEC also hires a consultant who researches electric utilities in the Bellville area and compiles data to formulate a compensation program that is competitive for its market. “Our retirement program is top-notch, but it’s sometimes hard to explain to some that this long-term benefit will outweigh a dollar or two more an hour right now,” Jouett says.

Championing all that co-ops offer is an important strategy in employee retention, especially among younger generations, says Delaine Orendorff, director of human capital planning and compensation at NRECA. Focusing only on compensation could fall short.

“What we do understand from research on this topic is that early career employees are looking for more than just competitive compensation,” she says. “They are

looking for a positive culture. They’re looking for opportunities to grow. They’re looking for collaboration, communication and transparency—which are all part of a positive culture. They’re looking for supportive leaders. And a really important point: They’re looking for flexibility.



Year	Enrollment	Year	Enrollment
2007	579	2015	1,089
2008	704	2016	1,073
2009	800	2017	1,105
2010	670	2018	1,131
2011	664	2019	1,137
2012	703	2020	468
2013	908	2021	1,016
2014	900	2022	1,193

“The goal for those who are losing lineworkers would be to look at the root causes, of which there could be many, and develop strategies to address these issues,” Orendorff says. “The issue may be compensation, but it could be other factors as well.”

Workplace loyalty also can vary by generation. “The concept of lifelong employment is not as strong in Generation Z or millennials as it was for boomers or the great generation,” Orendorff says.

Line work requires years of extensive training to become proficient, and TEC’s instructors bring 390 combined years of experience in the industry to the 17 training centers they have established around the state to equip organizations with the employees they need.

“One of the best parts of our schools is they are taught by people that have been down the lineman trail, and we have the ability to teach the students the how and why of the things they work with work,” says Williams, who started in the industry in 1965. “In my day we were trained monkeys—do what you were told with no explanation of how and why things worked.”

TEC’s expertise makes all the difference at Bailey County EC.

“Our young guys are able to learn not only the theory behind what we do,” Richardson says, “but also get hands-on experience in a controlled, safe environment that allows mistakes to be made and learned from, without the fear of death or severe injury.”

TEC UPDATE

TEC Seeks Guest Instructors and Trucks for Hotline Schools

Securing enough guest instructors and bucket trucks for TEC’s Loss Control schools is becoming increasingly difficult. Loss Control reminds organizations that when they provide a guest instructor, they receive one complimentary registration to a TEC safety school, instruction on how to oversee and instruct in a teaching setting, and an instructor manual with teaching instruction. This helps develop leaders at organizations.

Truck shortages could lead to limiting the number of students allowed in a school—even as demand for school enrollment reaches all-time highs.

Contact [Tami Knipstein](#) to offer guest instructors and trucks and to learn more about how Cooperation Among Cooperatives benefits the whole community.

2023 TEC Loss Control Scholarship Applications

Scholarship applications are available on the [TEC website](#). The application deadline is Jan. 17, 2023.

TEC Seeks Injury and Safety Information

TEC requests your organization’s data for 2022. The Injury/ Incident Report and Lifesaving Award and 24/7 Good Samaritan Award nomination forms will be available Nov. 1 on the [TEC website](#).

Important Deadlines

Dec. 31: Nominations for 2022 TEC Loss Control Lifesaving Awards and 24/7 Good Samaritan Awards. **Late nominations will not be accepted.**

Jan. 23, 2023: 2022 Injury/Incident Report. This report includes all employee recognitions and award nominations.

Remembrance

Charles Bradley “Brad” Gonzalez, a lineworker at Bowie-Cass EC, died Aug. 18 of natural causes. He was hired by the co-op in December 2018 and had been a lineworker for a little more than two years. He was 37.

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