

FEBRUARY–MARCH 2024

## SAVE THE DATE

Feb. 13

**Basics of Distribution  
System Planning**  
Webinar

Feb. 19–23

**Staking Technician Training  
Seminar—Phase I**  
Georgetown, TEC  
Training Facility

March 6–7

**10-Hour OSHA School**  
San Angelo, Concho Valley EC

March 11–15

**Staking Technician Training  
Seminar—Phase II**  
Georgetown, TEC  
Training Facility

March 12

**NESC Grounding Requirements**  
Webinar

March 19–22

**TEC Loss Control Conference  
& Exhibit Show**  
Frisco, Embassy Suites

TEC works to add schools to the 2024 **calendar** as registrations close when the maximum number of students is reached. Waitlists are available. Click on the desired school for details.

## ALWAYS THINK SAFETY

Gloves | Grounds | Cover Up

## JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Use the [TEC Safety and Loss Control discussion list](#) on the TEC member website to share and gather information.



**Texas Electric  
Cooperatives**  
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION  
FROM TEC LOSS CONTROL

## 'The Retirement of a Legend'

Danny Williams, Loss Control manager who tried to 'teach them the right way,' wraps up six-decade career

**W**hen Danny Williams started his career as a lineworker at McCulloch EC in 1965, color TVs were the latest marvels coming into homes.

Williams and his co-workers at the Brady co-op—which no longer exists—made sure the power always stayed on for those TVs.

"I loved linework," he says.  
"I loved climbing."

Williams later became an instructor, teaching work skills and safety to utility employees. And in 2007 he became manager of TEC's Loss Control program, where he changed lives at co-ops across the state.

"Danny Williams has a passion for helping others like I've never seen before. It's personal," says Mike Williams (no relation), TEC president and CEO. "He has helped make this Loss Control program the best in the nation."

Danny Williams, 80, will retire in March after more than 38 years teaching generations of lineworkers the right way to come home from one of the most dangerous jobs around.

It's "the retirement of a legend," says Wesley Caldwell, a regional supervisor in the Loss Control program and one of 10 instructors who work for Williams. "He's made a big commitment to changing the culture at every co-op he's ever called on."

Tami Knipstein has worked closely with Williams for 17 years. As the Loss Control program's coordinator, she keeps the staff's calendar straight and helps ensure that when a co-op needs training, the team can make it happen. "Danny puts his heart and soul into training because he wants all linemen to return home to their families after working one of the most dangerous jobs there is," she says.

Tears trickle down Williams' cheeks when he thinks about his work life, which started long before his co-op days in the 1960s.

"I've been working since I was 8 years old," he says. "Don't know anything else.

"My family was poor. Very poor. We didn't have nothing."

His dad bought him a push lawn mower and sent him down the street, giving the family another needed breadwinner.

"And I walked around Brady when I was 8 years



"I don't think that I picked the job," Danny Williams says of his 59 years in the utility industry. "I think the job picked me. I still believe that."

old—to help the family," he says. "I was a little fat, chubby kid, and them old ladies liked me. And I mowed lawns and paid for that lawn mower."

Later he hauled hay, picked cotton and worked at a feed mill. Then he landed a plum job at the co-op.

"I went to work for them for \$1.10 an hour in 1965, and that was the best-paying job in town," he says. "I was working at a peanut mill making 90 cents an hour."

He remembers that first day—Jan. 4, 1965. There was no orientation or onboarding in those days. He showed up Monday morning and was immediately sent out with a crew.

He had no idea what he was doing.

"No, not a clue," he says. Guidance was sketchy: "This is how you do it, and I ain't showing you again. Tomorrow you better know how to do this."

## The Culture of Safety

The TEC Loss Control Conference advocates and celebrates sound work practices

Phil Henricks always looks forward to TEC's annual Loss Control Conference.

As a golfer, he likes to see where his bragging rights rank among colleagues in the Gordon Williams Memorial Golf Tournament. But that's just a prelude to intensive safety discussions and networking at the TEC Loss Control Conference and Exhibit Show, March 19–22, at the Embassy Suites in Frisco.

"Exposure to the perspective of experts from around the state is why this conference brings so many people together every year," says Henricks, a regional supervisor in TEC's Loss Control program. He sees the conference's focus on safety and training as a unifying force for the hundreds of lineworkers and operations and safety managers who will attend. They also get hands-on exposure to new tools and services in

the industry from the dozens of vendors at the exhibit show.

The conference is the centerpiece of a program that provides training to nearly 1,000 utility workers at specialized schools around the state. In addition, TEC's team of 11 instructors also conduct regular safety meetings at many of the 98 participating organizations—56 co-ops, 30 municipal utilities and 12 contractors.



Wylie Davidson, at the 2023 Loss Control Conference, emphasizes that injuries can occur because of uncontrollable factors. But, he adds: "Why would we take chances on things we *can* control?"

Creating and maintaining a safety culture will be a repeated theme in Frisco. Reminding lineworkers that vigilance around high voltage never ends is the foundation of that culture.

"We're not wired to be safe," says Wylie Davidson, a motivational speaker and safety specialist who will give the keynote speech. Overcoming that is a matter of training—and culture.

Other sessions during the week will include:

- Leading by example.
- De-escalating confrontation.
- Weather outlook.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration electrical updates.

The conference is also an opportunity to celebrate organizations and individuals for outstanding safety records, and employees who changed lives in their communities will receive Lifesaving and Good Samaritan awards.

The golf tournament—with an earlier shotgun start this year, 9 a.m.—and an auction of donated items are important fundraisers for TEC Loss Control scholarships. Last year they helped raise nearly \$80,000.

For Curtis Whitt, who will become TEC's Loss Control manager, the conference is always an opportunity to catch up with old friends, meet new people and learn from others: "Our conference provides this opportunity for those who are eager to gain knowledge and develop skills to improve their safety function as an organization and on an individual level also."

## TEC UPDATE

### Scholarship Auction Items Needed

TEC Loss Control seeks donated items for the scholarship auction March 21 at the Loss Control Conference in Frisco. The auction is the primary fundraiser for the Loss Control Scholarship program. Email Tami Knipstein at [tknipstein@texas-ec.org](mailto:tknipstein@texas-ec.org) to enroll your donations. An auction of 80 donated items brought in a record of \$74,311 in 2023, when TEC awarded scholarships to 57 graduating seniors.

### Enter the 2023 Photo Challenge

The TEC Loss Control Photo Challenge is open to all employees of electric cooperatives, municipal electric utilities and contractors who participate in the Loss Control program. Photos will be judged by popular vote at the Loss Control Conference in March.

**Theme:** View From the Top (of a Pole)

**Entry period:** Entries are accepted through Feb. 15 (limit three photos per person)

**How to enter:** Email high-resolution digital images to [tknipstein@texas-ec.org](mailto:tknipstein@texas-ec.org).

### Texas Mutual Recognizes 6 Co-op Safety Records

Bluebonnet, Magic Valley, Rio Grande and South Plains ECs; GVEC; and United Cooperative Services were recognized by Texas Mutual Insurance Co. for their commitments to safety in 2023.

All six were among 200 of Texas Mutual's 76,000 policyholders—the top 0.26%—to earn its Platinum Safety Partner Award for their commitments to keeping employees safe and providing safety resources.

"Safety and wellness is one of the corporate values at GVEC," said Darren Schauer, general manager and CEO of GVEC, which has now won four Platinum awards. "We're dedicated to prioritizing safety and continually enhancing our practices."

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But he stuck it out and followed a blueprint common at electric co-ops, working his way up—from groundman to apprentice line-worker and then journeyman. Later he became line superintendent and then operations manager at McCulloch EC.

In 1985, Williams made a career change, turning to safety and training for the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service. He moved to TEC in 2000 and has been underpinning the safety culture at co-ops ever since.

"Danny's dedication to safety is unmatched. He's kept countless people safe," says Martin Bevins, TEC vice president of communications and member services. "Danny has made a difference in this world."

Williams became known as a leading ambassador for workplace safety. "Danny peddled safety like it was a life-or-death commodity, and without a doubt, Texas lineworkers have bought in," says Danny Nixon, a longtime friend and the operations manager at Lighthouse EC.

In a classroom setting or standing among students surrounding equipment at a training field, Williams' soft-spoken wisdom comes patiently. He makes eye contact, watching for lightbulbs to come on when the message lands.

"He's the best," says Scott Ferguson, director of cooperative services and emergency operations at Sam Houston EC. "He is full of knowledge. He's done the work. He's not just talking it. He's on a lineman's level. He knows the dangers."

Safety is sometimes a hard sell, an endless challenge for Williams and his team. Convincing young men that high voltage is hazardous and unforgiving shouldn't be difficult, but sometimes it is. As Williams explains it, so many of them think they're invincible.

That's why he and his team rise before sunup to travel the state, providing schools and nearly a thousand safety meetings a year that specify safe techniques for climbing poles and handling every piece of equipment that keeps the power grid functional. Still, bad habits show up even among seasoned workers. So do occasional injuries—some devastating—and deaths.

"You can teach them the right way. But you cannot watch them 24 hours a day," Williams says. "You cannot be with them when they're out there doing the work. When they're out there, they make the decision [about] what they're going to do.

"Even though they've been taught right, sometimes they don't do right."

And shortcuts can turn into imprudent habits. "You get away with it once, you'll try it again," he says. "Until something happens. That's human nature—one thing we've never been able to change."

He thinks back to when he was a lineworker in the 1970s, and he knows he was no different from today's workforce.

"What I remember, after a safety meeting, I worked pretty safe for about two weeks. After that I went back to my old ways," Williams says. "Complacency is one of the world's worst things."

For years, when Williams showed up at a utility, employees knew to expect two things: They would learn something and they would get to see his son, Gordon.

Gordon was a special traveling partner. He was born in 1963 and was soon diagnosed with Down syndrome. A doctor told Williams that Gordon wouldn't live past the age of 9.

But well into his 30s and 40s, Gordon rode shotgun as Williams roamed the state. "He went with me 17 years on the road," Williams

### TRIBUTE FOR DANNY WILLIAMS

A reception March 19 at the TEC Loss Control Conference will honor Williams. It's open to all of Williams' industry colleagues, and registration for the conference is not required.



COURTESY DANNY WILLIAMS

Danny with his son, Gordon, a regular traveling partner for 17 years.

says. "Everybody loved Gordon. He never met a stranger."

In his 50s, Gordon's health began to fail, and he died in December 2019 at the age of 56. "He taught me more about life than anybody," Williams says.

Reminiscing about his career always takes Williams to his time with Gordon—and to his time trying to make working on the electric grid safer.

He has succeeded. He's sure of it. Often, sometimes years later, he hears that wisdom imparted saved a utility worker from injury—or worse: "I remember what you said or what you did that helped me and kept me from getting hurt."

That's how he knows he's made a difference. That those hundreds of thousands of miles behind the wheel and weeks in roadside motels changed lives. Saved lives.

"Oh, my God, how many people has he touched?" says TEC's Curtis Whitt, a co-worker for 21 years. "Countless. To do it as well as he's done it for as long as he's done it is a pretty incredible feat."

Diane Williams, Danny's wife of 29 years, is ready to have him home for good. "Just to see him relax, take a breath and not be at the top of his game 24/7," is her wish for his retirement.

They have moved from Gatesville back home, to Brady.

"I'm gonna have me a little garden," Williams says. "Buy me a few chickens. And Brady's got a little lake. I'll get me a little bass boat—we're going to fish."

He'll even sleep in.

"Sure, till about 7 o'clock."