

DECEMBER–JANUARY 2025

## SAVE THE DATE

Dec. 10

**Separable Connectors Used in Underground Distribution**  
Webinar

Jan. 14–16

**Supervisor/Foreman School**  
Livingston, Sam Houston EC

Jan. 21–24

**Basic Pole Climbing School**  
Dilley, Medina EC

Jan. 28–29

**10-Hour OSHA School**  
Bandera, Bandera EC

Feb. 4–7

**Transformer School**  
Livingston, Sam Houston EC

March 11–14

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

March 18–20

**Supervisor/Foreman School**  
Tahoka, Lyntegar EC

April 8–10

**Supervisor/Foreman School**  
Kerrville, Kerrville Public Utility Board

April 15–18

**Basic Pole Climbing School**  
Pleasanton, Karnes EC

TEC works to add schools to the calendar as registrations close and classes fill up. Waitlists are available. Click on the desired school for details.

## ALWAYS THINK SAFETY

Gloves | Grounds | Cover Up



A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION  
FROM TEC LOSS CONTROL

## Make Safety Right at Home

TEC's pros share their priorities around the house

**T**EC's Loss Control safety specialists spend much of the year on the road, visiting organizations across the state for training and safety meetings.

Come December, they get a reprieve from the rigors of travel and spend much of their time preparing for the next year's training calendar. They want to remind people that they take safety as seriously at home as they do when speaking to employees in the electric utility industry.

Here are household safety tips they think everybody in Co-op Country should know:

**Devery Rosenquist:** This is the season when space heaters get a lot of use. Never leave a space heater unattended, and turn it off when leaving a room or sleeping. Never plug a space heater into an extension cord, and only operate one on a level surface.

**Curtis Whitt:** Traveling can be hazardous this time of year, so keep an emergency kit in your vehicle. This should include jumper cables, a blanket, ice scraper and phone charger.

Be mindful of ladder safety before you head out to hang seasonal decorations. Choose the right ladder and position it properly for the job—"no stupid balancing acts, no reaching way out to reach that last hook."

And don't forget: Keep all ladders at least 10 feet away from power lines as you move around your yard.

**Ronnie Wiggins:** Have a K-type (foam) fire extinguisher in the kitchen for grease fires and a larger ABC-type fire extinguisher handy for other types of fires. Make sure your family knows how to use them



Stepping to the very top of a ladder is a no-no, as the warning label clearly indicates.

and have an evacuation plan in case of a house fire.

Don't ignore electrical issues, such as plugs or light switches that don't work properly. They can lead to fires. And don't overload power strips with holiday lights.

**David Nance:** If you didn't check all alarm batteries when daylight saving time ended in November, do it now. Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors save lives but only if their batteries are charged.

Personal protective equipment is a jobsite requirement in the industry, but PPE is important at home too. Wear safety glasses and gloves when mowing and trimming in the yard.

Use great care when cooking, especially when children are around. Keep power cords and pan handles out of their reach. When cooking outdoors, do so away from gaming and eliminate all tripping hazards.

### RECORD ATTENDANCE

TEC Loss Control topped the 1,200-student milestone in school attendance in one year for the first time. Enrollment hit 1,204 in October through 65 schools.

"I believe the quality of training we're providing is reflected in those numbers," said Curtis Whitt, Loss Control manager. "The biggest thing is providing quality training and education for those entering our trade."

## PEC's Gough Is 3-Peat Rodeo Champ

When he was a kid, Zack Gough remembers wanting to be a pilot.

That never happened, but Gough still ended up working in the air, and his prowess as a lineworker often leaves him on cloud nine.

Gough, a 3½-year lineworker at Pedernales EC, finished as the best apprentice for the third year in a row at the International Lineman's Rodeo in October. He beat out 379 other apprentices and continued his mastery of competition that includes podium finishes at the Texas Lineman's Rodeo: second place in 2023 and third in 2024.

What makes him so good?

"I think the hours I put into it and the mentorship I've had," Gough said. And there's another thing. "I really do like competing.

"I was kind of blown away this year to do it again. I didn't think I was going to be able to."

Co-workers Darren Donhauser, David Hernandez and Michael Thyberg finished seventh out of 227 three-person crews in the journeyman division. The Pedernales EC trio also took first place at the Texas rodeo in July in Seguin.

Five other Texas co-ops participated in the international rodeo, held in Overland Park, Kansas: Bandera, Bluebonnet, MidSouth and Trinity Valley ECs and GVEC. New Braunfels Utilities and the city of Seguin, two municipal utilities that participate in TEC's Loss Control program, also sent teams to Kansas, where the competition also includes investor-owned companies.

For all his success, Gough conceded he's a nervous wreck heading into rodeos. "I don't like doing bad," he said. "It's definitely hard. You mess up one thing at that rodeo and it kind of ruins your whole day. If you've done the rodeo, you know how easy it is to mess up."

See complete results [here](#).



PEDERNALES EC



LEIGH DENNEY | TRINITY VALLEY EC

Above: Pedernales EC's Zack Gough is a three-time champion at the International Lineman's Rodeo. "I have some good guys I was able to learn from here," he says. Left: Zach Pollett, left, and Mauricio Robles of Trinity Valley EC conduct a cutout replacement in the journeyman's division.

## TEC UPDATE

### Apply for Loss Control Scholarships

High school seniors are eligible to apply for scholarships if they are children of electric cooperative, electric municipal or contractor employees who participate in TEC's Loss Control program, such as safety meetings, schools or the Loss Control Conference. Scholarship applications are available on the [Loss Control](#) page of TEC's website. The application deadline is 5 p.m. Jan. 17, 2025. For more information, email Tami Knipstein at [tknipstein@texas-ec.org](mailto:tknipstein@texas-ec.org).

### Safety Data and Award Nominations Needed

Complete your organization's 2024 Injury/Incident Report by Jan. 29, 2025, and return to [tknipstein@texas-ec.org](mailto:tknipstein@texas-ec.org) or fax to (512) 763-3390. The 2024 Injury/Incident Report is located on the [Loss Control](#) page of the TEC website, as are nomination forms for awards to be presented at the 2025 TEC Loss Control Conference, March 11-14 at the Embassy Suites in Frisco.

- **No Lost-Time Award** recognizes organizations that have achieved no lost-time accidents as of Dec. 31, 2024.
- **Million Man Hour Award** recognizes organizations that have achieved 1 million work hours or more with no lost-time injury as of Dec. 31, 2024.
- **Safety Achievement Award** recognizes employees who have achieved 30, 35, 40, 45, 50 or 55 years with no lost-time accidents as of Dec. 31, 2024.
- **Ray Pantel Meritorious Service Award** recognizes an individual who exemplifies outstanding dedication and service to the TEC Loss Control program.

### Enter the 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 TEC Loss Control program. Photos will be judged by popular vote at the 2025 Loss Control Conference.

**Theme:** Mutual Aid: Cooperation Among Cooperatives

**Entry deadline:** Feb. 14

**Photo limit:** Three per person

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

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## NUTSEA Puts Focus on Passion

In an industry where hard work and hazardous conditions usually dominate conversations, electric utility leaders stepped back and turned the spotlight on soft skills during the annual NUTSEA Conference, held in September in San Antonio.

People need to know you care, JD Cox said to the 167 members of the National Utility Training & Safety Education Association in attendance. “It’s our job to bring meaning and emotions to the words that we say to them,” said Cox, the director of safety and loss control at North-central EC in Mississippi.

Cox was one of a dozen speakers who addressed the gathering of training and safety specialists from around the country who are devoted to protecting utility workers from injuries.

He suggested that he and his colleagues are stuck in a rut and need to change their approach. They always do the same things the same way and continue to get the same results, including injuries and fatalities.

“The same things are killing our brothers today as they were 35 years ago,” said Cox, who stressed that continued emphasis on personal protective equipment and cover-ups in line work doesn’t seem to be enough.

He listed injuries and fatalities he has encountered in his career, including one lineworker who was killed before he received his first paycheck. He urged his colleagues to listen to and be empathetic with employees. He said this requires connecting with people, which entails an investment of time.

“You could just feel his passion for the safety of everyone in this industry,” said Billy Goodwin, safety and loss control specialist at San Bernard EC and a NUTSEA director.

That passion also resonated with Katy Armstrong, the safety and loss control coordinator at Central Texas EC who is new to the utility industry.

“We have to show our employees just how much we care about them and their lives outside of the cooperative walls,” Armstrong said. “A common theme emerged throughout the conference that one of the keys to success when it comes to safety is to build those relationships with your people. Following the rules and procedures is important, but ultimately our No. 1 goal should be the person that we are trying to get home each day to their families.”

Ken Macken, NRECA safety director, echoed Cox in challenging industry leaders to redouble their training efforts.

“No more fatalities,” said Macken, who also called out a motivational strategy employed at many safety conferences. “No more keynote speakers because they’ve lost both their arms.”

Macken said he will continue with programs put in place by Bud Branham, his predecessor at NRECA, including the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program, which TEC Loss Control coordinates in Texas. He also urged co-ops to sign on to Commitment to Zero Contacts, an initiative that provides resources to help organizations reduce the chance of serious injuries and fatalities due to electrical contact and enhance safety efforts.

The conference also celebrated industry leaders. Joe Miller of 4-County Electric Power Association in Mississippi received the Herman C. Potthast Award, NUTSEA’s highest honor. James Jouett, electric system manager at San Bernard EC, received the O.G. Anderson Award, given annually to an operations or line superintendent in the conference’s host state.

NUTSEA made a donation of \$4,000, which included nearly \$2,000

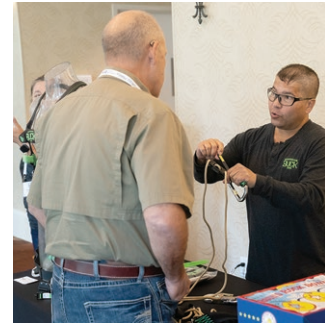


CATLYN CALHOUN PHOTOS | TEC

“Would you say safety is the absence of injuries or the presence of a great culture?” NRECA’s Ken Macken asked. “It’s the presence of a great culture.”



Above: “Leadership is influence,” JD Cox said. “Nothing more, nothing less.” Right: A vendor discusses Buckingham’s equipment. Bottom left: Joe Miller of 4-County Electric Power Association in Mississippi received the Herman C. Potthast Award. Bottom right: James Jouett, electric system manager at San Bernard EC, received the O.G. Anderson Award.



in attendee donations, to the U.S. Army Institute of Surgical Research Burn Center at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston. Dr. Lee Cancio, the center’s director, was one of the keynote speakers at the conference.

Click [here](#) to see more photos from the NUTSEA Conference.