



APRIL–MAY 2025

SAVE THE DATE

May 13–16

Groundman/Apprentice
Essential Skills School
City of Seguin

May 20–21

Fundamentals of Electrical
Theory for Lineworkers School
Robstown, Nueces EC

June 3–6

Basic Pole Climbing School
Tahoka, Lyntegar EC

June 16–20

Digger Operator School
Livingston, Sam Houston EC

July 8–10

Supervisor/Foreman School
Pleasanton, Karnes EC

July 18–19

Texas Lineman's Rodeo
Seguin, Nolte Island Park

July 22–24

Supervisor/Foreman School
McGregor, Heart of Texas EC

July 29–Aug. 1

Introduction to System
Operator/Dispatch School
La Grange, Fayette EC

Aug. 19–22

Transformer School
Tahoka, Lyntegar EC

TEC works to add schools to the 2025 calendar as registrations close when the maximum number of students is reached. Waiting lists are available. Click on the desired school for details.

ALWAYS THINK SAFETY

Gloves | Grounds | Cover Up



**Texas Electric
Cooperatives**
A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION
FROM TEC LOSS CONTROL

Safety: The Anchor of a Workplace

Safe actions prevail wherever they occur, whether it's the high seas or the High Plains.

That message was evident over several days in March during the TEC Loss Control Conference & Exhibit Show, a gathering of 278 safety and operations professionals at the Embassy Suites in Frisco.

Retired Navy Cmdr. Kirk Lippold, the keynote speaker, told the harrowing details of how the crew of a destroyer under his command, the USS Cole, responded in the minutes and days after a terrorist attack in 2000.

"Safety is going to touch everything you do. It is going to be part of the fabric of everything that you do," Lippold said. "Safety is a conscious action. It has to be done with action and purpose."

Even as he spoke, workers from at least six electric cooperatives headed toward the Panhandle, called home early from the conference in anticipation of a severe windstorm that was creeping its way toward Texas—bringing the threat of major outages. Safety is just one of the practices co-ops embrace with action and purpose.

The annual conference was a celebration of accomplishments, with more than 100 awards presented to individuals and organizations and stern, frank reminders that any lapse in safety protocols can go horrifically wrong. Speakers especially targeted the 84 first-timers at the conference, hoping to instill sound work practices as early in a career as possible.

"For all of the safety rules that we have, our people keep dying because we keep breaking the same two or three," said JD Cox, director of safety and loss control at Northcentral EC in Mississippi.

With dismay, he noted that, during his 37-year career in the industry, he has learned about electrical contacts causing ghastly injuries or deaths, most caused by failure to follow proper lockout-tagout procedures, failure to wear rubber gloves and other personal protective equipment, or failure to conduct job briefings to start the day.

These basic rules, he said, are within the 30,000-

word safety manual at Northcentral EC—and they are supposed to be standard policy at every co-op in the country. Yet ignoring them has had dire consequences.

"I'm not saying that safety manuals and all the rules that we have are not important, but what I'm saying is this: If printing more safety rules would end workplace injuries, then printing more diplomas would end stupidity," Cox said.



Kevin Farrell of Tesco, one of 51 vendors at the exhibit show, visits with one of the 278 attendees.

"How many 30-year-old widows are we going to create? How many daughters are going to have to walk down the aisle without their daddy?"

Interspersed among the stark rhetoric came presentations of awards, and one of the most prestigious is the Ray Pantel Meritorious Service Award, presented this year to a very surprised James Busby.

"Been doing this a long time," said the choked-up safety coordinator at Jasper-Newton EC. "The main thing I guess I can say is don't ever take for granted your safety. Doesn't matter what position you're in. Doesn't matter whatever everybody else is doing. You need to stand firm."

Freddy King, manager of the city of Seguin's electric utility, received the Unsung Hero Award. While introducing him, Curtis Whitt, TEC's Loss Control manager, said he appreciates King's readiness to assist with the program's schools, which rely on guest instructors and the use of training sites around the state.

**2026 TEC LOSS CONTROL
CONFERENCE & EXHIBIT SHOW**

March 17–20 | San Marcos, Embassy Suites

Continued on Page 2

Safety: The Anchor of a Workplace continued from Page 1

Navarro County EC continued its run of success by collecting the GE Safety Award for the fifth year in a row and sixth time in seven years. General Electric bestows the award based on a scoring system that includes Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program accreditation, disabling injury index, and records for driving and injury incidents.

Jerad Taylor, superintendent at Navarro County EC, said the run of GE awards “highlights our collective commitment to providing reliable, safe and efficient service to our members.”

Blake Galvan of San Patricio EC, Andrew Taylor of Farmers EC and Derrik Terrill of Tri-County EC received Lifesaving Awards. Videos detailed their dramatic actions. Three other co-op employees received Good Samaritan Awards.

Ten organizations were honored for attaining at least 1 million hours worked without a lost-time incident: CoServ and Bailey County, Central Texas, Karnes, Lamb County, Navarro County, San Bernard, San Patricio, Trinity Valley and Victoria ECs.

Thirty-eight of the organizations that participate in the Loss Control program, including co-ops, municipal utilities and contractors, were recognized for their years of work with no lost-time incidents. The city of Fredericksburg led the way with 39 years.

The conference is the centerpiece of a program that in 2024 provided training to a record 1,204 utility workers at specialized schools around the state. In addition, TEC’s team of 11 instructors conducted 849 safety meetings at 99 participating organizations—57 co-ops, 30 municipal utilities and 12 contractors.



“The first thing that I wanted to make sure they understood is that there is only one person in your life that is responsible for the decisions you make and the consequences that come from it, and that’s you as an individual,” retired Navy Cmdr. Kirk Lippold said.

Sessions included:

Jim Coleman, general manager and CEO at Jackson EC, spoke of mutual aid as a linchpin of cooperative greatness. Six co-ops lent aid to Jackson EC in July 2024 when Hurricane Beryl crippled its system. “Mutual aid is in the DNA of every co-op in this room,” Coleman said.

Rusty Endicott, safety and loss prevention manager at Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange, spoke of incident trends in Texas.

Continued on Page 3



From top: James Busby, the safety coordinator at Jasper-Newton EC, accepts the Ray Pantel Meritorious Service Award from Curtis Whitt, TEC Loss Control manager. Freddy King, right, the manager of the city of Seguin’s electric utility, is congratulated by co-worker Eli Santos after King won the Unsung Hero Award. Oscar Rochin, right, of GE presents the GE Safety Award to Navarro County EC, for the fifth year in a row. To see a list of all the awards presented at the conference, click [here](#).



Safety: The Anchor of a Workplace continued from Page 2

Michael Kelley, manager of training and safety at Central Alabama EC, told heart-wrenching stories of how incidents scar entire organizations for years.

Bronson Brown, NRECA's director of regulatory affairs, spoke of what co-ops might expect from the current political climate in Washington, D.C.

Sam Houston EC's Doug Turk, CEO, and Ryan Brown, assistant general manager, explained how ongoing disaster planning helped the co-op recover when 90% of its system was leveled after Beryl. Turk said preparations begin every time a storm starts as tropical waves off the coast of Africa.

April Ramos, program manager with the National Safety Council, addressed the real costs of risky driving.

A panel of CoServ's Cody Coulter, director of operations; Caitlin Creed, director of marketing and communications; and Stephen Meers, vice president of customer operations; spoke of how their fast-growing co-op manages the expectations of its members.

In addition, an afternoon of smaller breakout sessions gave attendees options for taking in specialized discussions on topics that included legal best practices, service backfeed hazards and vegetation management.

Lippold made no apologies for running a tight ship, which included strict procedure and safety regimens that prepared the 300 sailors aboard the USS Cole for every possible crisis. Ultimately, that included a suicide bombing by al-Qaida as the ship was refueling in the Yemeni port of Aden.

The blast ripped a 40-foot hole in the ship's side, killing 17 and injuring 39. The precise actions and clear decision-making that followed prevented additional deaths and kept the ship from sinking. Lippold credits that to the crew's training, which involved "stressful conditions for those sailors to operate under, so that they can develop the critical thinking skills and the muscle memory to be able to do things right in time of crisis."

Busby would say the same critical thinking skills and muscle memory are required to keep hazards in the electric utility industry at bay.

He remembers the day, about 35 years ago, when he was part of a crew reinsulating and changing cutouts on a section of line for a voltage conversion. He was hanging a new cutout with just his leather gloves on. That's a no-no.

"Nobody told me that I was doing wrong," said Busby, whose career started in 1983, two weeks out of high school. "Nobody told me that. So many times we keep quiet when we ought to speak up."

That was a defining moment in his career.

"Safety is not easy. Safety is a time-consuming effort," he said. "And you need to take the time and make the effort, because your life is worth it, and your co-worker's life is worth it."

Conference Raises \$73,090

Raising money for the TEC Loss Control Scholarship program is the main purpose of fun activities at the conference. An auction of 82 donated items brought in \$62,470. The Gordon Williams Memorial Golf Tournament, a raffle and donations added \$10,620—for a total of \$73,090. Since 1994, the auctions alone have raised more than \$786,000.

The fundraising allowed TEC to award 68 scholarships of \$1,500 each.



CAYLYN CALHOUN | TEC



CAYLYN CALHOUN | TEC

From top: TEC's Phil Henricks has a bidder on the line and barks out to auctioneer Larry Ogden to reel him in. "Our job is to make sure that when somebody fails, they fail safely," said JD Cox of Northcentral EC in Mississippi. Jakambrien Johnson of Jackson EC checks out one of the 82 items sold during the scholarship auction. Click [here](#) to see more photos from the event.



CAYLYN CALHOUN | TEC

Lifesaving Awards

BLAKE GALVAN San Patricio EC

Upon completing an underground job in Beeville, Ernest Gutierrez, a journeyman lineworker, and Blake Galvan, an apprentice lineworker, were en route back to the co-op. Suddenly Gutierrez, who was driving, stopped talking midsentence and began to swerve off the road. Galvan removed his seat belt and, suspecting Gutierrez could be having a stroke, used his left hand to apply the brakes and his right hand to steer the vehicle to the shoulder. While assisting Gutierrez, Galvan called the co-op. Emergency workers rushed Gutierrez to a hospital, where a stroke was confirmed. A doctor said Galvan's quick actions saved Gutierrez's life.

ANDREW TAYLOR Farmers EC

Andrew Taylor, an engineering assistant, was driving outside Sulphur Springs when he noticed smoke coming from a home. Taylor stopped, called the fire department and then checked to see if anyone was home. An older woman inside was unaware of the fire. Taylor helped get her out of harm's way.

DERRIK TERRILL Tri-County EC

Derrick Terrill and Dylan Eker were with several Tri-County EC co-workers at a northwest Fort Worth restaurant when, amid the usual lunchtime banter, Eker began choking. He stood up and put his hands to his throat to alert others. Terrill saw this and quickly performed the Heimlich maneuver, dislodging the food.

Good Samaritan Awards

CHRISTOPHER BEARD AND JOHNNY SIERRA South Texas EC

Christopher Beard, construction superintendent, and Johnny Sierra were traveling in separate vehicles back to the South Texas EC yard in Nursery when they came across a major wreck involving a dump truck and a pickup. The driver of the pickup appeared to be in serious condition. They called 911 and provided aid until the volunteer fire department arrived. Sierra, construction foreman, knows both drivers and contacted their families to inform them of the situation. Sierra and Beard's leadership and immediate actions gave the VFD a head start on rescue operations.

DIEGO SAENZ Bailey County EC

Longtime Bailey County EC member Gordon Waldrop was mowing his lawn on a 100-degree August day when his riding mower became stuck in a sandy patch. Waldrop, who relies on a walker, was unable to catch the attention of passing drivers. When he began to feel overheated and extremely thirsty, he called the BCEC office, which contacted Saenz, a serviceman working nearby. Saenz rushed to Waldrop's aid and freed him and his mower.



BLAKE GALVAN



ANDREW TAYLOR



DERRIK TERRILL

Click [HERE](#) to see the 2024 Lifesaving Award videos and videos of previous recipients.



WATCH VIDEOS

Photo Challenge Winner

PJ Matocha, a mechanic at Jackson EC, was voted winner of the conference's photo challenge. The theme was Mutual Aid: Cooperation Among Cooperatives. Matocha made this photo during Hurricane Beryl recovery.



PJ MATOCHA | JACKSON EC