

## Join the Conversation

TEC Loss Control Conference to spotlight work practices and celebrate safety

**T**EC’s annual safety conference closely resembles a reunion of longtime buddies, evident in the easy conversations, ready laughter and recollections of shared challenges.

That’s the experience Curtis Whitt, TEC’s Loss Control manager, most looks forward to. “It’s just meeting up with old friends, and maybe just catching up and hashing out some new ideas,” he said.

But the hundreds of safety and operations professionals aren’t just chatting. They’re nurturing a culture that provides a safety net for the electric utility industry, one knitted with proven protocols, a consistent mindset and a commitment among peers.

“It’s an ongoing challenge, for not just those that are specifically titled in the role of safety, such as the safety coordinators, but even the leadership team at these organizations,” Whitt said. The emphasis on safety needs to reach all the way to the boardroom, he said, otherwise “that’ll flare up in the culture right away.”

Developing that culture will be the focus of one of the dozen-plus sessions at the TEC Loss Control Conference and Exhibit Show, March 17–20 at the Embassy Suites in San Marcos. Ken Macken, director of safety programs at NRECA, will highlight the organization’s Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program and Commitment to Zero Contacts as initiatives in place at many cooperatives that shore up their safety cultures.

Mark Stubbs, general manager at Farmers EC, will speak about how an incident affects an entire organization.

Whitt said on-the-job injuries can devastate a family, but the emotional wreckage doesn’t stop there. “It’s a department; it’s an organization; it’s a community; you know, it’s far-reaching,” he said.



CAYLYN CALHOUN | TEC

Another topic on the agenda is de-escalating conflict and addressing hostile situations, an ever-present possibility for workers—in the office and at remote worksites.

Whitt said he senses that stress levels are high even in seemingly laid-back communities, and that can lead to confrontations over the size of an electric bill or a lineworker needing access to a homeowner’s property for necessary repairs. Learning interpersonal skills can help keep such encounters from escalating.

At the conference, most of the outbursts and excitement are limited to the golf course and the charity auction. The Gordon Williams Memorial Golf Tournament and an auction of donated items help fund TEC’s Loss Control Scholarships.

Awards are presented throughout the conference for exceptional actions and safety records. And dozens of vendors showcase the latest in tools and services in the industry.

Click [here](#) to register for the conference. ■

An afternoon exhibit show puts utility workers face-to-face with vendors—51 in 2025—that provide tools and services for the industry.

### SAVE THE DATE

**Feb. 9–13**  
**Staking Technician Training Seminar—Phase I**  
Georgetown,  
TEC Training Facility

**Feb. 10**  
**Basic Electric Distribution Systems Series—The Transmission System Webinar**

**Feb. 17–18**  
**10-Hour OSHA School**  
Fredericksburg,  
Central Texas EC

**March 10–13**  
**Journeyman Refresher School—Apparatuses and Leadership**  
McGregor, Heart of Texas EC

**March 11–12**  
**Metering for Staking Personnel**  
Georgetown,  
TEC Training Facility

**March 31–April 2**  
**Supervisor/Foreman School**  
Kerrville, Kroc Center

Find [photos from Loss Control schools](#) on the TEC website.

TEC works to add schools to the [2026 calendar](#) as registrations close when the maximum number of students is reached. Waiting lists are available. Click on the desired school above for details.



SCAN FOR A PDF OF THIS ISSUE



**Texas Electric Cooperatives**  
A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FROM TEC LOSS CONTROL

# Lineworkers Bring Life-Changing Light to Rural Guatemala

**J**esse Rivera wasn't sure what to think when he pulled up to the jobsite early one morning.

The lineworker from San Patricio EC was used to being greeted by a gaggle of curious children in the remote Guatemalan village where he and 21 other Texans had been building power lines, bringing light to a community that had always been in the dark after the sun went down.

But this November morning, one of the older kids was sweaty and looked tired.

"In Spanish, I'm like, '¿Qué pasó que tienes? (What's wrong?),' " Rivera said. "And he's like, 'Jugué fútbol toda la noche.' They played soccer all night long.

"He gave me a hug, and he thanked me for it."



CHRIS BURROWS | TEC

**Cipriano Amaro of Rio Grande EC prepares to get to work at the top of a pole in Yalicar, Guatemala, in November as co-worker Saul Leyva and a captivated crowd of kids watch on.**

"You can't explain the experience you have out here. You can explain it, but they won't understand," Rivera said more than two weeks earlier, as he suited up to climb a power pole in a humid, swampy, buggy field far from modern comforts but perilously close to venomous pit vipers, tarantulas and the screams of howler monkeys, under a baking sun.

"This is what we live for," he said.

In ways big and small, life was changing in the village of Yalicar, just over a mile from the border with Mexico, and for the lineworkers who were directly responsible.

Texas is one of 19 states that have sent co-op crews to Guatemala and Bolivia since 2012 through NRECA International. All told, over the course of the past 13 years, 572 American lineworkers have built 155 miles of line that supply power to 2,600 households in 40 communities. NRECAI engineers on the ground in Guatemala design the projects in close coordination with local utilities.

During the 20-day November trip for the lineworkers representing 10 South Texas electric cooperatives, nothing—not days of pouring rain, jungle creatures, language barriers, treacherous roads nor wild drivers—slowed them in their single-minded mission to bring power to as many people in northern Guatemala as possible.

"We did it so fast, they gave us part of another group's project, and that took us a day," Karnes EC lineworker Glenn Kelley said.

"It's amazing to see a group of people that's never worked together just walk up, say hi and start working and just everything falls into place."

All told, the Texas crew framed 87 poles, ran 5 miles of power lines and hung six transformers—without bucket trucks or many of their usual tools—to bring power to 135 homes, one school, and a handful of churches and stores across the villages of Yalicar and Entre Rios. Just like electric cooperatives in Texas did 85 years ago.

"They outdid themselves," said Jim Coleman, general manager of Jackson EC, which sent three lineworkers on this trip. "They're all overachievers, and I can't say enough about them."

The Texans worked side by side with the lineworkers of Empresa Municipal Rural de Electricidad, a municipal utility based in Ixcán, El Quiché, Guatemala. Their project built on work completed by co-op workers from other states, extending EMRE's distribution system into an area that has never had electricity. After the design was completed, the muni's workers set the poles and laid out all the wire before the Texans arrived.

"It's really an eye-opener to know that literally a mile from this village, people have had electricity

for years and years," said Paul Bourland, Jackson EC line superintendent, "and it's just because that's a private investor that refuses to build because there's no money out there. It's kind of like the reason co-ops exist."

It was deeply affecting for some of the men.

"Your emotions kind of got to you when you realized what you're actually doing for these people. They never had nothing. Everything that they had in their house, I could put in the back of my pickup truck," San Bernard EC's Jeff Bilski said.

"You see these people every day. The language barrier was difficult, but you could tell they were happy to see you. It was incredible.

"Sometimes at night, laying in bed, it would bring tears to my eyes." ■



TREY REEVES | BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

## TEC Gains Training Site at Bryan Texas Utilities

**TEC LOSS CONTROL** adds a training facility to its lineup with three upcoming schools at Bryan Texas Utilities after a collaboration that was years in the making.

Randy Trimble, BTU's executive director of energy delivery, said he reached out to TEC in 2021 about converting a newly idle warehouse into a facility with workstations that could help train apprentice and journeyman lineworkers.

TEC's first training there will be a Transformer School, April 7–10. Two more schools are on the calendar: Journeyman Refresher School—Apparatuses and Leadership, June 16–19, and Journeyman Refresher School—Transformers and Metering, July 28–31.

The addition of Bryan gives TEC 17 host sites for its schools.

Trimble said the array of stations for overhead, transformers, reclosers, padmounts, metering and regulators—in addition to classroom space—will make the facility a desirable location for nearby organizations to send workers for continuing education. And it will keep BTU employees close to home for their training.

“We just saw this as an ability to try to help control our own destiny,” he said. “And we really saw TEC as the perfect partner to do this.” ■

## Jackson EC's Myers Retires

**AFTER 30 YEARS** in sales, Mike Myers joined Jackson EC to manage its propane business and serve as member services adviser. The community-centered mission of cooperatives was new to him, but he soon embraced it.

“Serving our member-owners became one of the most rewarding aspects of my career,” said Myers, whose retirement Sept. 25, 2025, ended his 20 years of service at the coastal co-op.

He wore several hats at Jackson EC, including manager of corporate services and compliance, which put him in charge of safety. He led Jackson EC through two Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program accreditations and twice assisted TEC Loss Control with RESAP accreditation at two other co-ops. ■



COURTESY JACKSON EC

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## TEC LOSS CONTROL UPDATE

### Scholarship Auction Items Needed

TEC Loss Control seeks donated items for the scholarship auction March 19 at the TEC Loss Control Conference in San Marcos. 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 82 donated items brought in \$62,470 in 2025, when TEC awarded scholarships to 68 graduating seniors.

### 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 Loss Control Conference.

**Theme:** Energy in Action. (We're looking for photos that capture lineworkers, electric infrastructure or any other visible symbols of energy in use.)

**Entry deadline:** Feb. 13

**Photo limit:** Three per person

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

### Record Attendance in 2025

TEC Loss Control set an attendance record of 1,254 students. The program hit that mark with 92 schools as it continues to expand its safety and skills training across the state.

### Co-op Participation

TEC Loss Control program thrives with the participation and support of TEC's member co-ops, which provide training fields, classrooms and guest instructors across the state. In 2025, 56 co-ops turned to TEC for safety meetings, 53 participated in Loss Control schools and 63 attended the Loss Control Conference.