From the Board Room

Policy 604

At their June 7 meeting, the Board of Directors amended Policy 604 Rights-of-Way and Maintenance. The amendments included adding language stating the Cooperative may remove and clear trees in the utility maintenance area in addition to cutting and trimming. All trees outside the utility maintenance area now deemed to be a threat by the Cooperative may be trimmed or removed. Additionally, as recommended by legal counsel, the Board approved new language in the membership application service rules, to include as a condition of membership, the granting of an easement to the Cooperative allowing it to have access to and the ability to maintain its equipment.

The Board also took action authorizing management to continue the monthly practice of posting board meeting agendas and summary information about agenda topics on the Cooperative's website. This has been a Board-approved practice since January 2014.

Nick Joiner puts himself in the shoes of St. Croix Electric Cooperative members every day. Joiner, a step-up foreman for Badger Unified Cooperative Services (BUCS), leads a three-person crew trimming trees within 10-feet of overhead power lines. The crew works year-round.

“We want to do a good job for the members, respect their property and their trees,” he said.

As one-seventh owner in BUCS, SCEC has a right-of-way (ROW) maintenance crew dedicated to moving around the service area in a five-year cycle doing mechanical trimming (using saws) in ROW areas 10 feet around lines and away from poles. The year after BUCS finishes an area, SCEC hires another contractor for spraying in ROW areas. Spraying techniques and materials are approved by the DNR.

On SCEC’s BUCS crew with Joiner are Zach Andazola, of River Falls, and Jeff Potter, of Menomonie. Joiner, of Fall Creek where BUCS is based, said the crew is always moving.

“Both guys are hard workers,” he said. “It’s important to have faith in them, let them learn and help where I can. We focus on safety, knowing where each other is at and what’s around us.”

Safety is a concept taken seriously in the utility industry, especially for Joiner who has been specially trained to operate a bucket and saw around live power lines. The single-phase line in the picture is energized with 7,200 volts - 60 times greater than the 120-volt sockets members plug their televisions into.

At the time of publication, BUCS was working in the Town of Cylon. Members in the townships where BUCS will be working receive letters from SCEC prior to work beginning. Members who have any questions regarding whether a tree needs to be removed or where to plant trees can contact SCEC President/CEO Mark Pendergast at 715-796-7000. There are certain species that are allowed under lines since their mature height is not expected to encroach on the ROW clearance, but it is always best to check with the Co-op, before planting.

On-site, Joiner works with members to compromise where he can while still making sure the overhead lines will have the proper amount of clearance for the next five years. He said he has had numerous experiences where member cooperation and assistance in accessing trees has made the difference between getting a job done in a few hours versus a couple of days.

“We want the job to look as good as possible for the member,” he said. “We want it cleaned well so, when the member comes home, they don’t even know we’ve been there.”