White River Valley Electric Cooperative

Crisis Communication Plan

Updated July 2013

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# Crisis Communication Policy

The primary spokespeople for White River Valley Electric Cooperative will be the only people who will communicate with the media, public, employees and all key audiences in the event of a crisis or emergency.

1. Member Services Manager; Jeff Pardeck
2. Manager and CEO; Chris Hamon
3. CFO; Rod Romine

The member services department will work as a team to develop key messages and acquire the facts of the emergency for the designated spokespeople. The communications coordinator will ensure that WRVEC’s social media channels stay updated with the current facts and key messages.

Dispatch is responsible for IVR/CRC and switchboard/employee updates, especially in response to power outages.

The designated spokespeople will use the following to ensure the co-op’s message is sustained:

* Stay on message and communicate with one clear voice.
* Never comment on speculation or rumors. Never speculate on the cause or effect of a situation. Always wait until the facts are available. Report only the facts.
* Never release names of employees (or anyone) injured or killed until family is notified.
* Once family has been notified, information released about employees is limited to: name, age, position or title, and years of service.
* In a crisis situation where the police are involved, coordinate with them to determine what information can be released and who is going to release it.

In the event of a power outage, refer to the communication procedure listed in the Power Outage Action Plan.

In the event of a crisis situation other than an outage, the CEO is to be contacted immediately to deal with all media inquiries. If the media calls dispatch for information or an update, the dispatcher should take a name and phone number, and immediately contact the CEO with that information and any update information.

# Power Outage Action Plan

## Minor Outage

For outages that affect 500 to 1,500 members, the communications coordinator will:

* Post information and updates to WRVEC’s Facebook and Twitter pages, and respond as necessary to member posts.

## Major Outage

For outages that more than 1,500 members, the communications coordinator will:

* Post information and updates to WRVEC’s Facebook and Twitter pages, and respond as necessary to member posts. Information will not be posted between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m.
* Collect necessary facts and information, and send to designated spokesperson.
* Send a news release via email to radio stations, TV stations and local newspapers in WRVEC’s service area.
* Provide updates to the contacted news media at 3 a.m., 8 a.m., noon, 4 p.m., and/or 9 p.m., depending on the time of the outage, via news release.
* News releases and subsequent updates will follow the news cycle.
* Provide the designated spokespeople with the necessary facts and information so they can facilitate calls from the media.

Following the outage, the communications coordinator will:

* Follow up with the contacted media via news release.
* Visit affected areas if there is compelling video or photo opportunities.

# Media & Communication Procedure

An emergency or crisis situation is news. It is critical to be responsive to media requests for information with timely follow-up and consistent information. While we cannot control what the media reports, we can influence how that coverage will be handled by the way we respond and work with the media.

1. All media inquiries or requests for interviews will be directed to the list of designated spokespeople. Under no circumstance is any employee authorized to give an interview to the media concerning cooperative affairs unless specifically directed to by a designated spokesperson.
2. We will provide information to the media as quickly and fully as it can be gathered and confirmed. Adopt a helpful, forthright and honest attitude. Reporters will find the truth one way or another and the cooperative will lose credibility. Reporters are more likely to tell the story in favor of the co-op if the truth comes from the source. Repeat the key messages of what the cooperative is doing to fix the problem.
3. Give only the facts. Before speaking to the media, the designated spokesperson should have a list of key messages and an approved statement. Stay on message.
   * Do not speculate.
   * Do not use spectacular terms to describe events.
   * Do not provide information that has not been verified for release or that is proprietary.
4. Never say “no comment” to a reporter. Reporters will assume you have something to hide. If you do not have an answer to their question, respond by saying, “I’m unable to answer that question, but I can confirm [repeat a key message].” You should also tell the reporter that you can get in touch with them after you have collected the facts on the question they have asked. When you are done with your key messages, stop talking. Keep it simple and stay on message.
5. Avoid co-op and utility jargon in an interview. Use laymen’s terms to explain the facts.
6. Always assume that any microphone, camera or any other recording device is on. Never answer questions “off the record” and never say sarcastic or flippant phrases near a recording device. Always stay on message.
7. The media will want to be as close to the scene of the incident as possible. If the incident has occurred on private property, the media must be informed that it is against company policy for safety reasons to allow anyone near the area. If, for any reason, the media will be allowed or invited to the scene, a designated cooperative representative will escort them. In general, it is better to be helpful than to refuse access to the scene.

The same rules apply to photographers and videographers as for reporters. If the photographer is off co-op property, he is free to take whatever photos he wants without company interference. On co-op property, the photographer can be restricted form areas with proprietary equipment or from private offices.

1. The media work under tight deadlines. Take down all questions and find out when the information is needed. Call the media back according to the stated deadline or as soon as the information is available. If there is no specific comment to make or you have no new information to offer, gat back to the reporter before the deadline and say that there is no new information. Offer to get back with him or her when new information is available.
2. Official news announcements will be made at the following points in a crisis:
   * For power outages, in accordance with the Power Outage Action Plan.
   * For all other outages:
     1. Immediately upon hearing of the crisis
     2. After the first assessment of the situation (i.e., number of persons injured or killed, property damage, etc.)
     3. Progress reports of new details and status reports about activities undertaken to alleviate the problem. Provide updates at 8 a.m., noon, and 4 p.m., or as the situation necessitates.
     4. Social media will remain updated.
     5. A final announcement stating that the situation is under control and stating the actions taken to avoid further crisis will be made.
3. If it is necessary to brief all the media at once, to show visuals, or to explain the cooperative’s position quickly to the media in a uniform manner by several people, a news conference may be the best way to present the co-op’s point of view. This is particularly important in reaching the television audience and the conference should be scheduled to meet TV deadlines. The site for the conference should be WRVEC’s Community Room or near the incident, if it is possible.
4. In preparing for a news conference, the designated spokesperson(s) need to have clear statements and visuals such as charts or video footage, and be ready to answer direct and sometimes sensitive questions from the media. Designated spokespeople should rehearse answers to sensitive questions prior to the conference.
5. The media can be provided with a Media Kit which includes basic information about WRVEC, Touchstone Energy, and electric cooperatives in general. (See Appendix A)

# Interview Procedure

## Successful Interviews

Watch your body language (especially if you are speaking live or on camera). If you are seated, do not rock or swivel in the chair and be sure to sit up straight. If you are standing, be conscious of what your hands are doing and make sure you’re standing solid. In any interview, don’t fidget with your hands, hair, or clothing, and be conscious of your facial expressions.

Avoid co-op and utility jargon. Tell reporters in laymen’s terms the key facts surrounding the emergency – WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW (refer to the Media Relations Fact Sheet).

The media can be provided with a Media Kit which includes basic information about WRVEC, Touchstone Energy, and electric cooperatives in general. (See Appendix A)

## Answering Tough Questions

Avoid negative questions. Instead, use the opportunity to restate your key messages in a positive way.

Don’t be trapped by a reporter’s comment, “It’s off the record.” It never is.

Never repeat negative statements made by the media. Never respond flippantly, sarcastically or lose your temper.

Avoid responding directly to:

* Hypothetical questions (What will you do if…?)
* Raking or choice questions (On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate…?)
* Loaded questions (Which result will be more damaging, if…)
* “Mini speeches” (So, what you’re saying is that WRVEC was unprepared for this situation.)
* Third party questions (I’m certain the fire commissioner would like to know why…)
* Ambush questions – here the media catch you unawares and use the element of surprise to get an unconsidered response. In these situations, simply acknowledge the media presence and say that you are not prepared to answer at this time.

# Media Relations Fact Sheet

Get the facts so the designated spokesperson can stay on message without speculation. The information that should be retrieved:

* Who – Who was involved, names of bystanders, phone numbers for follow-up
* What – what happened, what led up to it, what are the consequences, what is being done to control the situation, are there hazardous materials involved, is there an environmental impact
* Where – where did it happen, general as well as specific locations
* When – date, day, time
* Why – answer this question only if you really know, don’t invent, get the facts. Explain.
* How – get the answer from the person in charge. Don’t speculate.

# Emergency Position Statements

The following position statements may be used during and following an emergency or crisis as media follow various story opportunities.

## Outage Repair and Prevention

WRVEC designs its distribution system to provide high reliability and rapid restoration in the case of an outage. To accomplish this, we use industry approved construction techniques and state-of-the-art technology. The construction of our system sets a baseline for safety and resilience with extensive grounding and fusing. The technology we employ provides us with a wide range of system information and control so we can reroute many parts of our system around a fault, quickly restoring power to most that have been affected.

One key feature of our system design is the recloser. Think of this as the circuit breaker in your home. When there is a fault in our lines, the nearest recloser opens, breaking the circuit. After a brief time, it will close and restore power. If the fault still exists, it opens briefly again then closes. If the fault still remains, the recloser opens and stays open for a few seconds. If it closes and still sees the fault, it will open and stay open until our crews can find and correct the problem. This process creates the blinks that people experience from time to time.

Without reclosers and fuses, faults on our system have the potential to burn down wires and greatly extend the time needed to restore power. Faults may be the result of lightning, vegetation contacting the lines, animals and automobile accidents. It is important for you to call our office if you lose power. Your call helps us identify the location and possible cause of an outage.

## Tree Trimming

Vegetation contacting WRVEC’s power lines is a leading cause of interruptions and outages. By professionally trimming growth away from our lines, we can minimize the chances of an interruption or outage caused by vegetation.

If you see a threatening situation where a tree limb is dangerously close to our lines or vines are climbing up the poles, please call our offices so we can inspect the situation and remove the vegetation safely if necessary. We remind all of our members to never attempt to clear vegetation from our facilities themselves due to the high likelihood of electrocution.

## Major Weather Alert

**Heat** – Today we expect to reach season high temperatures and as a result, season high demand for electricity. We encourage all members to reduce their energy use between noon and 7 p.m. to reduce demand. We recommend postponing energy intensive activities such as cooking, cleaning and laundry until after 7 p.m., and encourage people to draw the shades on the sunny side of their homes, increase the temperature on their air conditioners at least two degrees and use fans to circulate air.

**Ice Storms, Tornados, Sever Weather** – A major [storm type] storm is forecast to hit our service area on [date]. We urge everyone to make necessary preparations including:

* Have a flashlight and battery operated radio handy. Be sure to also have a stock of extra batteries.
* Have a hardwired phone (one without a battery pack) or a fully charged cell phone for emergency calls.
* Have a list of important numbers: family, doctor, and friends. Keep it in your storm kit.
* Make sure you have an adequate supply of medications. If the medications require an electrically operated device to administer them, be sure you have a backup power supply or mechanical alternative. We cannot ensure when we will be able to restore power so you must take steps to be sure you can administer your medications when needed.
* Check backup generators for proper operation.
* Stockpile water for drinking and cooking.

If you lose power, minimize the amount of time you open your refrigerator or freezer. These appliances can keep their contents cold for up to two days if left closed. Our crews will be working to restore power as quickly and safely as possible. If your power is not restored at the same time as your neighbor’s, please call our offices to report the situation.

**Collections** – Collection actions are a necessary part of business, particularly for a member-owned operation where any dollars not collected are paid for by the other members rather than shareholders. After a member receives a bill and payment is not made, the member will receive a friendly reminder that their bill is due. If the member is still behind, they are notified with a cutoff date on their next bill and we will make an attempt to contact the member via phone call. Every effort is made to work with a member including making payment arrangements. As a last resort, we will disconnect the service.

**Facility Security** – Public safety is a key objective for WRVEC. We take steps to make sure our system can be operated safely. In addition, we implement measures that increase the security of key facilities such as substations. These critical components of our system are protected by security fences and monitoring systems. These are designed to limit casual and intentional access to equipment that can kill and that, if damaged, will create extended outages for our members.

Our information and control systems are also protected by appropriate software and hardware systems that prevent unauthorized access and attack. Key systems are also backed up to secure off-site locations to allow for rapid disaster recovery.

**Acts of God, Damage to Homes and Property** – WRVEC systems are designed to deliver voltages and prescribed levels in the safest possible manner. In the course of storms and other natural events, damage to homes and their contents may happen. The cause of the damage may appear to be electrical in nature such as a surge. Since the exact cause of the damage is difficult if not impossible to determine, our insurance carrier will not cover any claims for loss when an Act of God is involved. Given the nature of our ownership, handling such claims through the cooperative directly puts an undue burden on the members at large. We encourage our members to protect their home, property and contents appropriately through such means as adequate grounding of all service entrances (electric, water, sewer, phone, cable), surge protection of sensitive and high-value appliances, and appropriate insurance.

Where damage can be traced directly to faulty workmanship by WRVEC employees, we will address these situations through our insurance carrier.

# Appendix A – Media Kit

## About White River Valley Electric Cooperative

Established in 1939, White River Valley Electric Cooperative is a not-for-profit utility distributing electricity to more than 48,000 meters across its five-county service area in rural southwest Missouri. WRVEC serves Douglas, Taney, Stone, Ozark and Christian counties.

Headquartered in Branson, Mo., the cooperative also has offices in Ava, Mo., Gainesville, Mo., Ozark, Mo., and Reeds Spring, Mo. Approximately 130 people are employed by White River, including electric and environmental service technicians and field personnel, customer service and billing representatives, and other central office positions.

As an active member of the community, WRVEC, and its members and employees support the local community through the Operation Round Up program which provides financial assistance to families and local organizations, and scholarships for college students. Operation Round Up has given back to the community more than $3.4 million in the 20 years it has been around.

WRVEC is one of more than 900 energy cooperatives in the United States and is also a Touchstone Energy Cooperative in addition to being a member of several national and statewide cooperative associations.

## Board of Directors

White River Valley Electric Cooperative is governed by a board of nine directors elected by and from the cooperative’s membership. The directors are responsible for setting major policies within WRVEC’s five-county service area, hiring executives and strategic planning for the evolution of the cooperative. Directors are elected to three-year terms. The current board of directors includes:

* Chief Executive Officer: Chris Hamon
* District A: Layne Morrill, Kimberling City; *Secretary/Treasurer*
* District A: Keet Short, Galena
* District B: Russell Jackson, Kirbyville
* District B: Bob Simmons, Branson; *President*
* District C: Bill Davis, Ozark
* District C: Joe Brazeale, Ozark
* District D: Russell Loftin, Ava
* District E: Pat Funk, Gainesville
* District E: Bill Cook, Theodosia; *Vice President*

## About Touchstone Energy Cooperative

In October of 1999, White River Valley Electric Cooperative joined Touchstone Energy, a national alliance of local, member-owned electric cooperatives. Currently more than 640 Touchstone Energy cooperatives in 46 states deliver energy and energy solutions to over 30 million members every day.

As a Touchstone Energy cooperative, WRVEC can use the resources of this national network and take advantage of economies of scale to enhance service to members. This relationship helps maintain high standards of service to all members. Some additional benefits include:

* Delivering valuable education programs that equip employees with the skills to communicate the cooperative difference and provide top-notch customer service.
* Offering an array of services and programs to enhance relationships with members.
* Producing award-winning advertising and communications materials which serve as informational tools for our members.

Touchstone Energy cooperatives serve their members with integrity, accountability, innovation, and a longstanding commitment to community. These core values are evident in WRVEC’s electric service, one that is among the most reliable, affordable and efficient in the country.

## About Energy Cooperatives

WRVEC is an electric distribution cooperative whose primary goal is to provide safe and reliable electricity at the lowest practical price. Utility cooperatives are private, independent businesses whose members have a financial interest in the operation. They are not-for-profit, democratically governed corporations that are based in the communities they serve.

Cooperative profits, or margins, are either reinvested in the cooperative or returned to the member-owners as patronage capital. Energy cooperatives provide reliable and technologically advanced service to 40 million Americans while maintaining a unique consumer-focused approach to business.

**The Seven Guiding Principles**: Energy cooperatives are guided by the following seven cooperative principles, which help anchor them firmly in the communities they serve and allow close regulation by their consumers.

1. *Voluntary & Open Membership* – Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership.
2. *Democratic Member Control* – Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions.
3. *Members’ Economic Participation* – Members contribute equitably to and democratically control the capital of their cooperative.
4. *Autonomy & Independence* – Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members.
5. *Education, Training & Information* – Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the devoopment of their cooperatives.
6. *Cooperation Among Cooperatives* – Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement when working together.
7. *Concern For Community* – While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities.

## FAQs

**Q.** What is an energy cooperative?

**A.** An energy cooperative is a not-for-profit utility whose members have a financial interest in the company. Cooperatives provide all of the same essential services as any other utility.

**Q.** What’s the difference between cooperatives and other utilities?

**A.** Most Americans get their energy from investor-owned utilities, sometimes called IOUs. IOUs are for-profit private corporations owned by investors and typically operate in densely populated areas. Cooperatives were established by the U.S. Congress and President Roosevelt in the 1930s. The Rural Electrification Act helped bring electricity to rural parts of the country not served by IOUs. Cooperatives serve about 75 percent of America’s land mass, but only 12 percent of the American population.

**Q.** Is White River Valley Electric Cooperative run by or owned by the government?

**A.** No. WRVEC is a corporation operating as a not-for-profit cooperative. Co-ops are governed by the members they serve and run by policies established by a member-elected board of directors. The board selects a chief executive officer, who then hires additional staff for the purpose of running the organization.

**Q.** What is the significance of being not-for-profit?

**A.** Energy cooperatives developed because many citizens who did not have access to electricity in the 1930s decided to band together and form their own companies to acquire power. Investor-owned power companies said they couldn’t make a profit in areas with a small number of consumers per mile of expensive power line. The cooperative business structure already was a well-established part of the American free enterprise system for providing services that were too big for individuals to do alone. Not-for-profit cooperatives were a natural solution for distributing electricity in areas where making a profit would be difficult.

**Q.** What are capital credits?

**A.** Any revenue collected by the co-op that is not needed to cover the cost of providing service is accounted for and allocated back to the members based on the amount of energy they paid for during the year. Those credits are paid out to members at a later date based on a retirement schedule adopted by the board of directors.

# Appendix B – Sample News Releases

## Outage Due to Storm – Initial News Release



**White River Valley Electric Cooperative**

**News Release**

Contact:

Jeff Pardeck, Member Services Manager

417.294.2110 (cell); 417.335.9205 (office)

jpardeck@whiteriver.org

**For immediate release: [date]**

**[outage #] WRVEC members without power due to [storm type]**

**Branson, Mo.** – As of [time a.m./p.m.], White River Valley Electric Cooperative has widespread power outages throughout [area of outage]. Approximately [outage #] members are without power in due to the [storm type].

All available WRVEC crews have been called in and are working to repair the damage [more info if available – to poles, to lines, etc.].

All downed power lines should be considered extremely hazardous. WRVEC asks that the public stay away from any downed power lines as they may still have electricity running through them. It is critical to leave these lines undisturbed and to report them to WRVEC.

The co-op is working diligently to restore power to members as quickly and safely as possible. For continued updates as they happen, visit WRVEC’s [Facebook](http://on.fb.me/WRVEC-fb) or [Twitter](http://bit.ly/WRVECTwitter) page. To report outages, members are encouraged to call the WRVEC outage reporting line at 1-800-879-4056.

# # #

[White River Valley Electric Cooperative](http://whiteriver.org/) is a [Touchstone Energy Cooperative](http://www.touchstoneenergy.com/Pages/default.aspx) dedicated to ensuring our members receive safe and reliable service in their homes and businesses across five southwest Missouri counties including Ozark, Taney, Stone, Christian and Douglas.

## Outage Due to Storm – News Release for Updates



**White River Valley Electric Cooperative**

**News Release**

Contact:

Jeff Pardeck, Member Services Manager

417.294.2110 (cell); 417.335.9205 (office)

jpardeck@whiteriver.org

**For immediate release: [date], [time]**

**Update: [outage #] WRVEC members without power due to [storm type]**

**Branson, Mo.** – As of [time a.m./p.m.], approximately [outage #] White River Valley Electric Cooperative members [remain/are still] without power.

About [peak outage #] members of WRVEC lost power following the [storm type] that hit our area on [date of storm]. Hardest hit areas were [describe those areas].

All available WRVEC crews have been called in and are working to repair the damage [more info if available – to poles, to lines, etc.]. Crews are working round-the-clock to get power restore to members as quickly as possible. [Have additional crews been called? Include that here.]

All downed power lines should be considered extremely hazardous. WRVEC asks that the public stay away from any downed power lines as they may still have electricity running through them. It is critical to leave these lines undisturbed and to report them to WRVEC.

The co-op is working diligently to restore power to members as quickly and safely as possible. For continued updates as they happen, visit WRVEC’s [Facebook](http://on.fb.me/WRVEC-fb) or [Twitter](http://bit.ly/WRVECTwitter) page. To report outages, members are encouraged to call the WRVEC outage reporting line at 1-800-879-4056.

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## Tornado Watch or Severe Storm Alert



**White River Valley Electric Cooperative**

**News Release**

Contact:

Jeff Pardeck, Member Services Manager

417.294.2110 (cell); 417.335.9205 (office)

jpardeck@whiteriver.org

**For immediate release: [date]**

**Take precautions before a [storm type] hits**

**Branson, Mo.** – White River Valley Electric Cooperative is making preparations for rapid restoration of possible power outages caused by the potential high winds from the [storm type] expected in the area.

[Storm type] can bring high winds which can mean downed power lines. If there is a power line lying on the ground, or if a tree falls on a line, the public should stay away from these lines as they may still have electricity running through them. A tree on a power line can act as a conductor so it is equally as dangerous as a downed power line.

WRVEC recommends that if anyone sees a downed power line they should:

1. Keep a safe distance;
2. Send for help by calling the cooperative or 911;
3. Let others know of the danger.

If high winds result in power outages, White River Valley Electric Cooperative will begin work to restore power as soon as safety conditions permit. Members experiencing an outage can report it by calling the WRVEC outage reporting line at 1-800-879-4056.

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## Pre-Storm/Wind Advisory



**White River Valley Electric Cooperative**

**News Release**

Contact:

Jeff Pardeck, Member Services Manager

417.294.2110 (cell); 417.335.9205 (office)

jpardeck@whiteriver.org

**For immediate release: [date]**

**Strong wind advisory:**

**Branson, Mo.** – White River Valley Electric Cooperative reminds you that [storm type] and power lines can be a dangerous combination.

[Storm type] can bring high winds which can mean downed power lines and fallen power lines can be deadly.

If there is a power line lying on the ground, or if a tree falls on a line, the public should stay away from these lines as they may still have electricity running through them. A tree on a power line can act as a conductor so it is equally as dangerous as a downed power line.

WRVEC recommends that if anyone sees a downed power line they should:

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