

# Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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## VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

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## Guest Column

# Power Restoration is a Team Effort that Includes You



**TODD ROSS**

**HAVING WORKED IN THE OPERATIONS** department of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) for 35 years — as a metering technician, a district manager and the head of the operations department — I'm accustomed to members' questions about power outages. Given our reliance on electricity, there's simply never a good time to be without service.

Since summertime brings the chance of outages from severe thunderstorms, like the one our members in northern Huntingdon County experienced in late May, this is a good time to talk about our restoration process and what's happening behind the scenes.

The first thing we want members to know is we still need you. When your power goes out, it might be just your home or a small section of the area where you live. There is a chance we may not know about it. To report an outage, call 800-432-0680.

When an outage occurs, restoring service is a team effort. Our consumer services representatives are taking your calls. Engineering staff and crew leaders are surveying damage. Our staff arborist may be coordinating removal of downed trees by contracted trimming crews. And our lineworkers are replacing poles and reconnecting wire.

However, since every outage is different, we don't know immediately how dangerous the situation is or what equipment might need to be replaced. When responding to outages, we first locate the problem and then figure out what materials we need. Then we must quickly plan how to make repairs without compromising service for the rest of our members. Normally, we prioritize our work based on restoring service to the most members in the shortest amount of time.

Our crews can encounter a wide array of dangers in the field. Besides working around high-voltage electricity, they're on alert for wind, lightning, falling trees and fast-moving cars. If you ever drive through one of our work zones, please slow down.

While we like to think our restoration team members are superheroes, they're human. They must eat and rest. If you ever see our trucks in a restaurant parking lot while your power is out, know that sometimes our employees huddle in a safe, common area to map out their next steps for getting your power back on while refueling themselves.

Sometimes outages for Valley REC members are caused by loss of service from power providers interconnected to our system, like Penelec and West Penn Power. We maintain positive relationships with these companies and are in communication with them when we lose their electric service to our substations.

Our crews do their best to help those who rely on our service the most, but if you depend on electricity for life-support, you must have a backup plan. Remember, we don't always know how long restoration efforts will take.

Finally, I want to remind the membership that our employees might be affected, too. Because Valley REC is a local electric cooperative, owned by the members we serve, our employees are local. They are your friends and neighbors. When you're without power, our people might be, too. 🙏

**TODD ROSS**  
VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS

# Three Springs Substation Replacement Progresses in Huntingdon County

**DOUG ROLES**, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

**VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC)** lineworkers and contracted crews have dismantled the Three Springs substation and are moving forward with construction of a new facility on the same site in Cromwell Township, Huntingdon County. The new substation is projected to be in service in late summer and will provide greater reliability and power quality to co-op members in the Three Springs, Maddensville, and Orbisonia areas.

The existing substation, located across Pogue Road from the Southern Huntingdon County High School, was built in the 1950s. The co-op began planning construction of a new facility last fall.

“It’s an old substation that’s been built upon and added to over the years,” says Todd Ross, Valley REC’s vice presi-

dent of operations. “We’re planning on having this project completed in August, before the start of the new school year.”

Work at the substation and on associated lines requires multiple, short-duration service disruptions. The co-op is notifying members ahead of time of planned outages.

At various points in the process, crews are working around energized lines. So, the settings on some fault-detecting equipment have been changed, increasing the likelihood that fault events (from animals and foliage), which normally would cause only a blink, could cause an outage.

Several poles had to be erected near the substation at the start of the project to facilitate continued service to the high school. The co-op rerouted power from two other substations to continue serving Three Springs area members. Those accounts are temporarily being powered by the Clear Ridge substation in Taylor Township, Fulton County, and the Riverview substation in Shirley Township, Huntingdon County. Once complete, the substation will provide increased voltage to its feeder and tap lines.

In February, The Tri-M Group, LLC began conversion work of the substation’s south feeder to a 25-kilovolt (kV) line, while Ayers Line Construction worked on the north feeder. At the site, Hickes Associates is doing excavation and concrete work. The Tri-M Group will construct the metal framework.

“Our crews will be working alongside them, doing our own equipment work,” Todd says.

Penelec, a FirstEnergy company, provides power to the Three Springs substation. The new facility will increase capacity and meet modern standards for clearance around equipment. The project includes moving the existing Three Springs substation transformer permanently to the Clear Ridge substation to improve power quality and backfeeding ability there.

“It’s a bigger transformer, capacitywise, than the three single units currently at Clear Ridge,” Todd explains. “Why get rid of equipment if we can utilize it?”

Valley REC leaders anticipate the Three Springs project to be the co-op’s last substation replacement for the foreseeable future.

“We’ve done five substations in the past seven years,” Todd says.

In 2022-23, the co-op built a new Sinking Valley substation, replacing a facility that had been in operation for more than 60 years along Kettle Road. The new location



**GETTING STARTED:** Valley Rural Electric Cooperative crews set a new pole near the Three Springs substation on April 17. Several poles were erected near the substation to enable rerouting of power from another co-op substation to the nearby Southern Huntingdon County High School.

along Church Hill Road provides a larger lot with easier access and is closer to a 46-kV Penelec delivery point. The first several spans of the old substation's north feeder traversed a steep ridge, making it difficult to do line maintenance.

In the fall of 2021, the co-op completed construction of a new Atkinson Mills substation in Wayne Township, Mifflin County. That project also replaced an aging wooden facility from the 1950s with a metal-frame structure.

In October 2020, the co-op completed construction of a new substation near Fort Loudon, Franklin County. The Path Valley substation now handles the load of the former Metal substation several miles to the north along Route 75. In 2016, Valley REC built a new Reeds Gap substation in Tuscarora Township, Juniata County, again replacing an older substation.

Substation rebuilding and replacement projects are part of the co-op's ongoing effort to improve system reliability and power quality. Crews in all three service districts continue to install protective devices that can isolate faulted sections of line from the rest of the distribution system, reducing the number of members impacted by any one power outage. Additionally, the co-op continues its aggressive approach to tree trimming, conducting vegetation management across the entire system within a four- or five-year period. 📍



**NOT MUCH LEFT:** By mid-May, the only thing left of the original Three Springs facility was the substation transformer. In early June, crews used a crane and truck to move that piece of equipment to the Clear Ridge substation.



**END OF AN ERA:** Valley Rural Electric Cooperative crews will begin replacing the Three Springs substation, built in the 1950s, with a new facility on the same site in Huntingdon County. Associated lines are also being converted from 14,400 volts to 25,000 volts to increase service quality and reliability.

# Meet Your Employees

**DOUG ROLES**, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

**HIGHLIGHTED IN THIS COLUMN IS** a recent addition to the Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) team, Dane Diehl, who works in the co-op's Martinsburg district as a fourth-year lineman.

Dane is from Saxton and a 2010 graduate of Tussey Mountain High School. He completed a 15-week lineworker training program at the Lineman Institute of the Northeast in Saugerties, N.Y., in 2019.

Dane began his employment with Valley REC in August 2022. Previously, he had worked for a Pittsburgh-based line construction contractor, where he completed an apprenticeship program. Before that, Dane and his family lived in Maine while he worked for Holland Power Line Construction, which rebuilds power lines.

"They're storm chasers; that's strictly what they do," Dane recalls. "We traveled up and down the East Coast."

Right out of high school, Dane worked in construction and at a distribution center. Married with two children, he said he was looking for a family-sustaining vocation that would allow his wife, Cierra, to stay home.

"I knew some people who were in the trade, but I hadn't made the leap," Dane says of becoming a lineworker.

Dane knew several Valley REC's lineworkers and had stayed in touch with them about a career at the co-op, hoping it would have an opening. Things came together when a position became available in Martinsburg, and Dane moved back to Pennsylvania. Dane says one of the things he most enjoys about working for Valley REC is the camaraderie.

"Being around a good group of guys makes it easy to come to work each day," he says.

Working with the co-op's veteran



**NEW TEAM MEMBER:** Dane Diehl works from the co-op's Martinsburg district. He is a fourth-year lineman.

lineworkers has shown him some of the tips and tricks of the trade. Dane is also happy the people he works for, the co-op's members, recognize the importance of the profession.

"When you're out there doing the job, you get the appreciation from the members," he says. "Many times, I've had people say, 'Thank you for what you do.'"

Dane began working for Valley REC two months after his brother Greg (featured in the June issue of *Penn Lines*) started in the Huntingdon

district as a metering technician. When not working, Dane and Greg enjoy any activity that takes them outdoors and allows them to spend time with their older brother, Tyler.

Dane and Cierra stay busy with their children's activities. Daija, 7, plays softball, and Declan, 5, plays flag football and soccer.

Dane's co-workers are glad he's willing to wait for outage restoration work to come his way in Martinsburg instead of chasing it. He's one of the people you can count on. 📞

## COMMON CAUSES OF POWER OUTAGES

There is never a good time for the power to go out, but if it happens on a sunny day, you might be left wondering why. Here are the most common causes of a power outage.



### WEATHER

High winds, snow and ice can cause tree limbs to fall on power lines. Other weather effects, like wildfires and lightning strikes, can cause major damage to equipment.



### CRITTERS

Squirrels, birds, snakes and other animals can inadvertently contact power lines, causing short circuits and disruptions to electrical supply.



### Scheduled MAINTENANCE

Occasionally, we plan outages to perform upgrades or repairs to parts of the local grid.



### ACCIDENTS

Vehicles can crash into utility poles, bringing down power lines. Construction and excavation work can also result in disruptions to underground lines.