



**FREESTATE ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE, INC.**

The Outlet

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Tip of the Month

Avoid placing items like lamps and TVs near your air-conditioning thermostat. The thermostat senses heat from these appliances, which can cause the A/C to run longer than necessary. Source: energy.gov

FreeState Prepares for the Future

FreeState Assistant General Manager **CHRIS PARR** has completed an intensive program in electric utility management with the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The **ROBERT I. KABAT MANAGEMENT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (MIP)** is a series of workshops offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin. The program guides participants through all facets of the electric utility industry, including the many changes occurring around the nation. Parr is one of only a few electric utility management staff who will graduate from the Management Internship Program this year.

“This is a prestigious program in the electric utility industry,” said **STEVE FOSS**, FreeState CEO. “It’s not a distinction every cooperative leader has, and it takes hard work and dedication.”

Foss, who completed the MIP program in 2006 added, “Chris [Parr] is an asset to the cooperative and understands the meaning and importance of member service. He was able to take his leadership skills and knowledge to the next level and this is an incredible accomplishment.”

Earning the distinction took a significant amount of time and



Chris Parr (right) FreeState’s assistant general manager, earned the distinction of MIP from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. The program guides participants through all facets of the electric utility industry, including the many changes occurring around the nation.

commitment. MIP participants go through three 10-day sessions designed to challenge and educate participants in new, innovative management techniques. Participants leave with a better understanding of what members want and how to ensure they get it. By covering the unique principles that govern the operations of electric cooperatives, the program helps the co-op analyze other business ventures it may want to enter as well as enhance the core organization. This allows greater emphasis of study on management challenges and the aspects of consumer ownership that cooperatives enjoy. Participants learn to focus on member value as part of day-to-day decision-making.

Speak UP Listen UP

Working Together to Establish a Cooperative Culture of Safety

FreeState Electric Cooperative makes safety a priority, whether it's the safety of employees or members. On March 14 and 15, Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. partnered with FreeState to host a regional "Speak Up! Listen Up!" seminar where cooperative team members from northeast Kansas could evaluate and improve safety performance and create an even safer workplace. The seminar focused on:

- ▶ Helping employees overcome fear about speaking up
- ▶ Teaching employees to give and receive safety feedback
- ▶ Providing training for effective conversations at all levels
- ▶ Emphasizing safety as everyone's responsibility
- ▶ Highlighting key principles to leaders

"One of our goals this year has been to emphasize the importance of saying something

if an unsafe situation arises," said **JOHN MALONE**, Safety and Resource Manager. "It goes back to that saying if you see something say something."

The national program was developed through a partnership between Caterpillar (CAT) Safety Services, NRECA's Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) and Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange. It is offered to cooperatives across the country and uses CAT's proven communication concepts.

"The training involves work scenarios that are tailored to what we do here every day," said Malone. "That is what makes this program so relevant."

The program uses real-life scenarios to train employees on how to engage in discussions and provide feedback within work environments in a constructive way. The program has helped strengthen safety culture at co-ops across the nation.

"We have an excellent safety culture here at FreeState," said **RANDY WAGER**, right-of-way superintendent. "This program took that one step further and gave me some insight on how I can continue to instill courage and confidence in employees to speak up and take feedback when it comes to working safely."

"I appreciate FreeState's commitment to safety, and so does my family," Wager added.

FreeState's safety commitment starts with a committee that meets monthly to discuss practices and policies and makes recommendations with best practices in mind when it comes to the safety of the cooperative outside and inside the office. The committee also develops and helps enforce the safety manual followed by all employees.

"It [the training] reiterated some of the practices we already employ here at FreeState," said **DAVID GECHTER**, Topeka line superintendent. "We have to lead by example, and that will help our employees keep safety at the top of their minds."



David Gechter, Topeka line superintendent, learned new techniques on how to give and receive safety-related feedback.

Leading the Safety Culture

The training seminar led by **LARRY DETWILER**, Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. director of loss control, safety and compliance, facilitates the co-op's safety culture by involving all levels of employees in the training.

"The culture for safety starts at the top-down," said Malone. "It starts with management and our co-op leadership."

The FreeState team who completed the training in Topeka was happy with the results.

Chelsea Renyer, Human Resources Generalist at Freestate who serves on the safety committee, said the committee is working to change the perception that the safety manual is only for linemen.

"I may not be in the field, but it's still important for me to understand and appreciate what goes on so I can help facilitate active listening and support those who are working to get procedures changed for the greater good," Renyer said. "It takes a team, and everybody on the team needs to have a mutual understanding."

That mutual understanding is what bridges the gap between those working in the field and support staff back at the office. Malone says empowering employees to speak up and listen up is key to how the safety culture is maintained.

"We talk about a team mentality when it comes to safety, but safety isn't just speaking up when something comes up that isn't safe or isn't the FreeState standard, it's also listening and being able to correct the problem," added Malone.

Accident Avoidance

FreeState wants its employees to return home safely each day to their families which requires clear expectations and discussion about how accidents can happen.

"Each of us understands the consequences of how we do our work every day," said Malone. "It's something we're very open about here."

The safety committee, led by Malone, trains all employees year-

round on various topics that relate back to the safety manual and safety discussions. Topics range from dog bite prevention to transformer swaps and even stress management.

Wager agrees the monthly meetings are important. "I oversee our tree crews, so it is a different set of issues than linemen have, but sometimes we have the same issues. So, it's great to have these discussions so we can share ideas and come up with solutions that fit—and it may even be something we look at company-wide."

Speaking Up

Feedback on the job site can prevent an accident or injury. The training seminar shared with participants ways to give constructive criticism and feedback in situations where safety may be at stake for those directly (and indirectly) involved.

"If you don't know it's unsafe, you don't know," said Wager. "All situations can be teaching moments."

The training reiterated the importance of speaking out when an unsafe situation arises—no matter who is involved and the situation.

"It doesn't matter what the job title is," said Malone. "All employees need to be empowered to take charge in a situation they consider unsafe or when they see disregard for our safety policies that are put in place to keep us safe."

Every employee has a right and responsibility to let someone know they aren't working safely. Feedback isn't a criticism; it's about respecting yourself and others. One form of feedback the co-op facilitates is a monthly safety meeting where all employees have a chance to openly discuss policies, procedures and other issues to receive positive feedback from a larger collaborative group.



Chelsea Renyer, HR generalist, attended training designed to empower employees to engage in safety-related dialogue when unsafe situations arise. Renyer serves on the safety committee.

"One avenue we use to address safety is discussions during our monthly meetings," Malone said. "It allows for an exchange of ideas and the ability to collaborate on solutions."

Listening Up

For Malone and other management, the monthly meetings are also about listening. FreeState practices foreman meetings once per month that allow executive management and crew foremen and superintendents to sit down and share ideas and offer solutions to concerns that may have come up.

"These are important meetings for executive management," said **RANDY RICHARDS, ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER**. "It keeps us in the mix and allows us to take a proactive approach if the crews tell us they need something, like equipment or more training."

"It's all about communication and listening to concerns or suggestions from the crews that are out in the field every day," Richards added. "It's as simple as gathering and discussing, and making decisions that will help not only safety but efficiency."

By asking questions, sharing concerns and working together to find the safest way possible to do the job is how FreeState practices "Speak Up! Listen Up!"



ASK Matt

Dear Matt,
I turn my ceiling fans off when I am not in a room. However, my spouse insists I am losing money in AC or heating by not circulating the air. Am I saving by turning them off?

You are correct to shut them off. Energy auditors say **“FANS COOL PEOPLE, NOT ROOMS.”** Turning ceiling fans off when you are not in the room saves energy and money. Ceiling fans basically help our comfort level. In the summer we are advised to run our ceiling fans in a counterclockwise direction at a higher setting to blow the air down at people in the room to create a wind chill effect.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, fans make a room feel 4 degrees cooler than they really are. Fans can save as much as 30 percent but shut them off when you aren't in the room because you don't want to give up those savings by using excess energy.

Ceiling fans also help in winter. Adjust the fan to run clockwise and turn it to a slow speed to avoid the wind chill effect.

Using a ceiling fan in the winter pulls cooler air from the floor up to the ceiling forcing the warm air back down near people. It helps our comfort but does not change the temperature in the room.

Energy Use Coordinator MATT LAMBERT will answer questions about energy efficiency, renewables, co-op programs, and everything in between. Email Matt your question at askmatt@freestate.coop.

Commitment to ZERO Contacts

FreeState Electric Cooperative recently joined NRECA's Commitment to Zero Contacts initiative launched in April 2018 to combat an alarming rate of serious injuries and fatalities (SIFs) among co-op lineworkers. A nationwide survey of 51,000 co-op employees conducted annually between 2006 and 2015 found an average of more than 23 SIFs each year.

FreeState also adopted the use of a job site safety briefing app developed for the program by Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange.

“This wasn't just a quick box check-off for us,” said **CEO STEVE FOSS**. “We have taken our time and gone through our safety committee, and foreman group to review the concepts and thoughtfully look at ways we can continually strengthen the safety culture.”

Commitment to Zero Contacts suggests that co-ops avoid a “bad cop” mentality and instead focus on a system-wide approach that helps them:

- ▶ Clarify and define life-saving rules.
- ▶ Verify use of life-saving rules.
- ▶ Create effective job planning on all jobs.
- ▶ Form a structured safety-minded management process.
- ▶ Seek employee involvement.

All employees signed the pledge to use FreeState's life-saving rules:

- ▶ Using personal protective equipment (gloves and sleeves);
- ▶ Application of personal grounds;
- ▶ Application of proper insulating material;
- ▶ Proper use of clearance procedures;
- ▶ To “speak up” and not accept, or walk by, a shortcut to safe work; and
- ▶ Slow down and perform effective job planning on all work.

“It's an all-in mentality,” said Foss. “Not only did each employee sign the pledge, they received a Commitment to Zero Contacts key chain as a reminder of the pledge they signed.”

“It's just part of our commitment to keeping our employees safe and return them to their families at the end of the day,” Foss added.



Employees of FreeState received a reminder of their commitment to zero contacts and carrying out the FreeState safety standards every day. The program is part of a national initiative and part of FreeState's commitment to returning employees to their families at the end of the day.