



Photo: Rod Schlieman, March Calendar Photo Contest Winner

# Agralite Electric Cooperative NEWSLETTER

March 2022

## Surge Protection 101

A power surge is an unexpected increase in voltage, and it can occur from a variety of sources. Regardless of the cause, surges can do major damage to electronic devices and equipment in your home. Below are some common causes of power surges and how to protect sensitive electronics.

**One of the most common causes of a power surge is lightning.** Most of us have experienced this during a severe thunderstorm. When lightning strikes an electrical system, the excess current must be channeled somewhere—unfortunately in many cases, it's sent through a home. Be sure to unplug all unused devices and electronics during severe thunderstorms.

**Another common cause of power surges is electrical overload.** This happens when devices or appliances are plugged into an outlet that can't handle the required amount of voltage, or if multiple devices are plugged into one outlet through an extension cord. If you're experiencing power surges due to electrical overload, it's time to call a qualified electrician to evaluate your home's circuits and electrical needs.

**Faulty wiring in a home can also cause power surges.** Damaged or exposed wires can cause spikes in voltage, creating a potentially dangerous situation. If you notice signs of faulty wiring, like visible burns on outlets, buzzing sounds from outlets or frequently tripped circuit breakers, your home may be due for electrical wiring repairs and updates.

**Surges can also occur after a power outage.** Sometimes, when electricity is being restored and reconnected, it's common to experience a quick surge in current. Similar to advice for a surge caused by lightning, it's best to unplug sensitive electronics during the outage—then wait to plug them back in after power is fully restored.

**Aside from unplugging devices when you suspect a power surge, there are two ways you can take additional precautions to protect electronics in your home.**

**Point-of-use surge protection devices, like power strips, can protect electronics during most surges.** Remember, not all power strips offer surge protection. Read packaging labels carefully before buying, and don't overload the power strip with too many devices. You can also install specialized electrical outlets with additional surge protection. Talk to a trusted electrician to learn more.

**Another option is a whole-home surge protector.** It can help protect your home from more powerful surges. In most cases, whole-home suppressors are connected to your home's service panel and feature thermal fuses and notifications that indicate when a device is impacted by a surge. Whole-home surge protection prices vary based on the size of the home and suppressor. Whole-home suppressors should always be connected by a licensed electrician, so consider the cost of installation as well. Occasional power surges are inevitable. Unplugging devices before a surge and using additional levels of protection like power strips or whole-home suppressors, you can better safeguard your sensitive electronics and devices. *Contact Agralite Electric Cooperative if you have questions about ways of protecting your home from power surges.*

## EMPOWERING

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FOR OVER

# 75

YEARS

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**Agralite Electric Co-op**  
*We're member-owned!*

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[www.agralite.coop](http://www.agralite.coop)

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**Agralite Scholarship**  
**Due April 6th**



Touchstone Energy®  
Agralite is a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative.

## Manager's Article by Kory Johnson

The energy industry is undergoing a dramatic transformation as consumer demand for more renewable energy sources grows, and innovation and technology continue to advance exponentially. You're likely hearing about this energy evolution first-hand.

Great River Energy (GRE), one of Agralite Electric Cooperative's three power suppliers has announced it intends to divest itself of the Coal Creek coal-fired power plant. GRE has entered into a tentative agreement to sell the power plant and the DC transmission line linking the power plant in North Dakota to the GRE service area in Minnesota. Long term, the energy from the Coal Creek station will be replaced with contracts for wind projects in Minnesota and North Dakota. The capacity for GRE will be served by existing gas-fired peaking stations located in Minnesota.

Basin Electric, a wholesale provider to Agralite, has been increasing renewables in its generation portfolio by adding large scale wind farms and contracting for additional wind power. Basin Electric is also building two utility scale solar arrays in South Dakota that will add more diversity to the energy mix. 226504

Our third power provider is the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). WAPA provided Agralite with 16% of the energy for 2021. WAPA markets the renewable power from the hydro electric dams along the Missouri River.

At Agralite, we have always put the good of our community first. While our primary function is to provide reliable and affordable energy to our members, we are more than an electricity provider. Because we are a co-op, our mission is to enrich the lives of our members and to serve the long-term interests of our community.

Green energy is certainly not new. Solar, wind, and hydro power have been around for decades. However, the recent innovations and advances in renewable technology have led to decreases in cost, making it more feasible and accessible. In recent years with our power supply contracts with GRE, East River, and WAPA, Agralite has been able to adjust our fuel mix by utilizing more renewables. In 2021, 36% of the energy was supplied by renewable energy sources, 16% from our hydroelectric contacts with WAPA and 20% supplied by wind and solar to meet the Minnesota requirements. Unfortunately, the state of Minnesota does not recognize large scale hydro as a renewable.

However, to borrow a nautical analogy, it takes a long time to turn the direction of a large ship—and changing the energy mix we use to power homes and businesses doesn't happen overnight. While renewable energy use is increasing, we will still depend on traditional forms of energy to keep power flowing reliably to your home and businesses. After all, solar and wind energy are referred to as "intermittent" power since the wind does not always blow and the sun does not always shine. And during the times when renewables resources are not producing, our livelihood and in some cases our lives depend on the constant flow of electricity. This fact coupled with the growing demand for renewables creates its own challenges. That's why there is real value in maintaining a balanced mixture of fuel types to ensure reliability and resiliency to meet the growing demand for electricity.

As the energy industry continues to evolve, Agralite Electric Cooperative, along with our wholesale providers, are striving to take advantage of technology advances and market opportunities as they become available. This means Agralite can leverage the flexibility of the grid to offer a wider range of renewable power selections as we continue to bring safe, reliable, and affordable power to our community.



**Pick up your calendar featuring member photos at the Agralite office!**

**Winter Office Hours:  
8:00am – 4:30pm**



## Find your account number and win a \$100 credit!

If your account number (as it appears on your monthly electric bill) is one of the [four account numbers](#) hidden in this issue, give our office a call by the end of the month and you will receive a \$100 bill credit. If more than one member finds their account number in a single issue, \$100 will be split equally amongst them.

## Energy Saving Tip:



**When was your cooling system last serviced? Most manufacturers recommend an annual tune-up for your home's cooling system. Schedule this service in March to beat the summer rush when the pros are the busiest.**

A qualified professional can check refrigerant levels, thermostat accuracy, motor and belt condition, and other factors that impact system efficiency.

*Source: Department of Energy*



## Be Prepared And Stay Safe: Storm Watches vs. Warnings

At any moment, 1,800 thunderstorms occur worldwide, according to the National Weather Service. That is 16 million storms a year! In an average year, 1,200 tornadoes cause 60 to 65 fatalities and 1,500 injuries in the U.S. alone.

To protect yourself, your family, and your property from seasonal thunderstorms and tornadoes, you need more than a flashlight and a few cans of food (*although they are essential parts of your emergency kit*). In addition to keeping a preparedness kit, understand that storms can be dangerous and learn how to interpret weather alerts to minimize risk.

### Watch Versus Warning

When bad weather is approaching, people typically turn on the TV, pull up a weather app, or look online for information. If you see a severe weather watch or warning, danger could be heading your way. However, many people do not consider the differences between the two.

A **watch** means there is a significant chance of a severe thunderstorm or tornado. Watch and wait for more information while taking precautionary measures, like unplugging electronics and checking the contents of your emergency preparedness kit.

A **warning** means a severe thunderstorm or tornado has been spotted or seen on radar. The moment you get a warning, take shelter in the safest part of your home, which is usually in your basement or the interior part of your home.

### Thunderstorms

Thunderstorms are some of the most common yet destructive weather events on Earth. Most of the damage comes from flooding caused by heavy rains, lightning strikes, and high winds. Some storms also deliver hail and can even spawn tornadoes. Bad weather systems, such as those that cause thunderstorms, can cause broken windows, extreme water damage, fallen trees, serious fires, downed power lines, and more.

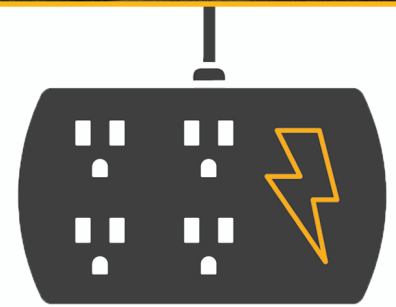
Do not ignore the potential hazards of thunderstorms. Keep flashlights or battery-operated lights well-supplied with batteries or charge them regularly. Keep a supply of nonperishable food and drinking water on hand. Turn off and unplug electronic equipment to protect it from power surges. Move valuables out of the basement or other locations that may flood. If a power outage occurs, never use a portable generator in your home, enclosed structure or garage. Do not step into a flooded basement or area since the water could be electrified.

### Tornadoes

The central part of the United States is sometimes referred to as Tornado Alley because it is the most common geographic location for these disastrous storms. The Great Plains have the perfect environment and climate for severe storm creation. While tornadoes can happen in any month, they are much more likely to occur in the spring and summer than in other seasons. April, May, and June have more than twice as many reported tornadoes as any other time of the year. 1653700 To stay safe during a tornado, be aware of weather conditions during thunderstorms that could produce tornadoes. Know the best place to shelter both indoors and out, and always protect your head, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Understanding severe thunderstorm and tornado watches and warnings can help keep you and your family safe. Do not underestimate the potential power of these weather systems. Take steps to protect yourselves and your property before a storm hits.

*For more about storm preparedness and electrical safety, visit [SafeElectricity.org](https://www.safepower.org).*



## SURGE PROTECTION

Keep your electronic equipment safe

A power surge is typically caused by lightning, changes in electrical loads, faulty wiring or damaged power lines.

Install power strips with surge protection to protect sensitive equipment. They are easy to use, protect electronics plugged into the device, must be replaced over time or after a major surge event.

### ! REMEMBER

Not all powerstrips offer surge protection. Carefully read the packaging labels when purchasing.



Agralite Electric Cooperative will award two \$2,500, two \$1,000, and three \$500 scholarships. One of the \$2,500 scholarship awards is intended for individuals interested in becoming an electrical line worker or electrician. Scholarship funds are made available by unclaimed capital credits and administration proceeds from the Rural Economic Development Loan program. The application can be found on the [agralite.coop](http://agralite.coop) website under the "Community" tab, from your school counselor, or in our office. Applicants who applied for the Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship may also apply for the Agralite scholarship. **The application must be returned to Agralite Electric Cooperative no later than April 6, 2022.**

**Mail Scholarship(s) To:**

Agralite Electric Cooperative,  
320 E Hwy 12, PO Box 228, Benson, MN  
**Or Email To:** [mchevalier@agralite.com](mailto:mchevalier@agralite.com)



**Call Day or Night**  
**1.888.884.3887**

Do not call the office for outages

February Energy Payment  
is due March 20.\*

\*We accept Visa, Discover & Mastercard.

***This institution is an equal opportunity  
provider and employer.***

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

## Cogeneration - Annual Notification to Membership

In compliance with Agralite Electric Cooperative's adopted rules relating to cogeneration and small power production, Agralite Electric Cooperative is obligated to interconnect with and purchase electricity from cogenerators and small power producers, whom satisfy the conditions as a qualifying facility. 1496700 Agralite Electric Cooperative is obligated to provide information free of charge to all interested members upon request regarding rates and interconnection requirements. All interconnections require an application and approval to become a qualifying facility. Any dispute over interconnections, sales, and purchases are subject to resolution by the Agralite Electric Cooperative Board.

You can find all of our Cogeneration information on our website at [www.agralite.coop](http://www.agralite.coop).

*Interested members should contact Agralite Electric Cooperative, 320 E Hwy 12, PO Box 228, Benson, MN 56215 or call 320-843-4150.*

## COLD WEATHER RULE & ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM NOTICE

*In accordance with Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule, electric service cannot be disconnected for nonpayment between October 1 and April 30 if electricity is the primary heat source and ALL of the following statements apply:*

- Your household income is at or below 60% of the state median household income. Income may be verified on forms provided by Agralite Electric Cooperative or by the local energy assistance provider.
- You enter into and make reasonably timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household.
- You receive referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation, or other programs likely to reduce your energy bills from Agralite Electric Cooperative.

### **Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule does not completely stop winter disconnects**

*Before disconnecting electric service to residential members between October 1 and April 30, Agralite Electric Cooperative must provide:*

- A 30-day notice of disconnection;
- A statement of members' rights and responsibilities;
- A list of local energy assistance providers;
- Forms on which to request Cold Weather Rule protection; and
- A statement explaining available payment plans and other options to continue service.

### **Energy Assistance Program**

The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) is a federally funded program through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which helps low-income renters and homeowners pay for home heating costs and furnace repairs. Household income must be at or below 60% of the state median income (\$67,764 for a family of four) to qualify for benefits. Applications must be received or postmarked by May 31, 2022.

*To learn more about the EAP program or to apply for assistance:*

- Visit the Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Assistance website, <https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance/>, for more details and to access the application portal.
- Contact your county EAP service provider for additional information and assistance.
- Agralite Electric Cooperative exists because of you, and we are dedicated to the people and communities we serve. If you are having difficulty paying your electric bill and do not qualify for either of these programs, please contact our billing department to set up a payment plan.

**Prairie 5 CAC 320-269-7976 West Central CAC 800-492-4805**  
**Heartland CAC 320-235-0850**

## Reap What You Sow: Stay Safe During Planting Season

Long hours and fatigue are a constant battle for farmers during planting season. If you farm, remember to take care of yourself by getting as much rest as possible and allowing yourself breaks to clear your head.

**Be especially aware of electrical hazards around the farm. Be cautious and think twice before acting around electricity. Safe Electricity shares the following reminders:**

- If your machinery or vehicle comes in contact with a power line, do not get out. Once contact has been made with a live line (*even when your tractor or truck makes contact*), you are now a “pathway to ground” and you could get electrocuted if you step out. Instead, stay where you are and call 9-1-1 to dispatch the appropriate utility to de-energize the power.
- If you come across an accident or incident near a downed power line, alert individuals (*from a distance*) to stay in the tractor or vehicle as long as there is no imminent danger. Do not approach the scene.
- When using machinery with long extensions or tall antennas and when using ladders, look up to avoid contact with overhead power lines.
- Even if there is no contact, an electrical current can jump or arc so keep equipment at least 10 feet from surrounding power lines at all times.
- Remember, non-metallic materials (such as tree limbs, ropes and hay) can conduct electricity, depending on dampness and dust/dirt accumulation.
- Visually inspect overhead lines, which may not meet height codes due to age or pole damage. If a wire is hanging low or is on the ground, consider it energized and stay at least 50 feet away; call 9-1-1 to have the operator dispatch the utility. 1630800
- Every day, map out where equipment will be moved to ensure it will clear power lines.
- When working near power lines, always use a spotter who has a broad vantage point.
- Train anyone working with or for you (*including seasonal employees*) to be aware of power line locations and teach them proper clearance distance. Also, design and implement a safety training program that includes a review of electrical hazards and how to safely deal with power lines.
- According to American Family Insurance, “know your PTO.” To stay safe when working with a power take off (PTO), always disengage the PTO, turn off the engine, and remove keys before getting off the tractor. Also, never step across a rotating power shaft.

*For more information on electrical safety, go to [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).*

## Plant Trees Safely

Before you dig, call 811 to locate buried utility lines.

### LOW TREE ZONE

Avoid planting within 20 ft. of power lines. If planting is unavoidable, only plant shrubs and small trees that reach a mature height of 15 ft. or less.

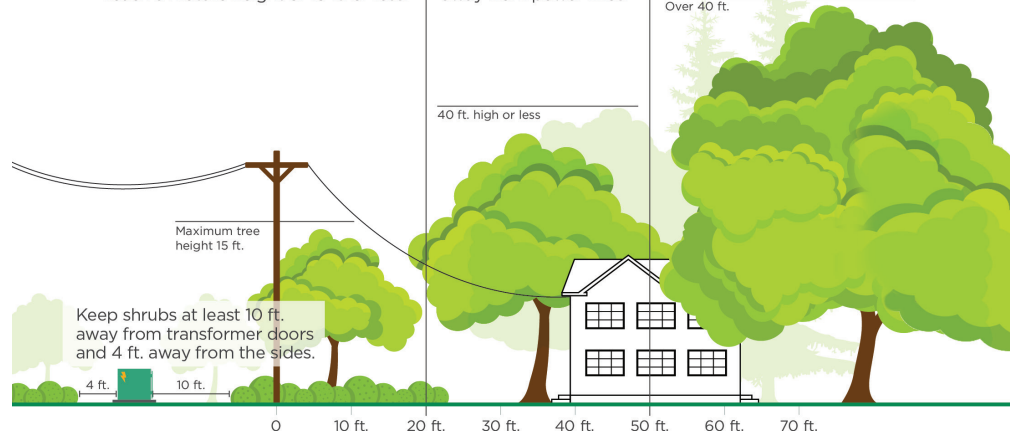
### MEDIUM TREE ZONE

Plant medium trees (under 40 ft. when mature) at least 25 ft. away from power lines.

### LARGE TREE ZONE

Plant large trees (over 40 ft. when mature) at least 50 ft. away from power lines.

Over 40 ft.



## SPRING INTO SAFETY

Spring is in the air and that means more than just a change of season for farmers. During the busy planting season, follow these eight safety tips:



### TRANSPORT SAFETY

Ensure equipment is compliant with agriculture road and travel safety rules



### SHARE SAFETY TIPS

Teach anyone working or doing business on your farm about electrical hazards



### ENCOURAGE YOUNG WORKERS

Be sure to match age and ability level with each chore



### BE CLEAR

Explain where the “back 80” or Smith field is; not everyone may know how to get there



### WRITE IT DOWN

Keep directions (with proper road and farm ground names) at home, in the shop and in cabs



### LOOK AROUND

Inspect your space and look for hazards before you start planting



### EVALUATE PROCEDURES

Consider new safety precautions you can implement, such as lockout/tagout



### MEET AND DISCUSS

Conduct morning safety meetings to brief everyone on the day and talk about potential hazards

**Safe Electricity.org**

Sources: Rural Mutual Insurance Co., farmprogress.com



## CURRENT AGRALITE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kathy Draeger, Clinton

*District 1*

Jeff Hufford, Morris

*District 2 - Secretary/Treasurer*

Bennett Zierke, Hancock

*District 3*

Steve Nelson, Starbuck

*District 4*

Orvin Gronseth, Murdock

*District 5 - President*

Andrea Thomson, Benson

*District 6*

Warren Rau, Appleton

*District 7 - Vice President*

## MINUTES OF MEETING BOARD OF DIRECTORS January 2022

Board Chairman Orvin Gronseth called a meeting of the Board of Directors of Agralite Electric Cooperative to order at 8:30 a.m., January 27, 2022. All members of the Board were present. Director Draeger joined by conference call. The agenda, minutes of the last meeting, the monthly disbursements, and payment of capital credits of deceased members were approved.

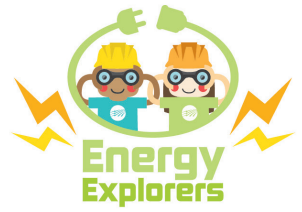
Jonathan Messner, Manager of Member Services, reported on activities of his department for the month. He discussed load management and Briggs generators. He reported on the 2021 rebate amounts and changes to the 2022 rebate program. Jonathan discussed the annual Co-Generation Reports, including Average Retail Rate, Avoided Cost Rate, and Summary of DG accounts and the Board accepted them. There was a discussion on Policy 300.11 Cogeneration/Distributed Energy Resources.

Jenny Stryhn, Manager of Finance, discussed Agralite's preliminary margins for the month of December. She discussed allocations received, the Great River Energy meeting she attended, and the 2021 audit. Jenny brought forth RUS Form 674, Form 675, and Board Resolution 674 and the Board approved them. Jenny brought forth Work Order #520 and Special Equipment December 2021 and the Board approved them. The financials were given by Jenny with a PowerPoint presentation.

## ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT WORD SEARCH

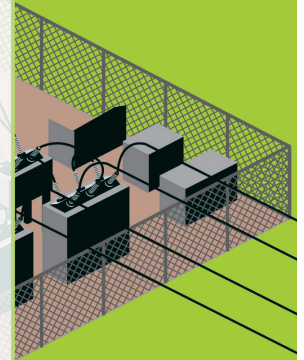
Did you know we use a variety of equipment to send electricity to your home?

Read the facts below to learn about the equipment we use, then find and circle the bolded words in the puzzle below.



- **Transformers** look like large metal cans on top of utility poles or big green boxes on the ground. They reduce the voltage of electricity for safe use in your home.
- **Power lines** hang overhead or are placed underground to carry electricity from where it's generated to homes and businesses.

- Lineworkers use **bucket trucks** to reach power lines and poles when making repairs and updates to the electrical system.
- **Electric meters** are placed on the outside of homes to measure the amount of electricity you use.
- **Substations** are facilities that contain equipment to help control the flow of electricity.



Tom Hoffman, Manager of Engineering & Operations, reported on activities of his department for the month. He discussed line crew projects and recent outages. Tom gave the safety report.

The 2022 Agralite Annual Meeting was discussed and June 30th was set as the tentative date.

Don Wilcox, Agralite's Attorney, joined the meeting. An executive session was held.

The Board unanimously voted in favor of the Transaction Changes to sell Coal Creek Station and approved the corresponding Resolution.

Director Nelson will be the voting delegate at the GRE Special Meeting on February 9. Director Zierke will be the alternate.

Kory Johnson, General Manager, reviewed his report to the board. He gave an update on the City of Benson feasibility plan study. He discussed the NRECA CEO Conference he attended.

The February Board meeting was set for the 24th.

Being no further business came before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.