

Safe Electricity Offers Summer Safety Tips

Summertime brings people out of doors. Whether heading outside for summer fun or yard work, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative (SIEC) and Safe Electricity recommend families review and follow simple safety rules to avoid outdoor electrical hazards that can cause serious injury or death. Of particular concern are overhead power lines and the added dangers of using electricity outdoors, around water.

“Keep your summer season enjoyable and safe,” said Michael Logeman, SIEC Director of Engineering. “Be aware of overhead power lines when working or playing outside your home. Make sure children know and follow basic safety rules.”

Safety tips to keep in mind this summer:

- Look Up and Live! Always be aware of the location of power lines, particularly when using long metal tools like ladders, pool skimmers and pruning poles, or when installing rooftop antennas and satellite dishes or doing roof repair work.
- Be especially careful when working near power lines attached to your house. Keep equipment and yourself at least 10 feet from lines. Never trim trees near power lines – leave that to the professionals.
- If your projects include digging, like building a deck or planting a tree, call J.U.L.I.E. before you begin. Never assume the location or depth of underground utility lines. Call at least two business days ahead of your dig date. This service is free, prevents the inconvenience of having utilities interrupted, and can help you avoid serious injury.
- For outdoor landscaping and decorative lighting, consider solar lighting units available for patios, steps and sidewalks.

Be careful using electrical appliances outdoors. Whether it is a lawn and gardening device, a bug zapper, an electric charcoal lighter, a radio or CD player, caution must be exercised. Be sure you use outlets that have ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI) to prevent serious shock injuries. Use portable GFCIs for outdoor outlets that don't have them.

If you need to use extension cords outside, check them carefully for exposed wires; make sure they are in good shape, and not frayed or cracked. Use only extension cords that are rated for outdoor use, and are large enough to handle the current needed for the device you are using. Check that the prongs on the extension cord plugs are clean, not broken or bent. Make sure the ground prong is intact in a three-prong plug, and avoid use of adapters for safety reasons.

Never use electric yard tools if it's raining or the ground is wet. Keep electrical appliances and tools at least ten feet away from pools, ponds and wet surfaces.

“Electricity and water are a dangerous mix,” warns Logeman. “Do not use electrical appliances in wet areas - even wet grass can create a hazard.”

Children often do not understand the dangers of electricity. For safe outdoor play, it is recommended that children be taught to follow these rules:

- Never climb trees near power lines. Even if the power lines aren't touching the tree, they could touch when more weight is added to the branch.
- Fly kites and model airplanes safely away from trees and overhead power lines. If a kite gets tangled in a tree that's near power lines, don't climb up to get it. Contact SIEC for assistance.
- Never climb a utility pole or tower. Don't play on or around pad-mounted electrical equipment.
- Never go into an electric substation. Electric substations contain high-voltage equipment, which can kill you. Don't retrieve a toy or rescue a pet that goes inside. Call SIEC instead.
- Water and electricity never mix! Keep electronics away from pools and hot tubs, and watch for overhead power lines when cleaning pools, sailing or fishing.

When designing an outdoor play area for your children, do not install playground equipment or swimming pools underneath or near power lines.

"Remember, summer storms and floods can leave electric hazards behind," Logeman added. "It's a good idea to keep utility emergency numbers close at hand."

Never step into a flooded area if water is in contact with electrical outlets, appliances or cords. Before re-entering a storm-damaged building, make certain the power is shut off. Don't touch main circuit breakers or fuses when you're wet or standing in water.

If you see a downed power line, keep everyone away from it, and call SIEC immediately. Assume all downed power lines are energized.

For more information on electrical safety, visit www.SafeElectricity.org and/or www.siec.coop.