Hurricane Hanna Hammered the Lower Texas Coast

When Hurricane Hanna slammed into the lower Texas Coast as a strong Category 1 hurricane, it left heavy flooding and power outages in its wake. Magic Valley Electric Cooperative was the hardest-hit electric cooperative, with members losing power. In addition, Nueces, Medina and San Patricio Electric Cooperatives each experienced outages affecting its members as well.

Five substations were impacted by the storm and over 58 transmission poles, including one concrete pole, needed replacement. Restoration plans were in place, materials were in stock, and crews were mobilized in a joint effort from STEC’s facilities and divisions.

The Atlantic hurricane season runs June 1 - November 30.
Do the difficult things while they are easy and do the great things while they are small. A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step. Lao Tzu

We often recall the latter part of this quote when we are preparing to face a long or arduous task, and need encouragement to just take that first step. To me, the greater message embodied in the quote is to proactively plan, prepare, and execute.

2020 has been a difficult year thus far. I don’t think anyone would dispute the fact that this year has given us more challenges than we would normally expect. I want to discuss two of those challenges in this message.

COVID-19 turned our work and personal lives upside down, beginning in March and continuing to the present time. A year ago, could you have imagined anything that would have come between you and your job, or your normal daily tasks, or your family the way that this virus has? COVID-19 has forced us to look at life from a completely different perspective, and it has shaken our view of the future. Vacation plans have been cancelled. Trade conferences and meetings have either been cancelled or held remotely via video conferencing. Masks and hand sanitizer have become integral parts of our daily lives. We don’t know what school for our children will look like or how safe it will be. We can’t go to movie theaters, sporting events, concerts, dances, weddings, funerals, or any other public event that involves crowds. We have become accustomed to “social distancing” when we do go out and we look for the marks where we are supposed to stand when we are in line. We get uncomfortable when a stranger comes within our personal space. And all of this within a few short months.

Hurricane Hanna made landfall at Port Mansfield, on July 25th at 5:00 pm, as a strong Category 1 hurricane with sustained winds of 90 mph. Hanna significantly damaged transmission structures in Willacy County, impacting the northeast portion of Magic Valley Electric Cooperative’s service territory. Peak outage numbers reported by Magic Valley were in excess of 84,000 members without power.

Prior to Hanna making landfall, STEC line crews mobilized to Edinburg and Calallen, staging on both sides of the projected path of the storm, and prepared to respond to damage to the transmission system as soon as it was safely possible. As the sun came up on July 26th, five substations were in the dark, and it quickly became obvious that a significant number of transmission poles were on the ground, including a concrete pole. Power Delivery personnel were able to get three of the five substations energized that first day, and preparations for addressing the remaining damage proceeded rapidly as additional damage assessment information became known.

So, what does the quote from Lao Tzu have to do with COVID-19 and Hurricane Hanna? Quite simply, both the virus and the storm presented significant challenges. But by performing “small” and “easy” tasks in advance, the “great” and “difficult” challenges were made more manageable and the results of our collective efforts were more predictable.
Preparations for the impact of COVID-19 involved the expansion of the Pandemic Response Plan, ensuring that IT capabilities were in place to support remote work, categorizing employees by their capability to work remotely, development of alternate shift schedules, restricted entry to critical locations, securing adequate PPE and hygiene supplies, expansion of video conferencing capabilities, developing and implementing HR policies and procedures to deal with issues related to the pandemic, and establishing schedules for monitoring and reporting of the pandemic as conditions worsened. All of those preparations helped reduce the impact of moving a significant portion of the workforce offsite to work remotely, and helped protect the health of those employees who continued to report to work on site.

STEC’s Hurricane Response Plan contains a number of actions that must be taken before the start of the Hurricane Season, to ensure that adequate supplies and other resources are in place to respond to a storm before one actually develops. By taking those responsibilities seriously, before a crisis develops, we are in a much better position to focus on directing those resources to respond to a storm.

Cicero is quoted as saying, “Advice in old age is foolish; for what can be more absurd than to increase our provisions for the road the nearer we approach to our journey’s end.” I respectfully disagree. I am definitely closer to the end of my life journey than I am to the beginning, and I still benefit regularly from advice that I receive, from fresh challenges that develop, and from things that I learn on a daily basis.

I continue to be impressed by the capabilities of STEC’s employees and their commitment to do their jobs to the best of their abilities in the service of our members. Thank you for your professionalism and for your commitment to STEC’s Core Values of Safety, Teamwork, Integrity, and Communication. Working together, I am convinced that we are prepared and capable of facing any challenge that this, or any other year, presents.

The Annual Meeting took place on May 28th via video conference and was limited to STEC Board of Directors, attorneys, and Member Directors.

Ricky D. Graff was elected as a Director for Wharton County Electric Cooperative, replacing Leroy Kaspar.

Cory Allen reported on the filings submitted to the PUCT on May 1st to comply with the implementation of HB 4150 through the PUCT’s Line Inspection and Safety Rulemaking.

The Board approved the 2019 Financial Audit prepared by Bumgardner, Morrison, and Company.

The 2019 Capital Credit Allocations were approved by the Board, and Capital Credit Certificates will be provided to each Member Manager.

STEC’s credit rating with Standard & Poors was affirmed at ‘A+’ with a Stable Outlook, and Fitch Ratings reaffirmed STEC’s credit rating at ‘A+’ with a Stable Outlook.

The Board approved four organizations for the CoBank Sharing Success Program.

Wendy Ohrt and Mike Kezar presented the Pandemic Plan and Implementation Status to the Board.

Don Gray’s insurance renewal recommendations were approved by the Board. Mr. Gray will continue to represent STEC on insurance matters.

The Board approved the Block and Index Service (BIS) Tariff Schedule.

Wendy Ohrt reported on the status of the proposed STEC-NEC Competitive Retail Services Agreement. The draft agreement will be discussed at the September Board Meeting.

Mike Kezar provided an adjusted timeline and status updates on the Strategic Priority - Key Initiatives. The revised schedule for the Generation Portfolio strategic Planning Workshops states the first workshop will take place in July.

The Board approved an alternate method of 4CP billing to the Members for June - September 2020.


The Board approved executing an agreement with Nexus Controls for upgrades to the Sam Rayburn Distributed Control System (DCS).

Revisions to Board Policy No. 105 - Travel Expenses & Fees - Directors were approved by the Board.

Jane Krause presented the 2021 Operating and Capital Budget Schedule.
HUMAN RESOURCES

Adjusting to the ‘New Normal’

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive changes to our daily lives, changes that have happened rapidly and abruptly. Life adjustments often come with a wide range of experiences and emotions. Sometimes that transition can feel smooth and other times that journey to the new normal is choppy or downright bumpy!

Some people may find themselves in survival mode, gathering information and resources necessary to function at home, work, as a person, and in our relationships with others. Others may be attempting to settle into their new routines. For some, this means trying to combat social isolation. For many, it means learning how to live (or re-live) with friends or family members, which is not always easy. A lot of people struggle to find a distraction-free space at home that is conducive to do productive and effective work. It takes twice as much time, effort, and energy to do even simple tasks, which can be quite draining. Others may be struggling with the fatigue, frustration, sadness, anger, grief, and anxiety of adjusting. Some people have gone through the adjustment process and are finding comfort in the new norm. In all of this, here are a few important things to remember.

1. This situation is both uncertain and temporary! It’s okay not to feel okay. It’s also okay (and encouraged) to seek help and support!
   - Consider this a time to reflect on who you want to be during this time.
   - Focus on what is within your control.
   - It’s good to be informed, and it’s a really good idea to take breaks from conversations, news, and information related to COVID-19.

2. Adjustment is a process that looks differently for most people. This process is not linear or well-defined. Patience and flexibility are really important.
   - Please be respectful of where you are in the process (some self-compassion can go a long way) and also of where others are.
   - It’s okay to be curious about where your friends, family, and others are in their process and to seek to understand their wants and needs at this time. Don’t forget to tell them what you want and need too.

3. Setting a routine can be really helpful. In addition to doing your work make sure to schedule time for your physical and emotional health, fun, creatively, social connection, and stress relief.

4. It’s okay to set boundaries, even with family members, friends, and co-workers.

CORPORATE & MEMBER SERVICES

Due to COVID-19 the National Safety Stand-Down was delayed from May until September 14 - 18, 2020. OSHA is encouraging employers to promote fall safety by focusing on “Fall Hazards” and reinforcing the importance of “Fall Prevention”. Employees should use this time to have a conversation about other job hazards they face, protective methods, and the company’s safety policies and goals. The goal of the National Safety Stand-Down is to help ensure every worker returns home safely by:

- Raising awareness of fall hazards,
- Sharing how to prevent fatalities and injuries related to falls, and
- Eliminating falls—because they are preventable.

The world of emission testing includes monitoring and reporting for emissions of Reciprocating Internal Combustion Engines (RICE). Red Gate and Pearsall Power Plants have RICE engines and must comply to the emission standards outlined in NESHAP’s 40 CFR Part 63 Subpart ZZZZ. In June, both facilities conducted annual testing for formaldehyde and carbon monoxide reduction efficiency. All engines passed the emission testing parameters and results of the testing were submitted to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

Air Hygiene conducts the testing by taking samples from both inlet and outlet ports downstream from the last point of interference. All exhaust samples for gaseous emissions were continuously drawn from three points using a multi-point rake probe. The testing used nondispersive infrared analyzer (EPA method 10) for measuring carbon monoxide and fourier transform infrared (EPA Method 320) to measure volatile organic compounds.

With the recent move for many to working remotely, there are a lot of questions around virtual conferencing platforms. The first thing to remember is this: If you are going to download a virtual conferencing application, be certain the download is from a reputable source. Most often the company will host the download themselves or have a link to the download on their website. It is advisable not to trust a download from third-party if you were not directed there by the official website.

**Virtual conferencing applications are vulnerable to multiple attacks**

- Malicious actors are creating fake installation files for multiple meeting platforms including Zoom Meetings, MS Teams, and Google Classroom.
- Some conferencing platforms have been “conference bombed.” This is when an uninvited guest gains access with the intention to disrupt or eavesdrop on the meeting.
- Virtual conference meeting users have been targeted to capture potentially sensitive data disclosed during meetings. As well, recorded meetings may not be stored by their meeting host in a secure manner. Attackers have accessed Zoom Meetings files stored on a computer and unsecured public cloud environments.

**Guidelines for Virtual Conferencing**

- If possible, NEVER share sensitive or regulated data during virtual conference meetings
- Do not share your meeting link in public forums or on social media. In the event you must advertise your meeting publicly, remove the password embedded in the link and ask attendees to contact the organizer for the password.
- Use a meeting ID rather than the personal ID associated with a virtual conferencing account. This way the meeting ID should change for each meeting.
- Disable sharing for all attendees except for the meeting host.

**Security Concerns Regarding Virtual Conferencing**

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Rio Grande City Substation

Valley Technicians continued comprehensive station maintenance at Rio Grande City Substation. Low voltage bushings and recloser controls were replaced, reclosers were untanked and maintained, and steel modifications were made on the distribution arrester mounting. The transformer was energized on June 15th.

Central Avenue Substation

25kV Breaker Addition

Lambda completed construction on Bus 2 with the replacement of the steel truss, reinstallation of the 25kV switches, panel modifications and wire terminations. Commissioning began in mid-June.

East Rio Hondo Substation

Commissioning continued on the remaining four 138kV breakers within the breaker-and-a-half bus and on distribution bus 2. The 138kV breakers were energized in July and bus 2 will be energized in mid-August.

Key Capture Energy completed the installation of a 9.9MW battery storage facility at the Port Lavaca Substation in Victoria Electric Cooperative’s service territory. The facility is the first of its kind in STEC’s system. It participates in the ERCOT market as wholesale storage load and provides other ancillary services. STEC currently has 2 additional sites that have completed pre-interconnection studies and have agreed to move forward with construction at Loop 463 and Lopeno Substations. An additional site is under study at D’Hanis Substation. The 3 additional sites are all projects of Broad Reach Power.

Don Clawson, Communications Technician, performs annual microwave radio and multiplex testing at the Four Corners Substation. Technicians complete monthly testing of primary and emergency communications systems including satellite phone, mobile radio systems, public address systems, and review the performance of various leased communications circuits.

Nursery Technicians completed the rehab at Mathis Substation and the load was restored to normal. The 69kV Box Structure along with the distribution low side bus was restrung with 500MCM copper. All high side switches were upgraded to 2000 Amps rating and low side distribution switches were also upgraded to 600 Amps rating. In addition, bird guard and wildlife cover were installed for the transformer and regulator. Relay Technicians and Engineering worked together to upgrade the existing electromechanical relays to microprocessor-based relays for the capacitor bank.

The SCADA and Communications departments have begun the installation of increased security measures at Salt Dome and Carancahua Substations. Fiber is being installed between an array of cameras and sensors to assist System Operations and Security in detecting unusual activity and/or for general monitoring of the substations.

The review of the Hurricane Preparedness Plan as part of the required annual Emergency Plan review was held via Lifesize in May which included the Member Cooperatives. Discussion included an overview of the different types of communications equipment that are available during emergency conditions and a rundown of the expectations for each of the alert levels.

The annual Under-frequency Load-shedding Survey (UFLS) occurred in May and the compiled data for STEC and on behalf of GSEC was submitted to ERCOT per the ERCOT Nodal Operating Guides Section 2.6.1

The Transmission line work and Substation construction projects have again slowed with the PUC-directed deadline for transmission lines to be returned to service. ERCOT allows some transmission outages, but often require the outages to be returned to service by 1:00 pm daily.

Amos Brown, SCADA Technician, is shown installing networking equipment at the Merrett Substation. This ongoing project is improving the communications reliability to the Valley Substations by transitioning System Operations RTU links to a fiber network.

SCADA and Substation Technicians completed the programming and wiring of distribution relay controls to provide the ability to remotely control the Hot Line Tag function. This function provides added safety for crews working on distribution lines by increasing the speed of disconnecting power in the event of a fault.

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Pearsall Power Plant employees continued with 2 Engines undergoing the 16K maintenance. 16K maintenance is considered the 1st major maintenance performed on the engines.

This maintenance involves:
• overhaul of all cylinder heads and gas prechambers,
• changing gas admission valves, piston rings, and big end bearings, and
• multiple inspections of gears and bearings.

Pearsall Power Plant employees along with additional OEM support completed Engine 5, Engine 12 and Engine 4. 16K maintenance planning for additional engines has begun.

Power Plant Operators have been involved with maintaining the vegetation growth at the Solar site. Proper maintenance helps to prevent shading to ensure an optimum output of power generated.

Other on-goings in the QSE surround completing the transition to the new ERCOT scheduling and shadow settlements software, PowerOptix. The operations portion has been complete, and the settlements portion has almost been completely transitioned. The final piece has been the peripheral aspects of the software including reporting for estimates, Board updates, and third-party checkout.

Besides chasing prices and loads, STEC QSE helps with ERCOT 4CP management. ERCOT 4CP is the four peak intervals (one each for the month of June, July, August, and September) where each load-serving entity’s contribution to the ERCOT peak establishes their respective share of the transmission cost of service for the following year. STEC QSE helps notify Member Coops of the potential for 4CP demand. Each Member can help to reduce their peak demand thus lowering STEC’s peak demand to help lower ERCOT transmission charges to their respective cooperatives. For summer 2020, STEC has made five requests for load management, two for June and three for July. This happens to be less than normal in terms of load management requests for STEC. For June, the ERCOT 4CP peak was recorded June 8th at 17:45, the latest peak interval ever recorded. For July, the peak interval is currently July 13th at 16:45 and appears to be the final request for the month.

STEC QSE continues to motor on in another summer season. The summer brings about challenges in managing hot weather, high prices, and generation health. The hot weather has been relatively brief thus far, and with that, ERCOT power prices have been mild. Besides lower demand, mild prices for ERCOT have been driven by low natural gas prices and high renewables generation. Natural gas is considered the fuel of the marginal units, those units that supply power above the ‘base’ amount in ERCOT. Natural gas prices remain ~$2.00 and the daily spot gas prices for June and July have averaged ~$1.56 and ~$1.67 respectively, approximately 25% less than summer 2019. This puts the normally-considered-peak power at prices on par or lower than the normal baseload power fueled by coal, and makes coal the marginal unit in many hours during the on-peak timeframe. Renewable generation is able to displace baseload power at prices from ~$32/MWh to ~$0/MWh due to the lack of fuel cost and federal tax subsidies. For example, on the peak day of the summer on July 13th at 74.3GW (only ~1GW less than the ERCOT all-time peak record), renewable generation ended up at approximately 13.5GW at the peak hour of demand, almost 20% of demand. This was rather anomalous for wind generation to be at a capacity factor this high during peak heat, but the chart below highlights renewable generation’s impact on prices. Note that the prices (in blue columns) reduce from ~$46 to ~$26 in the peak hours day over day as the forecast for wind plus solar (orange line) increased. Summer is not complete, but the sentiment is relatively bearish for the rest of summer, but that remains to be seen.
STEC employees used 76.50 hours of paid release time giving back to our communities. Employees are encouraged to volunteer throughout the year with qualifying organizations. Each employee has 24 hours of paid release time allocated for use in 2020. If you know of an organization in need of volunteers, please provide the information to your ESC representative.

The ESC continues to meet and review applications for the Charitable Giving and Corporate Support program via video conference. As of June 3rd, the committee has recommended approval of $49,700 in corporate support to qualifying organizations in the areas that we serve. Many organizations specifically need funds to help with their response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The ESC recommended four organizations to the Board of Directors for the CoBank Sharing Success program. Together, STEC and CoBank donated $5,000 to each of the following organizations: Community Action Committee of Victoria, The Laredo Regional Food Bank, Jamie's Ranch for Special Kids (McCoy), and Loaves & Fishes of the Rio Grande Valley (Harlingen).

“Sharing Success” is a charitable matching contribution program provided to CoBank’s participating customers. This year, customers were able to nominate up to four qualifying 501(c)(3) organizations for a minimum of $250 and maximum of $2,500 each. The maximum matching contribution per CoBank customer is $10,000. The program is annually reviewed by the CoBank Board of Directors with regard to both continuing the program and the amount of support to be provided.

Power Delivery

- 40 Years: Kenneth Montag...Maintenance Supervisor
- 35 Years: Jeff Laughton...Production & Results Manager
- 30 Years: Larry Leaque...Senior Operator
- 25 Years: Michael Urban...Maintenance Technician
- 20 Years: James Dubose...Operations Supervisor
- 10 Years: John Coyle...Maintenance Technician
- 10 Years: James Hedrick...Marketing/QUE Specialist
- 10 Years: Jay Ohr...Marketing/QUE Specialist
- 5 Years: Juan Abrego...Operator
- 5 Years: Travis Dollins...Operator
- 5 Years: Anthony Giguere...Production Engineer
- 5 Years: Jimmy Lewis...Maintenance Technician
- 5 Years: Ramon Perez, Jr...Operator
- 5 Years: Lance Yaws...Maintenance Technician

Community Action Committee of Victoria is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization that delivers hot meals 250 days a year (Monday through Friday) to residents in DeWitt, Goliad, and Victoria Counties. The delivery of a hot, nutritious meal helps the recipient to remain independent and able to live in their own home. The visit is also a wellness check. The Community Action Committee of Victoria also distributes coats, blankets, and other necessities.

Loaves and Fishes of the Rio Grande Valley started as a food kitchen and is now a full-service shelter with locations in Harlingen and Raymondville. Their goal is to provide each individual and family with the assistance, the tools, and the preparation to grow and develop; eventually becoming a positive contributor to society. They offer many services including the Bread of Life Dining Hall, Family Emergency Assistance, Great Physician Healthy Living, The New Hope Job Shop, Harvest Table Food Pantry, and Open Arms Homeless Shelter.

Loaves & Fishes of the Rio Grande Valley

Power Supply

- 40 Years: Kenneth Montag...Maintenance Supervisor
- 35 Years: Jeff Laughton...Production & Results Manager
- 30 Years: Larry Leaque...Senior Operator
- 25 Years: Michael Urban...Maintenance Technician
- 20 Years: James Dubose...Operations Supervisor
- 10 Years: John Coyle...Maintenance Technician
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- 5 Years: Anthony Giguere...Production Engineer
- 5 Years: Jimmy Lewis...Maintenance Technician
- 5 Years: Ramon Perez, Jr...Operator
- 5 Years: Lance Yaws...Maintenance Technician
This year STEC awarded a scholarship to 1 high school graduate. Thank you to all the employees that have contributed to the STEC Scholarship fund and helped make this possible! 100% of the scholarship funds awarded are contributed by STEC employees, which truly reflects the best of the cooperative principles.

Congratulations to the recipient of the 2020 STEC Scholarship:

Trenton Carter - $1,500

STEC has suspended all non-essential business travel until further notice, to include: Employee Standing Committee Meetings, Staff Meetings, Safety Committee Meetings, Monthly HR and Safety Presentations, Strategic Planning Workshops, and other meetings that require travel between STEC office and plant locations.

- **Committee Meeting (via video conference)**: August 26
- **Board Meeting (via video conference)**: August 27
- **Employee Standing Committee (via video conference)**: September 3
- **Safety Committee (via video conference)**: September 3
- **Human Resources Meeting (via video conference)**: September 16 & 17
- **Committee Meeting (via video conference)**: September 23
- **Board Meeting (via video conference)**: September 24

**Core Values**
- Safety
- Integrity
- Teamwork
- Communication

**Tips for Working Remotely**

Working from home has been a challenge for some. Below are a few key items to consider.

**Communication is Key**

- Skype, Slack, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangout or email. The more you can communicate your status on projects, the better.
- Consider scheduling weekly or bi-weekly check-ins with folks that you regularly collaborate with, but may not have standing meetings scheduled with. Knowing you have that time reserved can be a gamechanger.

**Routine, Organization and Environment Matter**

- Keep your morning routine. Get up, shower, do whatever you would normally do to get ready for your day and use your old commuting time to organize yourself and set your schedule.
- Get up, go for a short walk, and talk to someone. You don’t sit for eight hours a day in the office in silence.

**Create Boundaries**

- When possible, take an actual lunch break, away from your computer.
- Resist the urge to tackle household chores. Or, if you need to finish up a load of laundry, etc., do it on your ‘lunch break.’
- Set work hours and, if possible, a separate physical workspace away from your family room/ kitchen/ main living area. Burn-out is real. It’s hard to turn-off when your computer and office are sitting in sight at all times. If you don’t have a separate office, pack up your computer when the day is done.

**Don’t Forget Meeting Etiquette**

- Participating in meetings remotely is more difficult than one would think. Be sure to mute your phone when you aren’t addressing the group, shuffling papers by phone speakers, side conversations and colleagues talking on top of each other creates a lot of noise and distraction.
- Meeting organizers, please remember the agenda. Organizing participation is essential to a productive meeting, even a loose agenda is better than nothing (or the dreaded round-robin!).