

EMPIRE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION, INC.



PRESS RELEASE

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“Our primary mission is to safely, responsibly, and reliably meet the electrical energy needs of our member-owners.”

**Energy Experts
Working for You!**

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EEA Takes Action to Reduce Wildland Fire Risk

More Conservative Protective Device Settings Used in Critical Areas

Fire Season is Well Under Way!

The drier than normal spring and summer weather have presented many challenges to our community. One of those is the danger of wildland fires. EEA has taken measures to reduce the chance that our equipment may start a fire when an electrical fault occurs. One of the devices EEA uses to protect against faults while minimizing outages is called a recloser. A recloser is like a circuit breaker in that it can detect a rapid increase in current flow and disconnect the power to the downstream circuit to reduce arcing and damaging equipment. It differs from a circuit breaker or a fuse in that when a circuit breaker trips or a fuse blows, the power remains off until a lineman manually resets the circuit breaker or replaces the fuse. A recloser will open for a very short period to allow a temporary fault to clear, and then reclose to reconnect power to the circuit.

Many times the temporary fault, like a tree branch being blown into a line or two lines being blown together by a strong wind, will have naturally cleared itself and the recloser will no longer detect a fault and remain closed allowing power to flow. In the event the fault is still there, the recloser will trip again and then reclose to restore power to the circuit. If the fault is still present, the recloser will trip a third time and remain open until a lineman can inspect the downstream circuit to find the fault and clear it. Once the lineman has confirmed there are no faults, he will manually reset the recloser to re-energize the circuit.

If you have ever experienced a very short or momentary outage at your home where the lights flicker and you must reset your clocks, it was most likely a recloser operating. Resetting clocks and other electronic equipment may be annoying, but the recloser is the better option. If EEA did not have a recloser where the fault occurred, we would most likely have a fuse in place as the protective device. In that case, the fault would have blown the fuse and your power would remain out until a crew could be dispatched to inspect the circuit and manually replace the fuse. Reclosers placed in strategic locations provide EEA the safety we need to responsibly operate our system while providing you with very high reliability.

There is a downside to any protective device when environmental conditions increase the likelihood of a fire being started. Some faults that occur on our system are accompanied by arcing when lots of heat, light, and sparks could be created. The arcing will stop when a recloser opens and de-energizes the circuit, but if the fault is still there when it recloses, the arcing will resume which increases the chance of starting a fire. Normal settings for a recloser are to remain open on the third or fourth fault detected. During high fire danger, EEA sets the controls to what is referred to as “one shot” where the recloser functions like a circuit breaker and will remain open upon detection of the first fault. This reduces the possibility of arcing and lowers the potential for starting a fire. This setting will also result in more sustained power outages because the recloser will remain open for even temporary faults requiring a lineman to respond to the area to determine the cause. This is a precaution we choose to take in order to reduce the chance of fires. If you do experience a power outage, please call EEA at (970) 565-4444 or (800) 709-3726. EEA appreciates your patience as we all work to safeguard our community and wait for the fire danger to moderate.

Josh Dellinger, General Manager, Empire Electric Association, Inc.