

A WEEK ON CALL: THE PEOPLE BEHIND POWER RESTORATION



Sharon Barnhart, Mike Wagner, Rob Hunger, Autumn Kolbinsky, Ron Barnhart, Jim Downey, Adam Fry
Not photographed: Dagen Johnson, Peyton Olds, Brandon Keith, Jason Hooten, Ben Harlemert, and Ian Kindler

When the lights go out, most people notice only the moment their home suddenly goes dark. What they may not see is the team of people who immediately begin working to restore power—linemen responding in the field and employees behind the scenes coordinating the response.

At the end of February, I experienced that process firsthand during my first week serving on call for Southeastern Indiana REMC.

From February 27 through March 6, our service territory experienced multiple outages caused by traffic accidents, storms, lightning, and fallen trees. Being on call meant that once normal office hours ended, I became the point of contact for outages and emergency calls until the office reopened the next morning. Going into the week, I was nervous, but I quickly learned I was supported by a team ready to help whenever I needed it.

My primary on-call crew that week was linemen Mike Wagner and Dagen Johnson. Friday evening started relatively quietly with a few smaller outages that the crew was able to restore quickly. But by Saturday morning, things changed.

A car accident in the Dupont area knocked down a pole and left more than 300 members without power. Once the crew arrived and assessed the damage, it was clear additional help would be needed. Jason Hooten and Rob Hunger were called in to assist, and together the crews worked as quickly—but most importantly as safely—as possible to repair the damage and restore power.

Power was restored later that afternoon, and the crews were able to head home to rest. I spent the afternoon calming down from the stress—and

excitement—of my first experience coordinating additional crew support.

But the night was far from over.

Later that evening, multiple SmartHub alerts began appearing for outages in the Batesville area. Another accident had taken down a pole—this time affecting more than 700 members, including both electric and fiber services.

The crew responded immediately, but the damage was extensive. What started with the primary crew quickly turned into a full team response. Seven SEI REMC linemen—Mike Wagner, Dagen Johnson, Peyton Olds, Jason Hooten, Ben Harlemert, Brandon Keith, and Adam Fry—worked together on the scene to rebuild the line and replace the damaged pole. Emergency locate requests were placed through 811 so a new pole could be installed, and crews worked steadily through the night in difficult conditions. Throughout the response, Superintendent of Maintenance Jim Downey helped coordinate the effort, ensuring the crews had the support and resources they needed to safely restore power. The team labored through the darkness until power was restored the next morning.

As I sat awake throughout the night coordinating calls, my biggest concern wasn't the outage itself—it was the safety of the crew members working outside in difficult and unpredictable conditions.

STORM SEASON ACROSS THE TERRITORY

As the week continued, spring storm systems began moving through Southeastern Indiana, bringing lightning, wind, and heavy rain that caused outages across several parts of our service territory.

Throughout the week, crews responded to outages stretching from the Pleasant and Logan substations to Sunman, Batesville, Hopewell, Bluecreek, Dupont, and even down to the Vevay area. Linemen Mike Wagner, Dagen Johnson, and Peyton Olds found themselves traveling from one community to the next as storms rolled through the region.

What many members may not realize is that when an outage occurs, linemen first report to the office to get their outage truck and equipment before heading out to the location of the problem. From there, they may spend the night traveling across the service territory as new outages are reported.

One moment they might be restoring power near Batesville, and the next they could be responding to an outage miles away in another part of the territory. It was a clear reminder of just how large SEI REMC's service area is—and how dedicated our crews are to restoring power wherever members need it.

A TEAM EFFORT BEHIND THE SCENES

While linemen are the ones working in the field to restore power, they are supported by a team working behind the scenes throughout the night.

During my week on call, SmartHub reports were often the fastest way I learned about outages. As soon as members reported their outage through the app, I was immediately alerted and could review any comments they shared before notifying the crews so they could respond quickly.

I also relied on several office team members for guidance and support throughout the week.

My management backup, Ian Kindler, was someone I could call whenever I needed direction—even in the middle of the night. Despite having a family at home, he was always willing to answer the phone and help work through situations as they unfolded.

Ron Barnhart, our GIS Coordinator, was another important resource. Ron trained me for my first on-call experience and was incredibly helpful whenever I needed guidance, no matter the hour.

And when calls came in that required assistance beyond what a crew could fix in the field, Sharon Barnhart, our Billing Specialist, stepped in to help. She assisted with member calls related to electric and fiber service issues that required account support or troubleshooting rather than a service call.

It's also important to recognize that the on-call rotation involves many employees across the cooperative. Team members from Member Services, Mapping, Billing, Human Resources, and other departments all take turns serving on call throughout the year. Each person brings their own experience and knowledge to the role, and the guidance I received from many of them throughout the week was incredibly helpful.

While linemen respond in the field, office employees are working behind the scenes to communicate with crews, monitor outage reports, and assist members when issues arise. It is truly a collaborative effort, and during my week on call it became clear that we have a dedicated team of both office staff and field crews working together to keep our members a priority.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Serving on call gave me a completely new perspective on the work our crews do.

While I was sitting at home in the middle of the night making phone calls and coordinating responses, our linemen were getting out of bed, putting on their gear, and heading out into storms, darkness, rain, wind, lightning, and fog.

They leave family dinners.

They wake up from deep sleep.

They spend long nights restoring power—and often return the next day to continue their regular work.

Power outages can be frustrating. I don't enjoy losing power at my house either. But seeing firsthand what it takes to restore power brings a whole new appreciation for the people doing the work.

Our linemen truly are the unsung heroes of our communities. When storms roll in, when accidents damage poles, and when power lines go down, they are the ones who answer the call—no matter the time of day or the conditions outside.

As spring storm season begins, remember that when the lights go out, SEI REMC crews are already on their way—working through the night and through whatever conditions they face to restore power safely and get the lights back on.

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