



Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Update



A Message From The General Manager/CEO

By Dan Laws

Keeping The Lights On While You Celebrate

The National Weather Service is predicting a cold and wet winter season. The potential for ice storms again this year is high. Here at Rio Grande, we are preparing for what may come. We hope there is no ice, but we are preparing as though there will be. We are strategically staging additional materials around our service territory, so they will be close to potential problems and be accessible.

The original system here at Rio Grande, particularly in West Texas, was built to a light construction grade. What this means is that smaller poles with longer span lengths were used in construction. I can't say for sure why this was done, but I suspect it was the result of two things. The first thing was a misunderstanding of how severe weather can be in West Texas. The other reason is the cost of construction.

In the early Fifties, when much of Rio Grande's West Texas service territory was being built, there were a lot of miles to cover. The cost to do the work was huge, so if everyone that needed electric energy was going to get service, everything that could be done to reduce costs had to be implemented. Building to a heavier construction grade is significantly more expensive than a light construction grade. While I don't know for sure that was a reason, it makes sense it would be a factor.

Today when facilities are replaced, they are built to the heaviest construction grade. Larger poles are employed, and, where practical or necessary, span lengths are shortened. Modern materials are used to improve survivability in the harsh sun and bitter cold that can be experienced in west Texas. New and improved over current protection devices are employed, and SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) is expanded to reach farther into Rio Grande's system. This is done so that one day, much of the control functions can be handled remotely, saving time and money.

A large percentage of the original system is still in place in West Texas. Our climate allows us to squeeze more life out of the poles than would be possible in damper climates. That's a good thing! If it were not the case, the cost of electric energy for each of you would be much higher. Our system has held up well during recent ice storms, and the damage has been considerably less than what I would have anticipated. If your power was out for an extended period of time, you would of course disagree. I am looking at the larger picture and contrasting our experience with what neighboring utilities experienced.

The Christmas season is upon us. The lights and smells of the season fill our hearts with warmth. We celebrate the birth of our Savior with hopeful expectation, knowing one day he will return. In the meantime, we have the opportunity to walk with him daily and share the love he has given us with those we have contact with every day. If you have never experienced that love, I encourage you to look into it. You will be glad you did. From all of us here at Rio Grande, have a wonderful holiday season. We will do our best to keep the lights on while you celebrate with friends and family.