

Ameren Illinois issues tips for National Farm Safety and Health Week

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COLLINSVILLE – Ameren Illinois is offering possibly life-saving tips to Illinois farmers in light of National Farm Safety and Health Week 2018, which kicked off Sunday, Sept. 16.

The power company is using the week's message to remind Illinois farmers to take safety precautions around electric and natural gas lines during this season's harvest. A representative from Ameren Illinois said farmers come into contact with lines dangling above and buried deep below the ground, and being aware of their surroundings as well

as knowing what to do if an accident does occur are crucial. It is especially critical to get this message out to farmers during this time of year, as harvesting is about to take place across the area.

“Illinois farmers are working from dawn until dusk this fall,” said Richard J. Mark, President and Chairman of Ameren Illinois, in a release. “With increasingly larger machinery in use, it is important that farmers look up, down and continually scan their surroundings for potential hazards. Tactics such as using a spotter and lowering equipment when crossing a road can truly make a difference when it comes to safety on the farm.”

According to the release, making contact or even getting too close to power lines can energize farm equipment as well as other items in the nearby area. Because of this, Ameren Illinois strongly advises farmers and those working on farms with farm implements and equipment, stay at least 10 feet away from active wires. It stated the auto-guidance GPS features in most modern farm machinery cannot usually detect overhead threats and hazards like power lines.

If electrical contact does occur, the release states farmers should remain calm and within the cabin of their vehicle and contact Ameren Illinois at 800-755-5000. Exiting a cab while a vehicle is energized may result in electrocution – both in farm implements as well as in cars, trucks and other passenger vehicles. In fact, drivers are asked to do the same if a power line ever falls near or lands on their vehicle.

Ameren Illinois also advises Illinois farmers call 811 before digging anywhere to ensure they do not strike potentially hazardous natural gas lines, which can not only be dangerous, but can also cause a lot of inconvenience and damage if struck.

Here is a list of more safety tips Ameren Illinois wants the public to know in honor of National Farm Safety and Health Week 2018:

- Awareness is key to avoiding dangerous situations. Always look up, down, side-to-side and continually scan your surroundings for potential hazards.
- When operating large machinery, maintain a 10-foot clearance radius from all overhead power lines. Even getting too close to a power line can cause electricity to jump across several feet of air (arcing) to the equipment.
- Utilize a spotter whenever moving or operating equipment. Spotters may be able to identify hazards outside your immediate line of sight.
- Remember to always lower equipment before leaving the field, as power poles often line the roads near farms.

- If farmers notice drooping or sagging power lines, proactively call Ameren Illinois at 800.755.5000. Do not under any circumstance attempt to remedy the situation on your own.
- The electric transmission and distribution power lines near farmland often carry thousands of volts, and should only be handled by qualified utility personnel.
- If an auger or other piece of equipment becomes tangled in power lines, realize that both the equipment and surrounding area may be energized. Call Ameren Illinois immediately at 800.755.5000 and although first inclination may be to exit the vehicle, wait **INSIDE** the cab until the utility arrives to de-energize the line. One step out could cause the body to become the path to ground for the electricity, resulting in electrocution.
- The sole scenario in which occupants should exit the cab before Ameren Illinois arrives is in the rare event the equipment begins to smoke or catch fire.
- If this happens, jump clear of the vehicle without touching it and the ground at the same time. Land with both feet together on the ground. Then hop with both feet still together so there will not be a voltage difference between your feet, which would give the electricity the chance to follow through the body. Hop as far away as you can.
- Farm hazards are not always visible to the naked eye. Pipelines buried underground help Ameren Illinois deliver safe and reliable natural gas to customers, but inadvertent strikes to these facilities may result in gas leaks.
- To mitigate the potential for natural gas incidents on the farm, always call 811 (J.U. L.I.E.) before tile plowing, setting fence posts or any other deep digging projects outside of routine farm tillage. Additionally, keep an eye out for above-ground piping.
- In the event of an inadvertent pipeline strike accompanied by the smell of natural gas (rotten egg scent), blowing dirt or bubbling water, clear the area immediately and call 911, followed by Ameren Illinois and then 811.
- Technology is playing an increasing role in farming operations, but auto guidance GPS systems do not always have the ability to detect the presence of hazards. Therefore, always keep your head on a swivel and stay aware of your immediate surrounding, even if the equipment is operating itself.