

## Maintaining Security of Electric Grid Is Co-op Priority

### Key Facts

- America's electric cooperatives make the protection and security of their electric system assets a high priority, using a layered approach to secure essential facilities.
- Electric co-ops and other electric utilities support the current process used to develop mandatory standards for the physical protection of the electric grid.
- NRECA supports efforts to increase access to government intelligence information relating to a particular vulnerability or threat to the electric system.

### Working Together to Protect Against Emerging Threats

Protecting America's electric grid and ensuring a reliable, affordable and secure supply of electricity are top priorities for electric cooperatives. The power grid is an incredibly complex network. More than 900 electric cooperatives are committed to ensuring the safety and reliability of electricity delivery to homes and businesses across the country.

The electric sector uses a layered defense strategy to protect critical assets, including power plants, transmission infrastructure that carries electricity long distances, and substations and distribution lines that provide electricity to local users. This approach is designed to ensure protection against severe storms, vandalism and cyber incidents.

Part of offering excellent service is keeping that service secure and reliable. Our commitment to security of the electric grid includes regularly inspecting and repairing equipment to prevent wear-and-tear and upgrading our equipment to withstand storms and severe weather. It also includes working together with co-ops across the country to pool resources, share knowledge, and implement new technology that can help us protect the system against emerging threats. We can't stop a storm or predict every possible disruption but working together we do everything in our power to keep the lights on and our members protected.

In cases where an event impacts our consumer-members, this strategy—combined with experience and decades of lessons learned maintaining the reliability of the electric grid—has resulted in efficient restoration of electric service.

### Government-Industry Partnerships

Our strategies for ensuring the reliability and security of the electric system are continuously evolving and are closely coordinated through the Electric Subsector Coordinating Council. The council is an industry-government partnership that enhances our ability to defend and protect against physical and cyber threats and to restore electric service in the event of a severe storm or other widespread disruption.

The industry partners with the ESCC and individual federal and state agencies to constantly evaluate and improve grid resilience. Electric cooperatives are leaders in this partnership and are committed to continually strengthen our defenses against natural events and acts of vandalism.

Electric cooperatives routinely monitor and manage potential risks to the electric system in order to minimize the impact they may have on their consumer-members. We conform to operating standards to continually enhance readiness against all threats to reliability. And electric cooperatives also work closely with the North American Electric Reliability Corp., federal agencies and local law enforcement agencies on matters of critical infrastructure protection. This includes sharing information about potential threats and vulnerabilities to the electric grid.

Most recently, industry has worked through the Electricity Information Sharing and Analysis Center to update physical security risk management options for the electric system. The document provides a framework for assessing and managing risk at critical facilities as well as resources related to physical security mitigation.

## **NRECA Positions**

**Protect the Standards Development Process.** The development of industry consensus standards is a critical tool for protecting our infrastructure. Industry experts participate in the NERC standards development process by developing standards for a variety of threats and vulnerabilities, and that process is working well. These standards are mandatory and enforceable once the NERC Board of Trustees and FERC approve them. Electric co-ops oppose any expansion of FERC's authority in this process and do not support proposals to allow federal agencies to create reliability standards.

**Improve Information Flow and Protection.** NRECA supports efforts to increase electric cooperatives' access to government intelligence information relating to a particular threat or vulnerability that could be actionable for industry. This includes more quickly granting security clearances for electric co-op representatives, and higher-level clearances for co-op leaders. In addition, the government should allow voluntary access to FBI enhanced background investigation screening processes for critical employees. Industry should have assurance that sensitive information shared from industry to government is properly protected and free of liability concerns when shared in good faith.

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