



GENERATOR SAFETY: WHY PREPARATION MATTERS



While Jackson Electric works hard to provide reliable, uninterrupted power, severe storms can cause outages across our service territory. When the power goes out, many people turn to generators, or wish they had one. Backup power can be a valuable resource, but only when it's installed correctly.

Generator safety is not something you can address after the lights go out. An improperly connected generator doesn't just put your home at risk, it can seriously injure or even kill others.

"The only safe way to connect a generator to your home is with a transfer switch," says Line Superintendent Eric Steien. "When a generator is connected improperly, that power doesn't stop at your house. It travels back onto our lines."

The Dangers of Backfeeding

Electricity can flow backward through a home's breaker panel, out through the meter, through the transformer, and back onto service lines. Plugging a generator into a wall outlet without a properly installed transfer switch is known as backfeeding, and it poses a serious danger to lineworkers who are unaware that the line is energized.

Because of this risk, the National Electrical Code requires generators to be connected through a transfer switch installed by a qualified electrician.

"A transfer switch is the key piece of equipment that prevents generator power from feeding back onto our system," Eric explains. "It's a physical on/off switch between the member's electrical panel and our equipment. It ensures that utility power and generator power can never supply electricity at the same time. Without it, a generator can energize lines our crews believe are de-energized."



This automatic transfer switch acts as a safety gate—ensuring generator power never feeds back onto utility lines and keeps crews protected while they work.

Backfeeding is not a hypothetical risk: it has occurred in real situations.

"There was a situation where a power line was believed to be de-energized, only to find out it was still live because of a generator feeding power back onto the line," shares Brian Schultz, Director of Operations. "A downed line was cut that was thought to be dead. It arced because it was energized by a generator nearly a mile away that was not installed correctly."

Fortunately, no one was injured in this incident, and the lineworker was wearing appropriate protective gear. However, not all situations end safely. Backfeeding is one of the most dangerous hazards lineworkers face during storm restoration.

"It only takes one improperly connected generator to put a lineworker's life at risk," Brian says.



A manual transfer switch.

Be Prepared Before the Next Storm

The worst time to think about generator safety is during a power outage. Proper generator setup requires planning, professional installation, inspection, and coordination.

"That's why we always stress preparation," Brian says. "When a generator is installed professionally, inspected, and commissioned ahead of time, we can confirm it doesn't backfeed onto our lines. That step protects everyone."

A transfer switch is not optional. It's a critical safety device that protects line workers, neighbors, and the public. Members who install generators should notify Jackson Electric so the system can be properly commissioned. Commissioning involves shutting off utility power, running the generator, and verifying that no voltage appears on the utility side of the system.

"If we discover a generator is connected improperly, we may have no choice but to disconnect service until it's corrected," Eric explains. "It's about safety. The liability is real if someone gets hurt."

Generators can be extremely helpful during outages, but only when installed and used correctly. Preparing now helps ensure safety before the next storm arrives. Members are encouraged to contact Jackson Electric with any questions about generator installation or safety.

A Safe, Reliable Option: Automatic Standby Generators

For members seeking convenience and peace of mind, professionally installed automatic standby generators are a safe and reliable option.

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Class of 2026 JEC YOUTH AMBASSADORS

Learning Leadership • Serving Community • Building the Future

The JEC Youth Ambassador Program brings together motivated students from across our service area to learn about cooperatives, leadership, and community service. These 12 ambassadors represent dedication, curiosity, and a commitment to giving back. Through speakers, hands on experiences, and service projects, they have grown as leaders and individuals.

Acronym Key

FBLA – Future Business Leaders of America
FFA – National FFA Organization
FCCLA – Family, Career and Community Leaders of America
NHS – National Honor Society
TIC – Tiger Investment Club
USTA – United States Tennis Association
UW–University of Wisconsin

Morgan Berg Black River Falls

Why I Joined: To learn more about cooperatives and broaden my horizons.



What I Learned: I learned so much about cooperatives, community service, and leadership. Every speaker taught me something valuable.

How I've Grown: Stepping outside my comfort zone helped me grow as a leader. Community service made me a better person, and I appreciate the program for that.

Future Career Goal: Large Animal Veterinarian

Hobbies & Activities: Showing livestock, softball, volleyball, hunting, fishing, 4-H, FFA, NHS, science club, Shooting Tigers

Most Proud Of: How far I've come as a person, and my academic success.

Anton Cassidy Black River Falls

Why I Joined: To learn about where my power comes from and set myself apart from my peers.



What I Learned: Co-ops are a unique business model, and I hope to see more of them in the future.

How I've Grown: I have developed leadership

skills and built connections that I'll carry with me into the future.

Future Career Goal: Major in biochemistry or chemical engineering at UW-Madison.

Hobbies & Activities: Guitar, reading, video games, soccer, running, curling

NHS, Science Olympiad, science club, student senate, youth soccer volunteer, Big Paws Little Paws, musical

Most Proud Of: Placing second at the State Science Olympiad.

Anna Janowski Black River Falls

Why I Joined: To broaden my horizons and expand my knowledge of cooperatives.



What I Learned: I had an amazing opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. through the program.

How I've Grown: I've become more responsible and learned to take initiative.

Future Career Goal: Teach secondary education, with plans to pursue a political career.

Hobbies & Activities: Video games, volunteering, spending time with friends, thrift shopping

Tennis, hockey, soccer, FCCLA, FBLA, Science Olympiad, NHS, student reporting labs, student senate, class officer, art club, Big Paws Little Paws

Most Proud Of: My ability to celebrate small successes.

Roman Madvig Black River Falls

Why I Joined: To become more involved in my community and explore different career paths while gaining valuable life skills.



What I Learned: I learned how to be financially responsible through lessons on budgeting and planning for adulthood.

How I've Grown: Learning from people and businesses across the community helped me grow personally and professionally.

Future Career Goal: Policy maker at a state capital or international ambassador.

Hobbies & Activities: Golf, fishing, working out, music, movies, spending time with family and friends

Football, golf, shooting sports, FCCLA, FBLA, science club, TIC, band, musical, NHS

Most Proud Of: Giving back to the community through service projects and volunteering.

Libby Moldenhauer Black River Falls

Why I Joined: To learn more about cooperatives and become more involved in my community.



What I Learned: I learned about the impact Jackson Electric Cooperative has on the community.

How I've Grown: I developed teamwork skills and learned to step outside my comfort zone.

Future Career Goal: UW-Madison to major in neurobiology with a statistics certificate; plans for medical school or actuarial/biostatistics work.

Hobbies & Activities: Tennis, volunteering, weightlifting, pickleball, spending time with friends

NHS, science club, Science Olympiad, soccer, lifeguard, class officer, Red Ball League, USTA

Most Proud Of: My ability to overcome challenges and persevere.

Hannah Tubbs Black River Falls

Why I Joined: To learn more about cooperatives and get involved in the community.

What I Learned: Jackson Electric Cooperative is a member-owned business that returns profits to members.

How I've Grown: Volunteering through projects like Project Christmas, the breast cancer fundraiser, and nursing home visits showed me the value of community service.

Future Career Goal: Study finance or accounting at UW–Green Bay.

Hobbies & Activities: Swimming, running, weightlifting, volunteering, reading

Swim team, track & field, 4-H, FCCLA, NHS

Most Proud Of: Being selected to represent Jackson Electric on the Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.



Reece Youngthunder Black River Falls

Why I Joined: To become more involved in my community and better understand how cooperatives function.

What I Learned: I developed a deeper understanding of my community and what it means to belong.

How I've Grown: I've become more responsible and learned to take initiative.

Future Career Goal: Pursue a finance degree at the Wisconsin School of Business, UW–Madison.

Hobbies & Activities: Hunting, fishing, archery, traveling, weightlifting

Service Club, FBLA, TIC, football, golf, Shooting Tigers, NHS

Most Proud Of: Receiving direct admission to the Wisconsin School of Business.



Owen Zenz Black River Falls

Why I Joined: To get more involved and meet new people.

What I Learned: A strong understanding of how cooperatives work together to serve members.



How I've Grown: I became more comfortable with volunteering and giving back.

Future Career Goal: Kinesiology major at UW–La Crosse, with plans for physical therapy graduate school.

Hobbies & Activities: Weightlifting, running, outdoor activities, video games

Cross country, track & field, science club, Science Olympiad, student senate

Most Proud Of: The friendships I've built in high school by growing more confident.

Kelsey Lien Blair-Taylor

Why I Joined: Encouraged by a friend who believed I would be a good fit.

What I Learned: Leadership, financial skills, and the principles of cooperatives.

How I've Grown: I became more confident, outgoing, and comfortable collaborating with others.

Future Career Goal: Elementary education, with horse training and photography on the side.

Hobbies & Activities: Barrel racing, photography, writing, reading, films

Track, cross country, FFA, FBLA, Educators Rising, NHS, BT Club, Big Cats/Little Cats

Most Proud Of: My personal growth and confidence in being myself.



Billy Miller Blair-Taylor

Why I Joined: I want to become an electrician.

What I Learned: How cooperatives work and the importance of giving back, especially during the holidays.

How I've Grown: I improved my public speaking skills.

Future Career Goal: Wildland firefighter or electrician.

Hobbies & Activities: Wrestling, jiu jitsu, video games, boxing

Most Proud Of: Winning when people thought I couldn't.



Paige Spors Melrose-Mindoro

Why I Joined: To meet new people and earn volunteer hours.

What I Learned: How cooperatives serve and support their members.

How I've Grown: I gained confidence by trying new things and forming new connections.

Future Career Goal: Animal science/pre-vet at UW–River Falls to become a veterinarian technician, with future plans to become a veterinarian.

Hobbies & Activities: Figure skating, reading, coloring, spending time with pets

Student council president, NHS treasurer, class treasurer, Raise Your Voice treasurer, band, figure skating

Most Proud Of: Already working my dream job and being prepared for my future.



Lydia Tracey Melrose-Mindoro

Why I Joined: To grow as a leader, give back, and gain real life experience.

What I Learned: How to communicate confidently, work on a team, and serve the community.

How I've Grown: I became more confident, responsible, and comfortable stepping outside my comfort zone.

Future Career Goal: Diagnostic Medical Sonography with echocardiography emphasis at UW–La Crosse.

Hobbies & Activities: Spending time with family and friends, traveling, shopping, reading, trying new things

Volleyball, FFA, Raise Your Voice, NHS president

Most Proud Of: Giving back to my community through my electric cooperative and making a positive impact.



“The safest time to plan for a generator is before you need it,” Brian says. “That’s one reason we offer Generac automatic standby generators. They’re permanently installed with a built-in automatic transfer switch, which removes the guesswork during an outage.”

When utility power fails, the system automatically disconnects from the grid, starts the generator, and restores power safely. Once grid power returns, the system switches back seamlessly.

“These systems eliminate many of the risks we see with portable generators,” Brian concludes.

—Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Supervisor

Generator Safety Tips to Remember

Whether using a portable generator or a permanently installed system, keep these important safety tips in mind:

- Never power your home by plugging a generator into a wall outlet. This causes dangerous backfeeding that can seriously injure or kill others.
- Always use a transfer switch installed by a qualified electrician.
- Operate portable generators outdoors only, in a well-ventilated area away from doors, windows, and vents to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Read and follow all manufacturer instructions—they contain critical safety information.



- Start the generator first, then turn on appliances and lights one at a time to avoid overloading. Prioritize essential needs.
- Never operate a generator in standing water or touch it with wet hands.
- Protect portable generators from moisture by placing them on dry ground under an open, canopy-like structure.
- Never use a generator in an attached garage, even with the door open.
- Turn generators off and allow them to cool before refueling. Never refuel a running generator.
- Store fuel in approved, labeled containers outside of living areas.
- Keep children and pets away from generators. Many components become hot enough to cause serious burns.

For more generator safety information, visit www.safeelectricity.org.

CONSIDERING SOLAR? CONTACT JACKSON ELECTRIC FIRST

Jackson Electric supports members who are interested in exploring solar energy. Solar can be a worthwhile investment, but it’s important to understand the requirements and costs before moving forward.

Recently, Jackson Electric adopted the Interconnection Requirements for Wisconsin Electric Cooperatives (IRWEC), along with a Jackson Electric–specific Technical Specification Manual. These documents outline the standards, procedures, and technical requirements that must be met for any solar system connecting to our electric system.

Before committing to a solar purchase, we encourage members to contact Jackson Electric first. Our staff can help you understand current requirements, review your plans, and ensure your project aligns with cooperative policies so there are no surprises down the road. JacksonSolar, LLC can also provide a quote with realistic, honest cost-recovery projections to help members make the most informed decision possible.

Contact Jackson Electric at 715.284.5385.

Learn more at www.jackelec.com/jacksonsolar-llc.



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