



HOW WALTON EMC REPLACES A UTILITY POLE

Utility poles are the backbone of Walton EMC's electric distribution system. Occasionally, one of these poles breaks due to a vehicle strike or natural causes such as lightning, ice, tornado or simply age.

If you've ever been caught on the "dark side" of a damaged pole, you might wonder how long a repair will take. The job is more than digging a hole and sliding a new pole into the ground, says Matt Britt, Walton EMC line crew supervisor for Monroe.

Today's power poles are oftentimes used for more than delivering electricity. Other utilities may also have equipment attached to the poles, making a replacement more complicated. It's also not uncommon for workers to encounter a maze of buried utility cables and pipelines that create digging challenges.

"The majority of our power poles are not easily accessible — either above or below ground. Accessibility dictates the pace and precautions involved in a pole changeout," Britt said. The work is done methodically and safely, with many factors determining the time required to complete the repair.

Outside of weather-related damage, motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of broken poles in Walton EMC's service area. Britt described the process of replacing a pole damaged by a vehicle.



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Assessment. Once Walton EMC is notified of a broken pole, a two-man response team is dispatched to secure the site and assess the damage. When possible, they temporarily redirect power to those affected by the outage.

Preparation. A crew of three to four other Walton EMC linemen are called to bring repair materials, a bucket truck and a digger truck. In compliance with law, a request is issued for locating underground utilities, which must be completed prior to digging. Because multiple locator services may be involved, significant time can elapse before all underground utilities have been marked.

Installation. When all crew members are present and underground utilities identified, pole replacement begins.

1. Undamaged equipment is transferred from the broken pole to the replacement. The equipment needed on each pole can vary.
2. The buried part of the broken pole is pulled out with a hydraulic pole puller. Poles are generally buried about 6 feet in the ground.
3. If needed, a new hole is dug before the pole is placed. Holes must be hand dug when underground utilities are nearby.
4. Power lines are then lifted and mounted on the new insulators. Once all is back in place, the power is restored.

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