

A tragic mistake: an important reminder about farm equipment and overhead power lines



in loving memory of Grant McCann, pictured here

June 7, 2016 is a day that will be forever imprinted in Greg McCann's mind. It began as a normal June day on his farm in southeastern South Dakota. The crops had been planted and, like every year in June, they were needing to be sprayed. Greg's 35-year-old son, Grant, helped out on the farm and planned to spray the fields that day.

"He went and got the sprayer filled and ready," Greg said. "He called me to see if I could move an irrigator for him, and that was the last time I talked to him."

To enter the field, Grant drove under a power line. Unfortunately, Grant didn't drive far enough into the field. He stopped at an angle close to the power lines.

As he began unfolding the 90-foot sprayer booms, they touched the energized power line which instantly electrified the tractor.

The sprayer was caught in a Bon Homme Yankton Electric Cooperative distribution power line. Co-op electrician Kevin Meyer was just a few miles away when he and his apprentice received a call that a neighboring farm was out of power.

"We packed up our tools and stuff and left the yard," Kevin said. "As we were leaving the yard, I received another call from a supervisor saying that we got a call that there's a sprayer that looks like it might have made contact with a line that's probably the first place to go and it's looking like we have more customers out."

Kevin and his apprentice didn't know what they might discover, but knew they had to move fast.

"As we're rolling up on scene, one neighbor was there sitting on the road on his four-wheeler and he just said someone is down in front of the tractor," said Kevin.

What they would discover is that Grant made a mistake that would end his life. Rather than staying in the cab and waiting for help, he had stepped out of the sprayer.

"The consequences of that mistake took my only son," said Greg. "He was my friend, my partner, my confidant. Now every day I remember that terrible morning and I see Grant lying dead on the ground. There's no fix. There's no second chances."

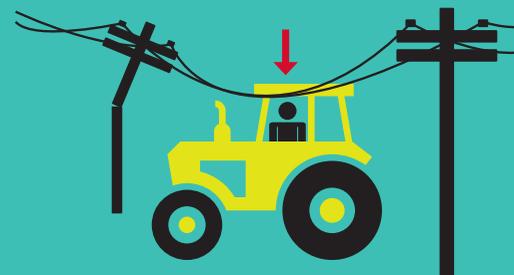
No one can know what was going through Grant's head at the moment he left the cab. But Greg wants others to learn from that mistake, so it doesn't happen to anyone else.

"If Grant would've stayed in the tractor and not touched anything, I think he'd be here today. But he didn't," said Greg. "I don't want anyone to have to experience the sadness and the emptiness that I and Grant's family and friends are experiencing and will be experiencing for a long, long time."

This article was reprinted with the permission of East River Electric Power Cooperative, Inc. to help bring more awareness regarding farm safety and power lines.

What to do if your vehicle contacts a power line

Stay in the vehicle and call 911 for help.



If you must exit the vehicle because of a fire, tuck your arms across your body and jump clear of any wires with your feet together, never touching the equipment and ground at the same time. Then shuffle or hop at least 40 feet away with your feet together.



Stay away from the equipment until the authorities tell you it is safe.



Pay attention to electrical equipment

As we enter this year's planting and spraying seasons, remain aware of where electrical equipment is located when you're working on the farm and remember the steps to take if your equipment contacts a power line. You could save your life, or the life of someone you love.

With the Coronavirus pandemic and its financial impacts, everyone has a lot on their mind this year. Letting distractions take your mind away from work in the fields significantly increases the likelihood of farming accidents. Minimize distractions and stay focused in the fields. If you notice your mind wandering at any point, bring it back to the task at hand.

Even during pandemic, call before you dig

Calling before you dig is essential. Even during this time of social distancing, free utility line locates are available, and are required by law. Be sure to call 811 or visit call811.com at least a few business days before any digging project.

After calling, someone will come to your property and mark all buried utility lines. Once the lines are marked, dig carefully around any underground lines and consider relocating projects that are close to buried utilities.

It's not too late to fill out the 2020 Census

The 2020 Census is available to fill out online at my2020census.gov or by phone at 1-844-330-2020. About 59% of South Dakota households and almost 66% of Nebraska households have responded. The 2020 Census takes just a few moments to complete.