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PREPARATION KEY TO WEATHERING SEVERE STORM SEASON

Tree trimming program plays an important role in Westar's storm preparation.

TOPEKA, Kan., April. 9, 2013 — It's spring in Kansas. Flowers are blooming. Birds are chirping. Kids are playing outdoors ... at least until the sky begins to darken. Spring serenity is interrupted by loud rolls of thunder. Wind forcefully rattles tree branches sending limbs and leaves showering to the ground. Another severe storm season is upon us.

Kansans know preparation is the key to keeping their families safe as they ride through what can sometimes be a turbulent storm season. As the state's largest electric utility, Westar Energy is no exception. Storms often wreak havoc on electric energy infrastructure, toppling utility poles and yanking down power lines, leaving customers in the dark.

How Westar prepares

We prepare for severe weather by closely monitoring developing storm systems and making sure crews are ready to respond and supplies are available; however, most of our storm preparation happens long before severe weather enters the forecast. As part of our tree trimming and system maintenance program ReliabiliTree, crews clear tree limbs and vegetation away from power lines, removing one of the leading causes of power outages.

“Trees and power lines are natural enemies, especially during storms. But both play an important role in our communities – with power lines providing the lifeblood that powers our critical infrastructure and daily lives, and trees providing shade, wildlife habitat and improving air quality,” Elsie Eisenbarth, director, support services, said.

It’s impossible to prevent all power outages, but ReliabiliTree improves electric service reliability by keeping harmful limbs away from power lines before wind, snow or ice bring them down. Instead of just responding to problems as they occur, ReliabiliTree trims trees on a regular, four- to five-year cycle. Line crews follow the vegetation crews, identifying potential equipment problems and making repairs.

ReliabiliTree began in the Wichita area as a pilot program in 2010. Since its launch, Westar has cleared more than 80 percent of Wichita’s circuits and reduced the number of tree-related power outages in those circuits by more than 60 percent. ReliabiliTree expanded into Lawrence in late 2011, and this year is expanding into communities throughout Westar Energy’s service territory, including Manhattan and Topeka. For more information about ReliabiliTree, and to check the line clearance schedule to see when ReliabiliTree will be in your area, visit www.WestarEnergy.com/tree.

How you can prepare

Westar encourages customers to be prepared before a storm strikes by designating a storm shelter and creating a family emergency plan. Have an emergency kit handy during the storm and after the skies have cleared. Keep a kit in your shelter that includes:

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Battery-powered weather radio
- Bottled water and non-perishable food

- Blankets and shoes
- Work gloves
- Tools to shut off water and gas service, and identify the main breaker in your home breaker box to shut off electricity; phone numbers to local utilities
- Prescription medicines and personal products needed by family members

For more information about family emergency plans and additional emergency kit items, visit FEMA's ready.gov website.

Reporting an outage and receiving updates

Power outages may be reported to 1-800-LIGHT-KS (1-800-544-4857). This automated line will accept thousands of calls an hour and enter outage reports directly into our work order system. Outages may also be reported online or via a mobile phone at www.WestarEnergy.com if you have registered your account. As reports are received, the work order system analyzes information to help us better pinpoint where the problem might be.

General outage information is always available at www.WestarEnergy.com under Outages and Safety. During storms we frequently provide updates through social media: www.Facebook.com/westarenergyinc and www.Twitter.com/westarenergy.

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Westar Energy, Inc. (NYSE: WR) is the largest electric utility in Kansas, providing electric service to about 687,000 customers in the state. Westar Energy has about 7,100 megawatts of electric generation capacity and operates and coordinates more than 35,000 miles of electric distribution and transmission lines. For more information about Westar Energy, visit us on the Internet at <http://www.WestarEnergy.com>. Westar Energy is on Facebook: www.Facebook.com/WestarEnergyInc and Twitter: www.Twitter.com/WestarEnergy.