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SAVE A LIFE:

Avoid Distractions While Driving

by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager

Some temptations are hard to resist. Imagine you're driving down the road when you hear that familiar "ding" from your phone; a text, an email, or a call. It's easy to think, "I'll just look really quick." We know better, yet we convince ourselves that one quick look won't hurt.

The truth is, sometimes that's all it takes. A moment of distraction can change a life forever.

Why do we engage in behavior we know is dangerous, and, in many states, illegal? Perhaps it's because we believe we're in control. According to research from AAA, most drivers consider themselves to be better-than-average behind the wheel. We live busy lives, juggle multiple responsibilities, and have become accustomed to multitasking. Unfortunately, driving doesn't work that way. It demands our full attention at all times.

August is Back-to-School Safety Month, making it the perfect time to remind ourselves that the roads are about to get busier. As students return to classrooms, school buses will return to their routes. Crossing guards, bicyclists, young drivers, and children walking to school will become part of daily traffic again. This seasonal increase in traffic makes it even more important for every driver to eliminate distractions and remain alert.

Distracted driving is any activity that diverts your attention away from driving. While cell phones receive the most attention, distractions come in many forms. Adjusting your vehicle's navigation system, changing the radio station, eating, reaching for an item on the floor, talking with passengers, or even daydreaming can all take your focus away from the road.

Texting remains one of the most dangerous distractions because it

demand your eyes, hands, and attention all at once. Sending or reading a text message takes your eyes off the road for an average of five seconds. At 55 miles per hour, that's like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed. None of us would intentionally drive with our eyes closed, but that's essentially what happens every time we read or send a text behind the wheel.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, distracted driving contributes to thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of injuries across the United States each year. Behind each number is a real person who now owns a story that could have been prevented.

The risks become even greater when people are working along the roadside. Police officers, firefighters, EMTs, tow truck operators, highway maintenance crews and utility lineworkers routinely work just a few feet from moving traffic. They often work in difficult weather and low-light conditions, and after storms, when drivers may already face reduced

visibility and hazardous road conditions.

At Vernon Electric Cooperative, our lineworkers respond to outages at all hours of the day and night. After severe storms, they may spend long hours restoring power while working from bucket trucks positioned along roadsides. Their attention is focused on repairing damaged power lines and safely restoring electricity to members—not on watching for distracted drivers approaching from behind.

Unfortunately, emergency lights and warning signs don't always capture the attention of a distracted motorist. Every year, utility workers and first responders experience close calls. Some suffer serious injuries. Some never make it home. One moment of distraction puts both the driver and the workers at risk.

The same dangers exist for law enforcement officers conducting traffic stops, firefighters responding to crashes, EMS personnel providing medical care, and tow truck operators clearing disabled vehicles. These professionals

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SERVING UP *Drinks and Fun* AT ROOSTER'S

By Leah Call

Mike Lepke, owner of Rooster's Bar & Grill in Readstown, has a simple philosophy for running a successful business: keep track of revenue, watch your spending and be nice to people. Judging by the steady stream of regulars and loyal staff, it's a formula that works. Guests to this Vernon Electric Cooperative member business can expect a warm welcome and plenty of laughs.

Lepke opened Rooster's six years ago after decades of working and running businesses throughout the area. Raised on a dairy farm in Vernon County, past work experience includes farming and milking cows, hauling milk, and eventually launching his own excavating business. He also co-owns Chapters on the Horizon, a wedding venue in Viola, with his daughter and son-in-law, Jenny and Tyler Chrisinger.



Mike Lepke, owner of Rooster's Bar & Grill, opened the restaurant in Readstown six years ago.





“I always thought I’d like running a bar, so I took a chance,” said Lepke.

The gamble paid off.

“It’s going good,” he said. “I’m glad I started the bar. I meet a lot of nice people from all over the area. It has been a really good investment.”

Food, Drink and Laughs

Lepke is quick to credit much of Roosters’ success to the people behind the bar. The bar employs about 10 people, including two full-time staff members. One of those full-timers is bar manager Carly Carpenter, who has helped oversee daily operations since the day the doors opened. Lepke affectionately calls Carpenter the “eye of the Rooster.”

Carpenter says the staff at Rooster’s feels like family, and with her mother Debbie often working alongside her, that’s no surprise. For Carpenter, the job is about much more than serving food and drinks.

“I’ve met thousands of people over the last six years,” she said. “Some come in several times a week, others stop once a year, and I still remember them and what they drink. You get close to people and have great conversations.”

While Rooster’s draws plenty of loyal locals, it’s a stop for visitors from around the area and beyond, with customers sometimes arriving on motorcycle, UTV and snowmobile depending on the season.

The bar’s playful personality is impossible to miss. A sign above the entry door reads, “Last One in is a Rotten Egg,” setting the tone for the rooster-themed décor inside. The walls are adorned with chicken signs and edgy humor, while the menu keeps the theme going with a variety of chicken options, along with pizza, burgers and sandwiches. It’s no surprise that Roosters’ famous bone-in chicken wings have become the house specialty and most popular selection.

Beer lovers can enjoy a range of brews, including Roosters’ own Irish Red ale, crafted exclusively for the bar

by Appleton-based Hop Yard Ale Works.

Beyond the quirky atmosphere and all things chicken, Rooster’s hosts live music at least once per month on an outdoor stage. It also holds the annual Cock-a-Doodle-Doo Fest in June with chicken-themed games, a crowing contest, prizes and live entertainment.

“It’s a bar you wouldn’t expect in a small town like Readstown,” Carpenter said. “There’s a really good vibe at Roosters bar. I feel blessed to work here.”

Lepke is pleased with Roosters’ reputation as a friendly neighborhood bar. “Readstown only has 380 people. Everyone kind of knows everyone here. It’s about being nice to people and treating them the way you want to be treated.”



Rooster’s menu carries the restaurant’s chicken theme through a selection of wings, sandwiches, burgers, and pizza.



Rooster’s hosts live music on its outdoor stage and celebrates its chicken-themed personality each June during Cock-a-Doodle-Do Fest.

willingly place themselves in harm's way to protect and assist others. The least we can do is give them the space they need to work safely.

Wisconsin's Move Over Law requires drivers to move over into another lane when approaching an authorized emergency vehicle, tow truck, highway maintenance vehicle, or utility vehicle displaying flashing warning lights, if it can be done safely. If changing lanes isn't possible due to traffic or road conditions, drivers must significantly reduce their speed and proceed with caution. This simple action provides a crucial safety buffer for the people working just feet away from passing traffic.

Moving over isn't simply about following the law—it's about recognizing that the person working alongside the road is someone's spouse, parent, child, friend, or neighbor. Our lineworkers live and work in the communities they serve. They coach youth sports, volunteer at local events and raise their families here. Every crew member who heads out to restore power deserves to return home safely after their job is done.

Parents also have an important role to play this time of year. As teenagers begin driving themselves to school, they are still developing safe driving habits and may be especially susceptible to the distractions of smartphones and other technology. Conversations about putting phones away, limiting distractions, and slowing down around school buses, construction zones and roadside workers can help build safe habits that last a lifetime. Leading by example is equally important. Young drivers notice when adults prioritize safe driving, and they notice when we don't.

At Vernon Electric Cooperative, safety is at the core of everything we do. We invest in training our employees,



Vernon Electric crews establish a roadside work zone while completing line work. Drivers should slow down, move over when possible, and remain alert when approaching utility vehicles.

maintain our equipment, and follow strict safety procedures to reduce risk on the job. That's why we continue to encourage everyone to stay alert, eliminate distractions and slow down whenever they encounter roadside workers.

The next time your phone buzzes while you're driving, leave it. It can wait until you've reached your destination. If you see flashing lights ahead—whether from a police cruiser, ambulance, fire engine, tow truck, highway maintenance vehicle, or utility bucket truck—slow down, move over when it's safe, and give those workers the room they need to do their jobs safely.

Together, we can make our roads safer for students heading back to school, families traveling across our communities, first responders answering emergencies, and lineworkers working to keep your lights on. One simple decision to stay focused behind the wheel could save a life — perhaps even the life of someone you know.

MariBell Transmission Project: Advisory Resolution Update

Resolution response: An advisory resolution on the MariBell Transmission Project was proposed and adopted at Vernon Electric Cooperative's 2026 annual meeting. The resolution requested additional project information from Dairyland Power Cooperative, which (together with its partner GridLiance Heartland) will develop and own the 765 kV transmission line after the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) assigned Dairyland the 140-mile segment between Marion, Minn., and Bell Center, Wis.

Dairyland's response to the Vernon membership's resolution is now publicly available on Dairyland's website (www.DairylandPower.com) in the Press Room – Press Releases section, along with additional project information, contact details for the MariBell team and links to the MariBell website and route map.

Virtual Town Hall: Dairyland will host a virtual town hall meeting on MariBell for Vernon members in August. Dairyland leadership and members of the MariBell project team will provide an overview of the proposed project and answer member questions. More information, including the date and registration details, will be announced with the Vernon membership soon.

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