

Truckin' with your local electric co-op

Your co-op's big investment in rolling stock helps ensure safe and reliable service to you

BY LE SPEARMAN

Whether the workers at your local electric cooperative are hitting the road to repair an outage, install a new service or maintain existing poles and lines, they—and the co-op's trucks—must be ready to roll twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Getting to the job site with all the tools and equipment necessary to get the job done quickly and safely is the highest priority.

All of your co-op's vehicles—including aerial bucket trucks, digger derricks and service trucks—are designed to handle specialized tasks. Obviously, the

initial cost for each truck—as well as the expenses for parts and equipment needed for jobs every day—represents a major investment for your cooperative. And like most business costs, the bottom line for outfitting these utility vehicles increases each year.

Wendell Mayes, line superintendent for Prairie Energy Cooperative in Clarion, recalls that in 1972 a bucket truck cost \$22,500—plus another \$2,500 to outfit the truck with safety equipment and supplies. The story's considerably different today: When Prairie Energy purchased a new 2002

cab/chassis combo and added a line box unit with aerial bucket lift, the price topped \$125,000. And Mayes estimates that it now costs Prairie Energy approximately \$12,500 to stock a bucket truck.

All of the co-op's trucks are maintained to the highest standards possible, which protects the utility's investment in equipment and ensures the safety of the workers who operate these vehicles "Equipment testing is done annually," explains Mayes. "The truck operators inspect the vehicles every day to make sure they are ready for the road." ■

This 2002 model 4400 International cab and chassis with ALTEC aerial bucket makes it possible for linemen to safely work on lines and pole-mounted transformers. The rig cost \$125,350. There's an additional \$12,541 worth of parts, supplies and equipment on board too—everything from wasp spray (\$3) and a first-aid kit (\$20) to an electric meter (\$65) and an eight-foot hot stick (\$200) for handling live lines.



Photos by Le Spearman



This 1998 Model 4900 International digger derrick cost \$135,000 when it was new. It's used primarily to dig holes and set poles. Some electric co-ops add a bucket and use rigs like this one for security light repair and maintenance tasks on pole-mounted electrical equipment.



It may look like any other pickup truck, but this \$27,000 2001 Ford F150 carries the same safety equipment as the co-op's other trucks—including a biohazard kit, first-aid kit and flashing safety light.



Where does all the equipment go?

The aerial bucket truck shown on the previous pages is more than just a service, maintenance and installation truck—it's a rolling parts, tools and safety equipment warehouse. Here's a look at some of the more than \$12,500 worth of inventory tucked away in the nooks, crannies and storage compartments on Prairie Energy Cooperative's rig.



From the back, safety signs and wire spools are in clear view.



There's no shortage of reminders and instructions for the bucket's operator.



Outriggers stabilize the truck during work on lines.



The fire extinguisher is easy to grab in an emergency.



Screw grounds sometimes are used during live line work.



Utility trucks must carry safety decals on all sides.



A lineman uses a personal grounding set when working on energized lines. The metal pulleys, running blocks and web slings are used when stringing electric lines.



While working in a bucket truck, a lineman wears a safety harness that snaps to a hook in the bucket. If he falls out of the bucket, the harness would stop his fall. Other safety items such as rubber liner gloves and arm protector sleeves are stored in this area too.



Insulated cover-ups, rubber hoses and blankets, clothespins and insulated jumpers allow linemen to safely work on energized lines.



The biohazard kit and first-aid kit are stored in the same compartment on the truck.



The longer pole is an extendo stick, which is used for moving live electrical equipment. The hot stick next to it helps connect devices such as transformers to energized lines.