

Transcript of Power Chat in the Electric Lounge
Season 2 – Episode 9 “Protecting the People Behind the Power”
September 10, 2026

00:08 – 0:21

Narrator: Power Chat in the Electric Lounge is powered by SECO Energy, an electric distribution cooperative serving over 260,000 members across parts of seven central Florida counties. For more information about us, visit secoenergy.com.

00:24 – 2:01

Curtis Wynn Chief Executive Officer: Welcome to Power Chat in the Electric Lounge. I'm Curtis Wynn, CEO of SECO Energy. Every day, SECO Energy employees and the contractors who work alongside us are out in our neighborhoods and communities performing essential work: restoring power, maintaining equipment, trimming vegetation, working on meters, and helping us keep our electric system safe and reliable. Most interactions with our members and the public are positive, but occasionally a routine interaction can become confrontational and sometimes threatening or dangerous. So today we're talking about an issue that's important not only to SECO Energy, but to every community we serve. How do we keep the people who are simply doing their jobs safe? When should an employee disengage? When should law enforcement become involved? When does an angry exchange potentially cross a legal line? And what can all of us do to keep these situations from escalating in the first place? Our members absolutely have the right to ask questions, express concerns, and be frustrated at times, and we want to hear from them. But threats and violence are not the answer. I've invited a group of people who bring different perspectives to this conversation, and instead of me giving everyone a lengthy introduction, I'd like to hear directly from them.

2:02 – 2:08

Eddie Velez, Director of Corporate Security: Thank you, Mr. Wynn, for having me today. My name is Eddie Velez, and I'm Director of Security for SECO Energy. Thank you.

2:09 – 2:16

Paul Bloom, Marion County Sheriff's Office Public Information Officer: I'm Paul Bloom from the Marion County Sheriff's Office. My role there is as a spokesperson, and I also oversee crime prevention.

2:17 – 2:21

David Vincent, Citrus County Sheriff: David Vincent. I'm the Sheriff of Citrus County and have been a law enforcement officer for 33 years.

2:22 – 2:25

Pat Breeden, Sumter County Sheriff: Thank you for having us here today. I'm Sumter County Sheriff Pat Breeden.

2:26 – 2:28

William Gladson, State Attorney for the Fifth Judicial Circuit of Florida: I'm Bill Gladson, State Attorney for the Fifth Judicial Circuit.

2:29 – 2:44

Curtis Wynn: All right. Thanks for those introductions. Eddie, we're going to start with you. You and I talk from time to time, and we've had issues that come up, but can you give us a sense of some of the situations that they've encountered and what makes those encounters concerning from a safety standpoint?

2:45 – 3:26

Eddie Velez: Sure, Mr. Wynn. Some of the incidents that we do have on our lines, or our territory are going to be unfortunate, but they do happen. We do have people when we're on their property on occasion; they tend to sometimes don't like us being on there. So, what happens is on occasion there is there's some shootings that happen to at our employees. We have threats of violence at our employees too. And of course, we try to train our employees as best as possible during these, but these are some of the instance and obviously we also get threats over our phone lines saying that they're going to perform violence come into our offices and in the field too.

3:27 – 3:43

Curtis Wynn: Wow. So Paul, let me bring you in here. Um, when you hear situations like ones Eddie just described, uh, what stands out to you from a law enforcement perspective and what are some early warning signs that an ordinary disagreement may be moving towards something that is unsafe?

3:44 – 4:31

Paul Bloom: You know, I think when you come across someone and there's an immediate escalated confrontation, you know, this is not something that built over, you know, course of 15 20 minutes, but just right away and there's confrontation. I think as a SECO employee at that point, I'm realizing or this may be more that we want to move forward with and I need to start notifying chain command law enforcement necessary and type threats we're talking about here. Even threatening firearms and deadly force is very serious. Electricity is very important to us and to all consumers if that needed. However, we can't put a price on all life. So, taking that moment to realize escalating quickly is a quicker sign.

4:32 – 4:39

Curtis Wynn: Thank you, Paul. Sheriff Breeden, Sheriff Vincent, anything one or both of you would like to add?

4:40 – 4:57

Pat Breeden: I agree with Paul. If somebody comes right out of the gate and they're already top-tier angry, that's a warning sign. That's definitely a red flag. Reach out to law enforcement. That's what we're here for. We have zero tolerance for it, and we're here to keep everybody safe. If someone comes right out of the gate angry, you shouldn't wait to see whether it escalates. There's already a red flag there.

4:58 – 5:18

David Vincent: Sure. I think there's a difference depending on whether you're dealing with an in-person confrontation or maybe you're an office staff member. As soon as that confrontation starts, especially if it's not in person and the staff knows, "Hey, we might have a problem at this address," make sure everybody is aware of that. You don't want your employees showing up there uninformed, and keeping law enforcement in the loop is always a good idea.

5:19 – 5:30

Curtis Wynn: Great. Awesome insight. Eddie, talk to our employees. What do you want them to do when they recognize those warning signs?

05:31 – 05:59

Eddie Velez: For my employees, the first thing I want them to do is have a plan. Plan before they even get to the residence if they expect a high-tension situation may be involved and then be able to stick to that plan. I tell them, if you have that feeling in the pit of your stomach and it

doesn't feel right, you need to move away and get out of that situation. We ask them to move out of the situation, call their chain of command, and then move forward from there.

06:00 – 06:27

Curtis Wynn: So there are ways to detect those warning signs, but when it happens, I'll ask our law enforcement guests—you can jump in here—when should the employee just stop trying to resolve the disagreement and disengage? Is there a point you could identify to let employees know when it's time to back off?

06:28 – 06:49

Pat Breeden: I think most people realize when it gets to that point. If you're having a discussion about, “Hey, you're on my property,” maybe you can resolve it. But it comes to a certain point where the employee realizes, “Okay, this is beyond what I'm going to be able to handle.” I'd say backing out sooner rather than later is better. Call us. That's what we're there for. Let us come out and see if we can help.

06:50 – 07:01

David Vincent: Right, and I think Eddie hit it on the head when he said to trust your gut. In law enforcement, that's how we survive this career. You trust your gut, and if something doesn't feel right, it's probably a good idea to reevaluate it.

07:02 – 07:27

Curtis Wynn: Right. Mr. Gladson, there are going to be angry members. There are going to be angry landowners and property owners out there, but there's a distinction. At what point can an angry or heated interaction potentially cross the line and become a criminal threat?

07:28 – 08:23

Bill Gladson: In Florida, if you threaten somebody and it appears you have the ability to carry out that threat, that's an assault. During the discussion earlier, the suggestion I would make is that if any employee encounters someone who, as you guys said earlier, escalates and starts using “if/then” statements—“If you come on my property, then I'm going to do this,” or, “I don't want you here. You're not welcome”—the employee may try to explain, “Listen, the power is out. We have an easement. We need to get access.” That gives you the right to be on that property to carry out your mission. But sometimes it's difficult to reason with people who are making those kinds of verbal threats. Just threatening someone, without hurting them, can

be a crime in and of itself. And, of course, if someone has a weapon or threatens serious physical violence, it escalates and becomes more serious.

08:24 – 09:32

Curtis Wynn: I put a scenario together so we can work from it. Sometimes it's better to communicate from a scenario, so I'm just going to read it off here. It brings this issue closer to what a utility employee or contractor could actually encounter. Let's say SECO has equipment located on a member's property that our employee or contractor needs to access to perform their work. There's a locked gate, and the member tells the worker something along the lines of, "You can't come through my gate. If you come on my property, I'm going to exercise my Second Amendment rights." Now, the member may believe they're asserting their property rights or constitutional rights, but the employee hearing those words may reasonably be thinking, "This person is telling me they're going to use a firearm against me." Mr. Gladson, how would you evaluate a statement like that? When can language invoking the Second Amendment potentially cross the line into a threat or violence?

09:33 – 10:18

Bill Gladson: I would absolutely consider that a threat. I would not say right now that, with just that statement, it would necessarily be an assault that could be prosecuted. But 100%, if I were a SECO employee and someone made that statement, I would believe they meant to carry it out. To a reasonable person, that means you're going to arm yourself with a firearm. That's the kind of escalation you guys were talking about earlier. That's how I would interpret it. Now, if I were presented with just that statement without any other physical activity from the member, other threats, or the display of a weapon, I don't know that it would rise to the level of an assault. But 100%, it needs to be treated as a threat by your employees.

10:19 – 10:56

Curtis Wynn: Very good. Sheriff Vincent, let's put ourselves in the employee's position. The employee isn't standing there with a law book. They don't necessarily know the law. They're standing at a locked gate trying to do their job, and they've just heard that statement. What should that employee do at that moment? Should the employee disengage and immediately leave the situation rather than going back and forth about whether SECO has a right to access that equipment? We do have a right, but sometimes that doesn't always come across the right way, if you know what I mean.

10:57 – 11:48

David Vincent: Yeah. Like Mr. Gladson said, the intention behind that statement is that you're going to arm yourself with a firearm. If I were the employee, why would you continue that engagement? I would encourage disengagement, especially if time is on your side. We use that a lot in our business. If there's not a sense of urgency and someone's life isn't in danger, why are you pushing the issue just to say that you can? I think it's a good idea to disengage and reevaluate, then call law enforcement. If you have a lawful right to be on a property, we want to make sure you can get your job done, and maybe that resident doesn't understand that at the current time. But forcing your way through a locked gate on someone's property when they've already made that verbal threat is a good time to trust your gut and step back a little bit.

11:48 – 11:53

Curtis Wynn: Paul? Sheriff Breeden?

11:54 – 12:47

Paul Bloom: Like the State Attorney said, those “if/then” statements— “If you do this, then I'm going to...” —that's enough for me as an employee. And as Sheriff Vincent was saying, consider the urgency of the matter. We train de-escalation in law enforcement, and most of our calls involve someone on one of the worst days of their life. If we can get in there and de-escalate something, we want to do that. An employee may make an attempt, but at some point, it's going to be based on that employee's own feelings and who they're dealing with at that moment. They need to assess the level of seriousness themselves. Once they feel that seriousness rise to a level where they're uncomfortable, that's the moment. There's no reason to push it. Like Sheriff Vincent said, there's no sense of urgency here. Back out. Maybe they'll listen to me as a law enforcement officer showing up, maybe they won't, but they've already shown that they won't listen to the SECO employee. That's where we step in.

12:48 – 12:57

Pat Breeden: Yeah, I think as soon as that threat is there, it's time to back out. There's no need to argue. Just back out and call law enforcement. That's what we do. That's why we're there.

12:58 – 13:22

Bill Gladson: And if I could add, I think if you reach out to law enforcement, the SECO employee might find out that law enforcement has been to that house five times. They may know that the

individual has something else going on or that they've had to respond there frequently. More information is always better.

13:23 – 13:44

Pat Breeden: Yeah. We all have a CAD system where, if it pops up on that deputy's screen that this person has a history of violence or something similar, that's information you may not be privy to at the time, but we know it. It gives us more information. So if you ever have any doubt when you're going to a place like that, call whatever jurisdiction you're in. We can tell you, "Hey, we have some red flags on that residence, so you might want to take a deputy escort out there."

13:45 – 14:09

Curtis Wynn: There you go. Great. Mr. Gladson, you touched on this, and I want to really amplify this part of it. There's another misconception out there: "Yeah, I said these things, but I never touched anyone. I never pulled a weapon. I didn't hurt anybody." Does the fact that no physical violence occurred necessarily mean that no crime actually occurred?

14:10 – 14:41

Bill Gladson: Absolutely not. You don't have to hurt somebody to commit an assault. You have to threaten somebody, you have to mean it when you make that threat, and they have to be in reasonable fear. So if an employee is trying to do their job and get the power restored and you make a threat like, "I'm going to arm myself," "I'm armed," or, "If you step on my property, I'm going to..."—fill in the blank—I think you're getting to the point where it's a reasonable threat and a reasonable fear. People who are going to do that need to understand there are going to be consequences.

14:42 – 14:59

Curtis Wynn: Sure. To our law enforcement guests, words matter. When you're investigating a situation like this, to what extent do you focus on exactly what was said or what was reported to you as having been communicated in one of these situations?

15:00 – 15:34

Pat Breeden: I think that's the whole extent of it. We take both sides of the story, but for your employee at the time, what was their fear of the threat? Did they take it seriously? For it to be an assault, they also have to fear that the person was capable of doing what they said they

were going to do at the time. If the employee walks up and tells us, "I wasn't scared. They were nothing. They couldn't do anything," that could wipe out the crime. But if he says, "Man, look, he came at me. He had his fist raised. He was threatening to punch me," that's a whole different ballgame. And I think a lot of people don't realize that when they take the time to write something or send an email, a written threat is a whole different situation. If they send something to the co-op—

15:35 – 15:58

Curtis Wynn: You must have been reading my mind. I'm going to talk about that. Threats aren't limited to face-to-face encounters. Does it make a difference if a threat is made in person, over the phone, by text message or mail, or through social media? What should an employee preserve or document if they believe they've been threatened? You touched on that. Anyone else want to expand on it?

15:59 – 16:17

Pat Breeden: Definitely save it. As soon as you get that email or text, save it and store it. Call law enforcement. Let us record it and get copies of whatever we need, and we'll pass it along to the State Attorney's Office if it's something where we need to make an arrest. Each case is different, so we judge them as we go.

16:19 – 16:27

Curtis Wynn: To our employees: document, document, document. Make sure you give a good report, whether it's coming through Eddie or

16:28 – 16:32

Pat Breeden: Make sure it's going straight to us because we need it immediately. Don't hold it for two days and then say, "Well, I forgot about this." As soon as you get it, or as soon as you can report it to us, report it.

16:33 – 16:51

Bill Gladson: The other important part from a criminal perspective is a written threat to kill. The person receiving it doesn't necessarily have to believe you can carry it out. If you make a written threat to kill, that's the crime, and it's a serious crime. It actually is a higher level than just an assault.

16:52 - 17:05

Curtis Wynn: You investigate these situations, so maybe emphasize to the viewers just how important the advice we're giving today really is and how they should articulate that report.

17:06 – 17:25

Paul Bloom: Yes. It's not a vague charge, and it's not something we rarely deal with. Typically, you're going to see this in a school setting—say a child makes a written threat on social media against a school. It's a charge we're familiar with. Unfortunately, it can also happen to someone who's trying to provide a service for the community and receives that same type of threat.

17:27 – 18:03

Curtis Wynn: Let's go back to our scenario. The employee has disengaged and moved away from the situation to a safe location. When should that employee call 911, and what information do your dispatchers really need to hear at that time? Is it something like, "I'm a utility worker who was attempting to access our equipment, and the property owner told me they would exercise their Second Amendment rights if I entered"? What additional information does the dispatcher need to assess that situation and properly handle it?

18:04 – 18:34

Pat Breeden: They're going to ask a ton of questions. Sometimes people get on the phone with our dispatchers and think, "Why are they asking all these questions?" We can all relate to it. They're going to ask questions that people may think are irrelevant, but they actually serve a purpose because that dispatcher is the lifeline for the deputy who's going out there. Sometimes a question may not seem to make sense to the caller, but to our deputy and dispatcher, it does. Location, description, exactly where it happened, whether you saw a firearm—all of that is going to come into play. They're going to ask all kinds of questions like that.

18:35 – 18:54

Curtis Wynn: I think you're exactly right. Sometimes people get upset and say, "Why are you asking me all these questions?" But it's good to know that information is very important in allowing you to assess and properly handle that situation and, most importantly, protect your deputies when they arrive.

18:55 – 19:00

Pat Breeden: Yeah. I promise there's a reason for it. It's not just because we want to stay on the phone with you. There's a method to the madness.

19:01 – 19:12

Paul Bloom: True. We're responding by Braille, so whatever we're told—we don't physically see what's there. We want to know as much as we can, so we feel more confident about what we're dealing with.

19:13 – 19:27

Pat Breeden: And the dispatcher may ask the employee to stay on the phone the entire time until the deputy gets there. We urge them to stay on the phone because that way they're a live feed, saying, "The guy is still in the yard. He's walking around the yard." They're basically giving us live information about what's happening at that time.

19:28 – 19:47

David Vincent: I think a good way to start that conversation, too, is to say, "Hey, I'm John Doe with SECO," so we know you're not just a random citizen who was trying to get onto someone's property. Say, "I'm with SECO. We were trying to access..." Give them clear information about why you were on that person's property or were trying to access it.

19:48 – 20:06

Curtis Wynn: Back to the scenario again. The call has been made and the deputies are responding. What happens next? How does law enforcement approach and investigate a situation involving this type of reported threat against one of our employees? Can you step us through the next steps?

20:07-21:15

Paul Bloom: I'd say we're going to make contact with the victim, certainly, but it depends on the threat. If you're telling me there's a man out in the yard with a gun, I want to deal with him first. I'm going to take the information that's already been given to our dispatchers for now and then speak to our victim. Typically, we want to talk to the victim and make sure they're safe. If we need to move them back farther, we will. For employees, I'd say the responding officer may know more about that house and the people in it than they do, so listen to that officer or deputy who shows up. If they ask you to move back another block or two and stand by, please do that. Otherwise, we're going to take it very seriously. I know both of these sheriffs are in

their first terms, but I think their records show they're very aggressive toward crime and have zero tolerance for this kind of thing. We expect our utilities to be able to do their work. Florida is a unique place. You can't just block a road and protest in Florida because you want to. We're all about common sense, and I think we take a good approach to the calls we get from you guys.

21:16-21:44

David Vincent: I think it's important for any victim to understand that sometimes we can take action on scene. We might be able to make a physical arrest depending on what the person did. Then there are other times when we can't. We have to take all that information and visit Mr. Gladson's office, present all the facts of the case to our State Attorney, and they'll make the determination about whether there's a way to prosecute that case. Not every case can end in an arrest on scene. There could be an arrest after the fact.

21:45-21:59

Pat Breeden: And sometimes, on scene, we have a great working relationship with the State Attorney's Office and we all have in-house staff. If the deputy gets there and isn't sure about something, we'll make phone calls that day and work it out. If we don't have an answer right then, we'll find an answer. We always work through it.

22:00-22:38

Curtis Wynn: Great. Sometimes once our employees make the call and the property owner—or whoever is making the threat—understands that law enforcement has been called, they calm down and sort of retreat. Then your officers get there and everything seems calm, almost like nothing ever happened. Is there a concern with that? Is there a certain reaction we should be concerned about when we've called because the situation looked one way and then, when you arrive, it doesn't look that way? How does that proceed?

22:39-23:18

David Vincent: Well, everybody acts differently when a uniform shows up. That's human nature. I can speak for my agency: I think our deputies do a great job of getting down to the facts. We're unbiased in these situations. We want to take the facts and make decisions based on those facts. We know people's attitudes change when we show up. Most people, unless they're totally unhinged, aren't still acting erratically when police arrive. Most people want to

calm down and not act like that in front of the police. We understand that and take it into consideration, but our deputies are really on a fact-finding mission.

23:19-23:35

Pat Breeden: Cooler heads prevail. That's a true thing. But you'll know the other kind, too, because not everybody calms down. As you said, there's that one person who's going to keep going. A lot of times we'll know about that one before we get there, and then you have to go in a different direction and handle that situation differently.

23:36-24:10

Curtis Wynn: Great. Let's turn it around a little bit. We've talked about what employees should do, but now let's look at it from your perspective, Eddie. If a member believes that a SECO employee or contractor should not be coming through a gate or accessing a particular area of their property, what should that member do? How can they raise that concern with SECO without confronting the person who's simply trying to get the job done that we dispatched them to do?

24:11-24:57

Eddie Velez: What's great about SECO is that we have so many forms of communication: email, text, the call center. If our members have an issue, they can use any of those formats to ask questions. They also need to understand that when our utility workers go onto their property, the utility worker's mindset is safety first. They have to make sure their work zone is safe. They know what they need, including their PPE, in order to proceed with the job. The member might not know that. If you approach the utility worker, now they not only have to look out for their own safety, they have to look out for your safety as you enter the area. So: communication, communication, and communication. We have all the avenues for that.

24:58-25:17

Curtis Wynn: Right. That's important. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that we need to pause and give that member the respect they're due as a property owner. Even though we have a right to be there and we have a job to do, taking that extra step and taking the extra time to communicate, as you clearly stated, is important.

25:18-25:44

Pat Breeden: One thing I might add is that when you're going to a member's house, you all do a great job because your trucks are well marked and highly visible. Make sure there's no doubt that it's a SECO employee going there. They can see the decals, the yellow light, or whatever is on the vehicle. You don't want to spook a member or scare them into wondering, "Is this really a SECO employee?" Your trucks are always visible, and that lessens people's fears a lot of the time, especially at night when there's a power outage.

25:45-25:57

Eddie Velez: That's a good point. We also have contractors out there, but they're labeled as SECO contractors. Members are more than welcome to take a photo and send it in and say, "Are these one of your guys?" We'll clarify it for them.

25:58-26:01

Pat Breeden: It's hot. I want to make sure y'all get my power.

26:02-27:10

Curtis Wynn: And there's also this flood of people—and I know you probably get calls about this—who show up at our members' homes and are not SECO representatives, but say they are SECO representatives. The clear distinction is that they need to have identification, and if there's a vehicle in someone's yard or driveway, it should always have that SECO logo on it. We're very intentional about making sure that happens. But it doesn't go unnoticed that there are a lot of folks coming to people's houses and presenting themselves as SECO when they're not. I think that's a very important thing to recognize. Now, a disagreement over whether SECO has the right to access equipment is one thing, but the safety of the employee standing at that gate is an entirely different issue. Eddie, what do you want our members to understand about why our employees sometimes need access to utility equipment located on or near their property?

27:11-27:56

Eddie Velez: If a member approached me with that question, I'd say our main goal at the end of the day is to keep the lights on for you. Part of that is maintenance. We have maintenance for our utility poles, maintenance for our lines, and maintenance for our meter system. That work takes time, and sometimes it requires us to go onto your property. I understand that members may read our terms and conditions when they first sign up and then not look at them again, but

they need to go through and understand the terms and conditions we operate under. Those are the things I would mention to our members.

27:57-28:14

Curtis Wynn: Great. From a law enforcement perspective, there are proper channels for the member as well as the employee. Any advice you could give our members about how important it is to go through those proper channels if they have a concern?

28:15-28:46

Paul Bloom: Like Eddie mentioned, there are quite a few proper routes. It's a professional business, and you can take those proper routes and get your questions answered. Any disputes can typically be handled pretty quickly. But, like you mentioned, Mr. Wynn, we also want people to be wary of scammers. They're out there. People may be going door to door, even in gated neighborhoods, and showing up at your door. Having that awareness while also knowing there are avenues to properly handle your concern is a good mixture.

28:47-29:17

Curtis Wynn: Great. Eddie, more broadly, what do you want our members to clearly understand from this conversation about SECO employees and the contractors they see working in their neighborhoods? Who are these people, and what are they there to accomplish? You touched on this a little earlier, but give us a few more comments on that.

29:18-29:56

Eddie Velez: Again, we have contract workers and we have SECO workers, but the end goal, Mr. Wynn, is to keep the lights on and maintain a healthy system. You're going to have vegetation crews come onto your property to help maintain reliability. You're going to have our metering team come out. It takes a huge team, and that team is sometimes going to need access to your property. Members need to understand why we're there and have open communication with us so everyone can remain on good terms.

29:57-30:20

Curtis Wynn: From the public's perspective, why should people care about the safety of these utility workers? What can happen to the larger community when those employees can't safely access the equipment they need to perform their jobs? Any thoughts?

30:21-31:16

David Vincent: From my perspective, utility workers are essential workers. They're almost literally first responders in emergencies. We see that in our coastal communities here in Florida with hurricanes, and in your communities as well. That's how important utility workers are to keeping everyday life going. If you want your lights on, if you want your air conditioning, and, more importantly, if you want your internet these days, you've got to work together with your community to get those things done. Utility workers are such an essential part of our community. If people have questions about their property, property lines, or what you're trying to access—maybe it's a new resident and they don't know—I would encourage them to pick up the phone. You have information at your fingertips these days to get ahold of SECO. I would encourage people to do that.

31:17-31:36

Pat Breeden: A lot of people also need electricity for medical reasons. They may be on oxygen. There may be some type of medical concern. Elderly people, especially with as hot as it is, need the air conditioning. Medical needs are a big part of having electricity available, and not everybody can afford a generator. They rely on the speed of getting their electrical service restored.

31:37-32:01

Curtis Wynn: Sheriff Breeden, I love that point. Someone could be on medical equipment or having a medical emergency. But the situation could be even broader than that. A person who's blocking access to our facilities could be affecting 50 or 100 other people who depend on our service. We may need to access that person's property in order to provide service to everyone else. Very good point.

32:02

Pat Breeden: Thank you.

32:03-32:19

Curtis Wynn: Absolutely. We try our best to work hand in glove with all first responders. We appreciate the recognition of us as first responders because, in many cases, we can't do our jobs without you, and that goes vice versa in terms of how we need to work together.

32:20-32:31

Pat Breeden: And we urge people, too, to remember that utility workers are often working on the side of the road. Don't drive distracted. Pay attention to your surroundings. That helps keep them safe.

32:32-32:53

Curtis Wynn: Well, a short lightning round here to close it out. We'll finish by going around the table and asking for a really short answer to this question: If you could tell every person who encounters a utility employee or contractor in their neighborhood just one thing about keeping that interaction safe and respectful, what would it be?

32:54-33:12

Bill Gladson: I would say, if somebody tells you who they are, listen to them. By that I mean if they share with you their concerns about how they might want to arm themselves, I would take them at their word. These kinds of disputes can be settled in the courtroom and not on the side of the road or in somebody's yard. Put safety first.

33:13-33:48

Pat Breeden: Yeah. If somebody's acting unhinged, as we spoke about, it's time to back away. There's nothing that has to be that urgent. Speak to your co-op. Make pre-arrangements if it's necessary. Sometimes it's as simple as, "Hey, we just want them to let us know when they're going to come out here because I have a dog I need to put up," or something like that. Sometimes things can be worked out just by speaking to one another.

33:49-34:18

David Vincent: I think simply having a conversation goes a long way these days. We tend to see a society that likes to escalate things very quickly. Sometimes it's just a warm welcome: "Hey, I noticed you out here on my property. Do you guys need something on my property?" Start off with a conversation like that. If everyone goes out the front door yelling and screaming, those interactions don't go as well. They tend to go a lot better when they start calm rather than angry.

34:19-34:20

Pat Breeden: One more thing for you, Paul: record everything. Everybody has a cell phone. If they're recording you, record them. That strengthens our case. Sorry to cut you off.

34:30-35:24

Paul Bloom: That's a great suggestion. Growing up here in Florida, there are a lot of beautiful things to see: beaches, state parks, and one of the most beautiful things you'll see after a hurricane is all these service trucks going out there and fixing those lines. We understand that SECO isn't just reactive. There are a lot of proactive things you're doing. When they're out there this time of year, in August, trimming back limbs and doing work around power lines to make the system more sustainable during a hurricane or strong storm, have some appreciation for them. If you bring them a glass of cold water, that's okay, too. Understand that they're there for a good reason. And I think I would just echo what the sheriffs said: if they don't want us on the property, then I'm very suspicious. I think most of our good members understand and appreciate the work.

35:25-35:41

Eddie Velez: From our members' standpoint, I want them to understand that our guys and gals have families, too. When you make these threats, remember that. I want all our SECO employees to go home safely. If you keep in mind that they have families, too, I think it'll go a long way.

35:45-37:52

Curtis Wynn: Well said. Well said. I think today's discussion makes one thing very clear: safety is a shared responsibility. Our employees and contractors go into our communities every day to serve the people who live there. They shouldn't have to wonder whether doing their job will put them in danger. When a line worker, vegetation crew member, meter technician, or another person working on our electric system is threatened, the impact doesn't necessarily stop with that individual. It can delay restoration of power. It can interrupt necessary maintenance. It can make it harder for SECO Energy to provide the safe, reliable electric service our communities depend on. For our employees, your personal safety comes first. Recognize when a situation is escalating. Follow your training and safety procedures. Know when to disengage and involve law enforcement when necessary. And to our members, we understand there will be times when you have questions, concerns, or even frustrations, including questions about why an employee or contractor needs to access equipment on or near your property. We want to hear those concerns. Contact SECO and give us the opportunity to listen, explain what's happening, and work through the issue with you. But threatening or intimidating the employee who's standing there trying to do their job is not the answer. I want to thank Eddie Velez, SECO Energy's Director of Corporate Security; State Attorney Bill Gladson; Paul

Bloom from the Marion County Sheriff's Office; Sheriff Pat Breeden; Sheriff David Vincent; and all of our law enforcement partners for joining us and helping us have this very important conversation. The people behind the power are our coworkers. They're our neighbors. They're our friends and our family members. Every one of them deserves to go home safely at the end of the day. Thank you for joining us for Power Chat in the Electric Lounge. Again, I'm Curtis Wynn, and we'll see you next time.