

Effective safety training begins with keeping it fresh

As MEUW's Randy Larson embarks on his 44th year in the electric-linework trade, one thing remains unchanged: his passion for keeping lineworkers safe. Randy is the primary classroom instructor for MEUW's Job Training and Safety (JT&S) Program (most recently referred to as the Electric Utility Safety Training Program). He brings energy, experience, and creativity to every session he teaches.

"Effective safety training begins with keeping it fresh," Randy says. "If I'm bored teaching it, the crews will be bored learning it. I want them to leave wanting more."

That philosophy has defined Randy's seven-plus years at MEUW. He's continually revising curriculum, introducing new topics, and using field demonstrations to reinforce critical lessons. Whether it's a new [federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration] OSHA rule, an updated safety procedure, or a lesson learned from a recent close call, Randy builds it into the next rotation. "I've made it clear to our members — you'll never see the same program for annual mandatory OSHA training subjects twice," he says. "I don't want training to become a dull, boring, 'when-will-this-be-over?' session."

Randy's journey began during Electrical Power Distribution school in Eau Claire in 1982. Before finishing the program, he was hired at Jump River Electric Cooperative as temporary help. After gaining experience with a contractor in Minnesota, he joined the municipal electric utility in Richland Center in 1986, and completed his State of Wisconsin Apprenticeship in 1988.



Larson

A few years later, his career took a turn toward education. In 1992, he became the State of Wisconsin Apprenticeship Instructor at Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC), where he taught for 26 years. After retiring from CVTC in 2018, he applied to work for MEUW. "Thirteen days later, [MEUW's Director of Safety Services and Operations] Mike Czuprynski offered me the job," Randy recalls with a smile. "I guess I wasn't done teaching yet!"

When asked what fuels his commitment to safety, Randy's answer is simple and heartfelt: "It's *my* linemen's safety," he says. "I'm not just doing this for the power companies or even the linemen themselves. I'm doing it for their families. I want every one of them to go home the same way they came to work."

His classroom isn't just a workplace, it's where he feels most at home. "Putting the program together, that's work," he says.



To keep training from being dull and boring, MEUW's Randy Larson often takes lineworkers out of a traditional classroom. This photo is from a training day at Arcadia Electric Utility where Randy worked with the crews to demonstrate measuring high-voltage potential and what happens when damaged rubber gloves aren't properly tested, among other topics.

"But when I get in front of the crews — that's the fun part. Throw me the challenging questions. I love that."

One of the most rewarding aspects of Randy's work is seeing generations of lineworkers come through his classes. "Sometimes I've trained a dad years ago, and now his son is in my class," he says. "I tell them how we used to do it, and then I show them the better way."

From leather gloves and felt hats to today's rubber gloves, arc-rated clothing, and ergonomic climbing body belts, Randy uses history to show how far the trade has come. "In the 1920s and 30s, only half of linemen lived to retirement. Look how far we've come, and how much we owe to the safety standards we follow today," he explains. "My goal is to help every lineworker be more professional and proactive about safety."

During most of November and each December, Randy focuses his time preparing the next year's curriculum — reviewing what's been taught, identifying topics that need to be revisited, and finding new ways to make the learning engaging. That might mean incorporating photos from the field or finding new videos or fresh case studies that support the topic.

He also spends a good deal of time looking for inspiration from a variety of sources: other safety instructors across the country, OSHA updates, industry magazines, member feedback, and even phone calls from lineworkers who share their own stories. "You listen to crews, to management, to other instructors — that's how you know what needs more attention," Randy says. "If someone had a close call, I want to turn that into a lesson that might save someone else's life."

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LIVELines

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A proud member of the Quad State Instructors organization since 1993, Randy also stays connected with more than 120 other safety professionals across 22 states. The group meets regularly to share program ideas, regulatory updates, and best practices in safety education.



First introduced in early 2021, Randy uses a 16-foot trailer that enables line-workers to practice procedures in hands-on simulations in a kind of mobile classroom he built from scratch using mostly donated equipment and supplies that keeps training fresh and highly interactive.

Randy's work ethic is well known and his early-bird-gets-the-worm onsite arrivals don't go unnoticed. "It does take a special breed to do this," he admits. "I spend about 82 nights a year in hotels." But for him, the travel, preparation, and long hours are worth it. "My goal is that when I leave a member's facility, management knows they got their money's worth — and that their crews are better prepared to 'Work it safe.'"

That phrase — "Work it safe!" — has become Randy's signature sign-off, echoing through training sessions across the state. "I started saying it when dismissing my first apprenticeship class," he says. "Now the class says it for me."

After more than four decades in the trade, Randy shows no signs of slowing down. His enthusiasm, adaptability, and genuine care for the people he teaches continue to define him — and keep MEUW's safety training as strong and vital as ever. ●