



An Extended Guide · No. 2059

Electric Fence Monitors

Knowing when the fence is
down — before the animals do

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Knowing the moment your fence goes down

An electric fence only does its job when it's actually hot. The trouble is, a fence can quit on a Tuesday afternoon and you might not find out until Thursday — usually when the neighbor calls to say your cattle are in his beans. A fence monitor is a small device whose whole job is to watch the line and let you know the minute something's wrong.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. For 30-plus years I've helped folks make the gadgets in their homes — and out on their land — behave. This guide is me standing at your fence line with you, explaining in plain words what these monitors do and don't do.

We'll cover why a dead fence is such a problem, what a monitor actually watches, how it reaches you — a blinking light, or a text to your phone — where it mounts, and the handful of things that drain a fence in the first place. We'll also be honest about the one thing a monitor can't do.

★ No wrong question here

If you'd just like someone to look at your setup and tell you whether a monitor makes sense and how it would reach your phone, that's exactly what I do. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 — I don't sell the gear, so the advice is just advice.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you already understand what a fence monitor is for.

- ❑ A dead fence lets animals out before you ever notice — that's the real danger, and the reason a monitor is worth having.
- ❑ A fence monitor watches the voltage on the line and tells you when it drops too low or quits altogether.
- ❑ The simplest ones warn you with a blinking light you have to walk out and look at; connected ones send a text or call your phone.
- ❑ A monitor tells you THAT the fence is down — it usually can't tell you exactly WHERE the fault is.
- ❑ Most fence trouble comes from weeds on the line, a broken wire, a bad ground, or a failing charger.
- ❑ Never work on a live, energized fence carelessly, and leave charger and electrical faults to the right help.

✓ Start with how you want to be told

The big choice is simple: do you want a light you check on your way past, or a text that finds you in the kitchen? Answer that and most of the rest of the decision falls into place.

Why a dead fence is such a problem

It helps to be clear-eyed about what you're really protecting against, because it isn't the fence — it's the time you spend not knowing.

An electric fence doesn't hold animals with wire; it holds them with respect. One good zap teaches a cow or a horse to keep off the line, and they remember it. But the lesson only lasts as long as the fence stays hot. Let the power quit for a day or two and curious animals start testing it again — and once one learns the fence is dead, the rest follow.

The quiet danger is the gap between when the fence fails and when you find out. A charger can fail overnight. A branch can drop across the line in a storm. A wire can corrode through at a splice you haven't looked at in a year. Any of those can leave the whole fence cold while you go about your day none the wiser.

Animals loose on a road are a danger to themselves, to drivers, and to you — and the liability is no small thing. A monitor shrinks that gap of not-knowing from days down to minutes. That's the whole value of it.

✓ The cost of not knowing

Think about what a single loose-stock call really costs — the chase, the repairs, the worry, the worst-case on a dark road. Measured against that, a little device that keeps watch day and night is an easy thing to like.

What a fence monitor actually watches

Before we talk about how it reaches you, let's be clear about what the little box is actually paying attention to.

A hot fence carries a high-voltage pulse — a quick snap of power that races down the wire many times a minute. A fence monitor, sometimes called a voltage monitor or a fence alarm, keeps an eye on that pulse. As long as the voltage stays up where it should be, all is well. When it sags too low or stops, the monitor knows the fence can no longer do its job.

Think of it as a watchman who does nothing but check the fence's pulse, over and over, around the clock. He doesn't fix anything and he doesn't make the fence stronger — he just raises the alarm the moment the pulse weakens, so you can act before the animals notice.

Some monitors watch one spot; others can keep an eye on the far end of a long run, which matters because a fault way out at the back of the property can pull the whole line down. The right setup depends on how your fence is laid out, which is a good thing to walk through together.

✓ Voltage is the health reading

You don't need to memorize numbers. Just know that the voltage on the line is the fence's pulse — strong and steady means healthy, weak or gone means trouble. That's all the monitor is really reading.

A light, or a text to your phone

Monitors come in two broad flavors, and the difference is simply how they let you know something's wrong.

The light-only kind

The simplest monitors sit by the charger or out at the fence and show a light — green when all's well, or a red or dark light when the fence is weak or dead. These are cheap and dependable, but they only help if you walk past and look. For a fence you see every day, that can be plenty.

The connected kind

A connected monitor goes further: when the fence drops, it sends a text message or places a call to your phone, so you learn about it wherever you are — in the barn, in town, or asleep at 2 a.m. To do that it needs a way to reach out, usually either your property's internet or its own cellular signal, the same way a cell phone connects.

Which flavor fits depends on how closely you already watch the fence and how far you roam. A monitor that only blinks at an empty barn at night isn't much help; one that texts you is worth its keep.

✓ Match it to your habits

Be honest about your routine. If you drive the fence line every morning, a light may be all you need. If you're often away or the fence is out of sight, a monitor that texts you earns its place.

Where the monitor goes

A monitor only reads what it can reach, so where it sits matters as much as which one you pick.

Many monitors mount right at the charger — the energizer — since that's where the power enters the fence and where you already have the gear and, often, an outlet. A monitor there watches the pulse as it leaves the charger, which catches a failed charger and most near-end faults.

Others clip onto the fence line itself, out where you want to keep watch. Putting one toward the far end of a long run is smart, because it tells you whether the pulse is still making it all the way out there — not just whether it left the charger strong. A fault halfway down the line can look fine at the charger and dead at the far post.

A connected monitor also needs to sit where it can reach you — within range of your internet, or where it has enough cell signal to send a text. Out past the barn, that's not always a given, which ties right into getting signal out to your buildings in the first place.

✓ Cross-reference: getting signal out there

If your fence runs well past where your Wi-Fi or cell signal reaches, a connected monitor may need help getting its message out. My guides Long-Range Sensors and Cell Boosters for Farms and Metal Buildings both speak to closing that gap.

What actually drains a fence

A monitor makes a lot more sense once you know the usual suspects behind a weak or dead line. Most trouble comes down to four things.

- **Weeds and brush on the line** — green growth touching the wire quietly bleeds power to ground, and a whole season of it can pull the voltage way down. This is the most common culprit by far.
- **A broken or shorted wire** — a snapped strand, a corroded splice, or a wire sagging onto a steel post or a gate can short the fence and drop the whole line.
- **A bad ground** — the fence needs good ground rods to complete its circuit; dry soil or too few rods leave it weak even when everything else is fine.
- **A failing charger** — the energizer itself can age, take a lightning hit, or simply quit, leaving the line cold with no obvious cause out at the fence.

Notice that three of the four are things you or a fence hand can find and fix with a walk and a voltage tester. The fourth — the charger — is electrical, and that's where you want to be careful, which we'll come to.

✓ Weeds first, almost always

When a fence weakens gradually over a few weeks, bet on weeds or brush growing into the line before anything else. A pass with the mower or trimmer along the fence often brings the voltage right back up.

A monitor tells you THAT, not always WHERE

This is the honest limit of these devices, and knowing it up front saves a lot of frustration.

A fence monitor is a smoke alarm, not a map. It tells you the fence has a problem — the voltage has dropped, the pulse is gone — but it usually can't point you to the broken splice at the back corner or the branch down across the line in the woods. The finding is still on you or whoever walks the fence.

There's one helpful exception: a second monitor out toward the far end narrows things down. If the charger end reads fine but the far end reads dead, you know the fault lies somewhere between the two — and you've just saved yourself from walking the whole line. Two watchmen tell you more than one.

Finding the exact spot is a job for a fence fault finder — a handheld tool that reads the line as you walk it and points toward the leak. That's a fine thing to own if you've got a lot of fence, but it's a separate tool from the monitor that raised the alarm.

✓ Set your expectations right

Picture the monitor as the fire alarm and your walk down the line as the fire department. The alarm gets you moving fast; it doesn't put out the fire. That division of labor is exactly how these are meant to work.

Staying safe around a live fence

Before we go further, the serious part. An electric fence is built to deliver a strong jolt, and a few simple rules keep that jolt from hurting anyone.

The shock from a fence charger is meant to startle a large animal, and while a healthy adult can usually take a brief touch, it is genuinely dangerous for a small child, for anyone with a heart condition, and for anyone who can't let go. Never let a grandchild play near an energized fence, and never grab a line to test it by hand.

Before you work on any fence — splicing a wire, clearing brush off the line, moving a post — turn the charger off at its switch and confirm the line is cold with a tester, not with your fingers. A fence that was dead a minute ago can come back on if someone flips the switch, so make sure everyone knows you're working on it.

! Lightning and fence lines

A wire fence is a long metal line stretched across open ground, and in a storm it can carry a lightning surge a long way. Never work on a fence during a thunderstorm, keep well back from the line when lightning is near, and have the charger properly grounded and surge-protected — that's work for someone who knows electrical systems, not a guess.

Two kinds of places, two sets of needs

What a fence monitor needs to do depends a lot on how much fence you have and how far it runs from the house and the signal.

If your place is close to town

A smaller place usually means a short run of fence you can see from the house or the barn, and your Wi-Fi or cell signal probably reaches it. That keeps the choice simple.

- A short, visible fence may be well served by a simple light-type monitor you glance at daily.
- If you want a text, a connected monitor near the house can usually reach your existing internet with no trouble.
- One monitor at the charger often covers a short, single-run fence.
- Clearing weeds off a short line is a quick chore that heads off most trouble before it starts.

If you're out on acreage or a working farm

Now the fence runs for a long way, maybe in several loops across the back forty, and parts of it are well out of sight and perhaps out of signal. The stakes and the distances both go up.

- A connected monitor that texts you is worth far more when the fence is out of sight or you're often away.
- A second monitor toward the far end helps you pin down which stretch has the fault.
- Out past the buildings you may need a boosted signal or a long-range sensor path to get the alert home.
- More fence means more weeds, splices, and ground rods to keep an eye on — a monitor won't replace the walk, but it tells you when to take it.

★ Not sure which fits your place?

Tell me how much fence you run, how far it reaches from the house, and whether you've got signal out there, and I'll help you figure out the simplest monitor that will actually keep you in the loop. Call (330) 200-8042.

Getting the alert to your phone

A connected monitor is only as good as its ability to reach you. Here's how that message actually finds you, in plain terms.

When a connected monitor sees the fence drop, it needs a path to the outside world to send its text or place its call. That path is usually one of two things: your property's internet, if the monitor is close enough to reach it, or its own cellular connection, the same little signal a cell phone uses, for monitors sitting well away from any Wi-Fi.

A cellular monitor is the handy choice out at a far fence, because it doesn't lean on your Wi-Fi reaching all the way out there. The trade is that it needs decent cell signal at its spot, and it may carry a small ongoing service cost to keep the connection alive — rates and fees vary, so check current terms before you count on it.

✓ Cross-reference: alerts that find you

Getting a sensor's warning from the back of the property to the phone in your pocket is a subject all its own. My guides [Long-Range Sensors](#) and [Well Pump, Pressure and Septic Alarms](#) both walk through how these alerts travel and land on your phone.

Keeping the monitor itself powered

A watchman who falls asleep is no watchman at all, so it's worth a minute on what keeps the monitor running.

Monitors get their power a few different ways. Some plug into an outlet near the charger. Some run on batteries you change now and then. Some out at the fence carry a small solar panel to keep themselves topped up. Each has its place — the key is knowing which yours uses so it never goes quietly dark on you.

The catch with a battery-only monitor is that a dead battery can look, from the house, exactly like a quiet fence — no alert either way. Good monitors warn you when their own battery runs low; it's a feature worth asking about so a flat battery doesn't leave you blind.

✓ Put it on the calendar

If your monitor runs on batteries, mark a reminder to check or swap them on a schedule — maybe when the clocks change. Five minutes on the calendar beats finding out the hard way that the watchman nodded off.

Weather, storms, and the charger

Out in open country the weather is part of the plan. A fence and its charger live outdoors in everything, and storms are the hard part.

Day to day, good outdoor-rated gear handles rain, sun, and cold just fine — that's what it's built for. A monitor mounted in a weatherproof spot near the charger, or a sealed unit out on the line, will take the seasons in stride. The thing that truly threatens it is lightning.

A long fence is a tempting path for a lightning surge, and a strike near the line can travel right back to the charger and whatever's connected to it — including your monitor. This is exactly why a proper ground and surge protection on the charger matter so much, and why that part belongs to someone who understands electrical work.

! Leave charger and surge work to the right help

Grounding, surge protection, and anything involving the charger's wiring or an outlet are electrical jobs. I'll help you plan the setup and pick a monitor, and I coordinate a licensed electrician for the electrical parts — I don't do licensed electrical work myself, and neither should an unlicensed helper.

What to do when the alert comes in

The monitor's whole purpose is this moment — it just told you the fence is down. Here's a calm way to work through it.

First, don't panic and don't grab the fence. Take a breath and think about what changed. Was there a storm? Did you mow near the line? Is it the season when weeds take off? The cause often announces itself if you stop to consider it.

- **Check the charger first** — make sure it has power and is switched on, and look for any warning light on it.
- **Look for the obvious** — a branch down on the line, a gate left touching the wire, a section flattened by stock or weather.
- **Walk the line with a tester** — a voltage reading as you go narrows down where the pulse is being lost.
- **Clear the weeds** — if the line is buried in green growth, a trim may be all it takes.
- **Turn it off before you touch it** — switch the charger off and confirm the line is cold before handling any wire.

★ Talk me through it on the phone

If you get an alert and aren't sure where to start, call me. I can often help you work down the list right there on the phone for a \$49 remote session, or come out for a visit if it needs hands-on eyes. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes to sidestep

A few avoidable slip-ups account for most of the disappointment with fence monitors. Now you'll see them coming.

- **Buying a texting monitor with no signal** where it sits — a connected monitor out of Wi-Fi and cell range can't tell you anything.
- **Letting the monitor's own battery die**, which looks just like a quiet fence and leaves you blind.
- **Expecting it to find the fault** — it tells you THAT, not WHERE, so you still have to walk the line.
- **Ignoring the weeds** all season, then blaming the charger when the voltage finally sags.
- **Touching the line to 'test' it** by hand instead of using a proper tester — a bad habit that eventually bites.

! The one that undoes everything

A monitor with no way to reach you is just an expensive blinking light. Before you buy a connected one, make sure it will actually have signal where it needs to sit — that's the piece people skip.

A simple planning checklist

Walk through these before you spend a dollar. Each answer points you toward the right monitor for your place.

- ☐ I know roughly how much fence I run, and whether it's one loop or several.
- ☐ I've decided whether a light I check daily is enough, or I want a text.
- ☐ If I want a text, I've checked there's Wi-Fi or cell signal where the monitor would sit.
- ☐ I know where my charger is and whether there's an outlet near it.
- ☐ I've thought about how the monitor itself stays powered.
- ☐ I know a monitor tells me THAT, not WHERE, and I'm okay walking the line.
- ☐ I've got the charger's grounding and surge protection on my list for a pro to check.

★ Bring me the answers

Fill in those blanks and you've done the hard part. Send them my way and I'll help you pick the simplest monitor that keeps you in the loop — no overbuying. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

If you rent, or it's only for a season

Not every fence is permanent. Rotational grazing, rented pasture, and temporary paddocks all call for something you can pick up and move.

For temporary or portable fence, a simple battery or solar monitor that clips on and comes off cleanly is the friendly choice. It travels with the paddock, needs no outlet, and doesn't tie you to any one spot. For rented ground, that same flexibility means you leave nothing behind when the season ends.

If you graze rented pasture well away from your buildings, a cellular monitor may be the only way to get an alert home at all, since there's no Wi-Fi of yours to lean on out there. Just confirm the signal before you count on it, and remember any service cost that comes with it.

✓ Keep it simple and portable

For fence that moves with the season, the best monitor is the one that's easy to move with it. A clip-on, self-powered unit you can trust beats a fancier one that's a chore to relocate every few weeks.

Keeping it working, year after year

Once the monitor's in place, a little attention keeps it honest. None of this is hard; it's just worth knowing.

Test it now and then on purpose — switch the charger off for a moment and make sure the monitor actually notices and alerts you the way it should. A watchman you never test is one you're only hoping is awake. A quick test a few times a year builds real confidence in it.

Keep an eye on the monitor's own power, keep its contacts and clips clean where it touches the line, and make sure a connected one still has its signal as seasons and leaves change. If it ever stops alerting on your test, treat that as the problem to fix, not a quirk to ignore.

✓ A yearly look-over

Once a year — maybe when you walk the whole fence anyway — check the monitor's battery, give it a test, and look over the ground rods and splices. A short habit in good weather prevents a cold-weather surprise.

What to do yourself, and when to call

Plenty of this you can handle. A few parts are genuinely jobs for someone with the right license — and knowing which is which keeps you safe.

Choosing a monitor, clipping it on, clearing weeds, walking the line with a tester, and swapping its batteries are all things a handy person — or I — can set up and show you. Getting a connected monitor onto your Wi-Fi or confirming it has cell signal is right up my alley too.

Anything involving the charger's wiring, an outlet, the grounding system, or surge protection is electrical work for a licensed electrician. And a fence that's shorting intermittently in a way you can't find may want a pro with a proper fault finder. I help you plan the whole thing and line up the right pro for those parts — I don't do licensed electrical work myself.

★ One call, start to finish

You don't have to juggle it all. I can help you pick and set up the monitor, get it talking to your phone, and coordinate an electrician for the charger and grounding, so you deal with one friendly person. Call (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask before you commit

Whether you're talking to a dealer or to me, these questions get you to the right monitor for your place.

Q: How will this monitor reach me — a light, a text, or a call?

Make sure the answer matches your routine. If you want a text, confirm it has a clear way to send one from where it will sit.

Q: Does it need Wi-Fi or cell signal, and do I have that where it goes?

A connected monitor is only useful where it can reach out. Check the signal at its spot before you count on it, not after.

Q: How is the monitor itself powered, and will it warn me of a low battery?

You want to know the watchman won't quietly go dark. A low-battery warning is a feature worth having.

Q: Is there an ongoing service cost for the connected part?

Some cellular monitors carry a small recurring fee. Rates and fees vary — ask for the current terms so there's no surprise on the bill.

✓ There's no silly question

If a dealer makes you feel foolish for asking how it works, that's a reason to find someone else. A plain answer to a plain question is the least you should expect.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks thinking about a fence monitor, answered plainly.

Q: Will a monitor tell me exactly where my fence is broken?

No — that's the honest limit. It tells you THAT the fence is down, not WHERE. You'll still walk the line, though a second monitor out at the far end can tell you which stretch to check first.

Q: Can I get a text when my fence goes down?

Yes, with a connected monitor — as long as it has a way to reach out, either your internet or its own cell signal. Out past the buildings, confirm the signal's there before you rely on it.

Q: What usually makes a fence go dead in the first place?

Most often weeds growing into the line, then a broken or shorted wire, a poor ground, or a failing charger. Three of those four you can find with a walk and a tester; the charger is electrical work.

Q: Is it safe to test the fence by touching it?

Please don't. The shock is meant to move a large animal and it's genuinely dangerous for some people. Use a proper fence tester, and turn the charger off before you ever handle the wire.

★ Still weighing it up?

Keeping stock where they belong is worth a good night's sleep. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll find the simplest monitor that actually keeps you in the loop — and I'll line up an electrician for the charger side if it needs one.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made knowing the moment your electric fence goes down feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home — barn, shop, and all — work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical, trenching, or tower work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Two Kinds of Fence Monitor

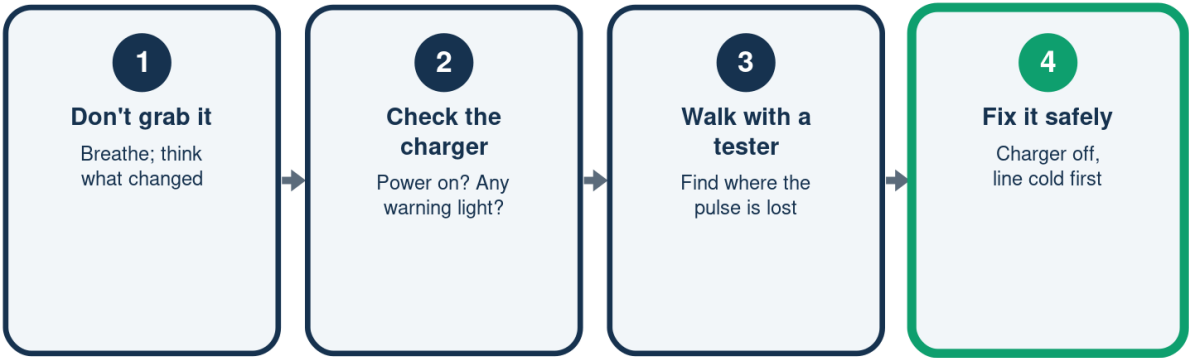
How each one lets you know something's wrong

	How it warns you	Best when
Light-only	A light to check	Fence seen daily
Connected	Texts or calls you	Fence out of sight
Far-end unit	Watches the far run	Long fence lines
Fault finder	You carry & walk	Pinning the spot

A monitor raises the alarm; finding the fault is still a walk.

When the Alert Comes In

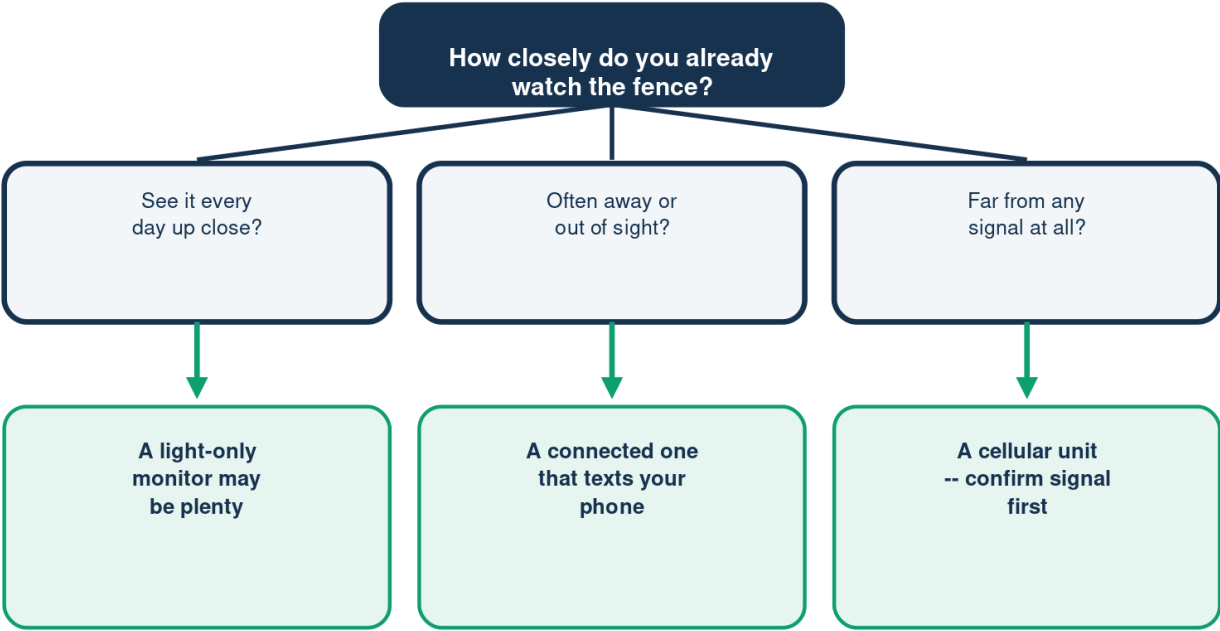
A calm way to work through a down fence



Work the list in order and most faults turn up quickly.

A Light, or a Text?

Let your routine pick the monitor



A texting monitor with no signal where it sits can't warn you.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

What Drains a Fence

The usual suspects, and who handles them

	What it is	Who fixes it
Weeds on line	Power bleeds off	You, with a trim
Broken wire	A short to ground	You or fence hand
Bad ground	Weak circuit	You, add rods
Bad charger	Electrical fault	A licensed pro

Three of four you can find with a walk; the charger is a pro's job.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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