

Car Versus Pole Accident Triggers Rare Power Surge

It is easy to predict that power outages will occur during windstorms, but on the night of February 5, 2019, residents of Central Park and surrounding areas did not expect a Chevy Suburban to drive off Highway 12 into a PUD transmission pole, causing an outage that affected over 7,000 customers, some for almost 24 hours.

"This was an event that rarely occurs in Grays Harbor County," said Operations Director Steve Easton. "The driver hit a pole carrying a high-voltage main transmission line that delivers 115,000 volts of electricity into town, and the impact severed the pole in half. Without anything to hold them up, the transmission and distribution lines under it collapsed onto one another, sending a brief surge of electricity down the power lines, and into neighboring homes."

Dispatchers quickly began to reroute power from adjoining circuits to bring customers in Montesano and Aberdeen, including the majority of Central Park residents, back into power. Some of the approximately 400 customers closest to the accident site were without power until the late afternoon of the following day, while line crews replaced the 85-foot transmission pole, restrung the lines and repaired damage to system equipment.

Lasting just millionths of a second, the surge in voltage, which was many times the normal voltage transmitted into homes, damaged customer appliances and electrical devices, including heat pumps, televisions, stoves and PUD-issued meters. The entire PUD meter department, and two line department servicemen, worked overnight over a two-day period to replace burned up meters to restore power to the area. There is no charge to the ratepayer to replace a meter damaged from a power surge.



Broken insulators mark the spot where a destroyed transmission pole stood.



Commission Meeting Dates

Meetings are held in the Nichols Building, 220 Myrtle Street, Hoquiam.

March 2019

Monday - March 4

Monday - March 18

April 2019

Monday - April 8

Monday - April 22

Regular business meetings are scheduled to begin at 4:30 pm. A one hour workshop (3:30 to 4:30 pm) will precede each business meeting, unless otherwise noted. The public is welcome to attend all commission meetings, special meetings, workshops and public hearings. **Public comment periods are included at the open and close of every meeting.**

Commission meetings may be cancelled and special meetings may be scheduled. Please visit our website (www.ghpud.org) for updated information.

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Commissioners Corner

by Arie Callaghan, District 1



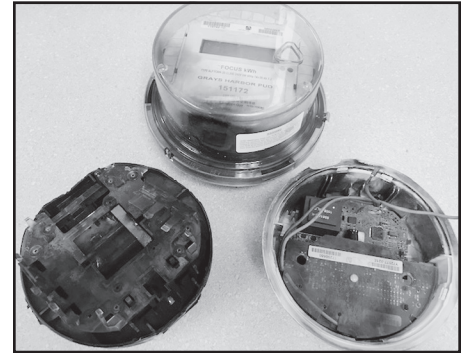
Even with all of the system upgrades and vegetation management the PUD has done, there is still no way to completely prevent the accidents that can cause a power outage and in some cases, a large power surge. Windstorms, branches weighed down by snow or wet leaves, overzealous armature loggers have all played a role in causing outages. However, every now and then we see an outage the likes of which we do not often see.

As you read on page one of this newsletter, last month a car vs. pole accident caused a power surge of 115 kv transmission energy through distribution lines. This doesn't happen often. These high voltage lines are required by law to have a certain amount of clearance between them and the distribution lines. However, when a power pole is completely severed by a car or a tree falls directly into the lines, properly hung lines can still come into contact with each other.

The PUD has the best equipment available and follows the best practices to protect against these surges, but it takes just a millisecond when these lines cross for the high voltage to back feed, before breakers will open and shut the power off. Depending on where the problem happens, it can do a lot of damage to people's property.

With an auto vs. pole accident, the liability would fall with the driver's insurance carrier. Unfortunately, there are still motorists on the road who do not have insurance, therefore the repair and replacement of damaged items comes back to the homeowner. In some cases, this can add up to thousands of dollars. This whole process is heart wrenching for our customers, but there are steps that can help reduce risk.

Surge protectors for your home electrical equipment can help provide a shield between electronics but they are not necessarily equipped to handle all strengths of power surges. Be sure to do your research. This incident served as a good reminder to verify personal and business insurance coverage and deductible amounts. Not all policies cover power surges where the cause occurs off-site from the insured location. In cases like this where a driver was uninsured, as well as in the case of lightning strikes, trees that fall over power lines, etc., your personal insurance may be your only recourse.



PUD Will Delay 2019 Rate Increase

The Grays Harbor PUD will put off increasing customer rates for one month. Originally scheduled to take effect on April 1, the proposed 2.5% increase will now go into effect on May 1.

"When the Board of Commissioners approved the 2019 budget we delayed the rate increase until the spring so we could factor in any weather or market changes," said Commission President Russ Skolrood. "The colder than expected weather will allow the utility to hold off on increasing rates for an extra month."

The proposed increase was driven by increased power costs of over a half-million dollars and a projected 2.9% increase in Bonneville Power Administration costs scheduled to take effect in October.

"Rate increases are not something the utility or the board take lightly," said Skolrood. "As power costs rise, so do the costs for the PUD. However, we continue to work with Bonneville and other power providers to ensure that the needs of our customers are known and that we provide power at the lowest cost we can afford."

ENERGY, an informational newsletter, is published monthly for families and businesses energized by Grays Harbor PUD.

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