



CONNECTED

The Newsletter of Cowlitz PUD

Volume 10, No. 4

Advanced Metering Will Offer PUD Customers New Options, Flexibility

Picture this: It's a sub-freezing winter day and your house is cold. The electric furnace is already working overtime to keep up, plus you've turned the thermostat up a couple of degrees to warm things up.

While we all know this will cause the meter to turn faster and drive up the electric bill, we do it anyway for the sake of staying warm. But wouldn't it be nice to know immediately how much that decision to turn up the thermostat just cost us?

In today's world you aren't able to determine the cost impact of that cold weather until the PUD reads your meter and sends a bill later in the month. And even when you get the bill it's impossible to tell how much electricity was used in any one- or two-day period.

But that scenario is about to change with the advent of Cowlitz PUD's new advanced metering infrastructure. Using a signal carried via power lines and fiber optic communications, Cowlitz PUD will soon be able to access a meter reading and other electronic data from your meter in approximately six seconds.

We began planning for advanced metering over a year ago, when a team of our employees began working together to determine exactly what type of system was the best fit for Cowlitz PUD and our customers. Our research led us to choose Cannon Technologies.

Inside This Issue:

- Budget Pay Sign-Ups Underway
- New Groundwires Guard Against Theft
- A Message from the General Manager

This summer the PUD will start the actual installation of the new high-tech Cannon system, which will include new meters for about 2,000 business and residential customers located in the vicinity of our Columbia Way substation in Longview. Assuming testing goes well with this group, we expect to install about 11,000 meters per year beginning in 2008. The new advanced system should be fully in-place and functional in 2011.

"Cowlitz PUD is building our grandchildren's electric system."

– PUD Commissioner Buz Ketcham

Advanced metering will allow customers some exciting new opportunities, including:

Real time meter readings for your home or business – In the near future, you will have the opportunity to set-up a password and go online to see how much electricity you are using in an hour, day, week or any time period you want to know about. You can find out immediately how much electricity you used on that chilly day when you turned up the thermostat, or to see how your energy conservation efforts are working out.

Flexible billing dates – Many banks and credit companies allow you to pick your billing date, to best match your personal needs. With advanced metering you can pick what day of the month you want your meter read and PUD bill sent.

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New Ground Wires Offer No Value to Thieves

Metal theft continues to be a major problem across the country, including right here in Cowlitz County. Thieves, looking to recycle metals for cash are behind a rash of thefts from power poles and construction sites, and break-ins at Pacific Northwest electric substations. This creates an urgent safety concern for electric utilities.

As reported previously in this newsletter and in The Daily News, Cowlitz PUD line workers are busy replacing ground wires clipped and stolen from many of the power poles in the county. Cowlitz PUD is making progress toward replacing every one of the thousands of copper ground wires which have been damaged and stolen.

The replacement wire we are using offers no scrap value because it is mostly steel and contains virtually no copper, which in the past has been the object of the metal thieves. The new wire is also nearly impossible to cut, which foils a quick slash-and-grab opportunity for a thief.

Last October a man was electrocuted at a Clark Public Utilities power station near La Center, after apparently cutting his way through a fence and attempting to steal copper ground wires worth a few dollars on the scrap market. He made contact with energized, high-voltage equipment and was burned to death immediately.

Cowlitz PUD takes this very seriously. Copper ground wires ensure that electricity has a safe path to follow in case of damaged or failing electrical equipment on a power pole or in a substation. When thieves cut holes in fences of live substations or tamper with wiring, they put innocent bystanders and PUD employees at risk.

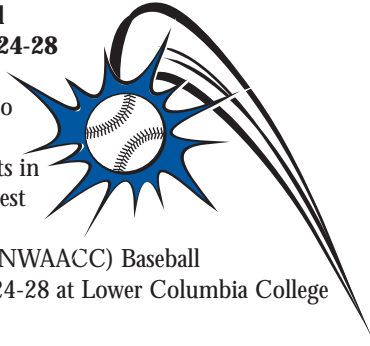
We need your help

If you see any kind of suspicious activity around any Cowlitz PUD substations, power poles or construction sites, please call 9-1-1 immediately and report it. You can also call the PUD 24-hours a day at (360) 423-2210 or (800) 631-1131 to report suspicious activity or if you see damage at a substation or to any PUD equipment.

What's Happening

LCC Hosting Baseball Championships May 24-28

Make your plans now to attend one of the premiere sporting events in the region, the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges (NWAACC) Baseball Championships, May 24-28 at Lower Columbia College in Longview.



Don't miss out on five great days of baseball, featuring 15 games between the Northwest's top eight teams. Call LCC Athletics (360) 442-2470 for more details and ticket options.

As space is available each month in Connected, Cowlitz PUD offers a brief listing to promote programs and activities for public, non-profit groups with wide interest in Cowlitz County (on a first-come, first-served basis). Send your request to: whathappening@cowlitzpud.org

Budget Plan Enrollment Period Underway

Cowlitz PUD residential customers can sign-up for the popular budget payment plan through August.

Many customers utilize this convenient option, which allows you to make 12 equal monthly payments to help avoid unpredictable seasonal electric billings. To qualify you must be a PUD residential customer and live in a residence with at least one year of billing history. Your account must be paid in full before starting.

Every 12 months the PUD reviews all budget pay accounts and adjusts the monthly payment accordingly, based on past electric usage and the balance on the account. Find out more about budget pay at www.cowlitzpud.org or call the PUD to sign-up or to find out if you qualify.

YOU CAN PAY YOUR PUD BILL ONLINE

www.cowlitzpud.org

Debit or credit card (Visa/MasterCard)



Change a Light, Change the World Save on ENERGY STAR® qualified CFLs

Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs (CFLs) save you money on your electric bill and are now on sale for as low as \$2.99 per four-pack at Home Depot, Lowe's, Wal-Mart and Costco, through May 31.

These energy-efficient light bulbs provide a high-quality light while using less energy, plus they last far longer than standard light bulbs. They come in a variety of shapes, sizes and wattages suitable for all household applications. CFLs are ideal where lights are on for long periods of time or in hard-to-reach places.

By choosing CFLs you help preserve energy resources and our environment while reducing your own electric bill and the time you need to spend replacing burned-out light bulbs.

These limited time prices are offered by a partnership among Cowlitz PUD, ENERGY STAR, Bonneville Power Administration and manufacturers Philips, Feit Electric, TCP and GE.

Advanced Metering *continued from page 1*

Automated meter reading – The advanced system will allow the PUD to obtain your meter reading at a computer in our main office. It's accurate and more convenient for you. No PUD employees who have worked as meter readers will lose their job. Some have taken new assignments already and the others will eventually move into new positions by 2011.

Advanced metering will also provide the PUD information to help manage our electric loads and to better identify where the power is out when an outage takes place. Someday we even expect to offer special time-of-day electric rates and voluntary load management options. As PUD Commissioner Buz Ketcham said at a recent Board meeting, "Cowlitz PUD is building our

grandchildren's electric system."

Once installation begins in July or August, watch for regular articles in this newsletter and information on our website addressing advanced metering. Stay tuned – we think you will find it to be an exciting new world with advanced metering.

Commission Activities



In March the Cowlitz PUD Board of Commissioners:

- **Joined commissioners and staff members from other Washington PUDs to attend the American Public Power Association's Legislative Rally March 11-15 in Washington D.C.** Cowlitz PUD's board and general manager met with members of Congress and their staff members to discuss pertinent energy issues like BPA Residential Exchange, NW salmon recovery and climate change.
- **Awarded a contract to rebuild 2.1 miles of transmission and distribution power lines on West Side Highway, between Lexington and Castle Rock.** The contract is with DJ's Electric (low bid) and the contract amount is \$177,175.
- **Approved a resolution authorizing further implementation of the potential water system ownership transfer with Beacon Hill Sewer District.**

Upcoming meetings (all beginning at 1:00 p.m.):

Tuesday, April 10

Tuesday, April 24

Tuesday, May 8

PUD Board meetings are open to the public and are held in the PUD Auditorium, 961 12th Avenue in Longview. On a trial basis the start time of the meetings has been moved forward one hour to 1:00 p.m., until further notice. Please consult www.cowlitzpud.org for up-to-the-minute Board meeting dates and times.

From the General Manager's Point-of-View...

Our local and regional economy is strong. We're seeing population growth, more houses, expanding businesses and new businesses are starting up. Growth also means a greater demand for electricity.



The NW is blessed with an abundance of low-cost hydropower. Over time it has powered regional economic development in aerospace, aluminum smelting, pulp and paper – and has irrigated the Eastern Washington desert. Hydro is relatively environmentally benign, at least compared to the impacts of mining and burning fossil fuels. We are not dependent upon any foreign production of this energy.

But this supply of federal hydropower won't meet our growth much longer. New sources of generation are needed to meet future loads. Maybe the biggest job at hand for utility leaders is to join with state legislators and Congress to figure out how to balance out the potential new sources of power to serve the region.

Part of that answer is wind and other renewable sources. Cowlitz PUD's participation in the White Creek Wind Project is a significant commitment. But we must deal with the fact that the wind does not blow all the time.

The hydrosystem can turn the intermittency of the wind into predictable firm power. It's simple: Store water behind the dams when the wind is blowing and use it to generate power when it's not.

That concept would have worked 25 years ago when I first got in this business. But a federal judge in Oregon, relying on the Endangered Species Act, has limited the ability to use the hydrosystem. Driven by court orders, the passage of water through the river is now largely determined by fish considerations, not power generation.

The next option is natural gas fired generation plants. They can be started up quickly to respond to changing loads and the gaps in wind generation. But gas is expensive. The natural gas industry continues to explore and drill, but it's a finite resource and not prevalent here. We can import liquefied natural gas, an idea with plenty of controversy. It is not yet clear that the construction of a significant number of LNG facilities will take place in this country. And this fuel would come from parts of the world that may be less-than-reliable suppliers.

Coal? The U.S. has a supply that would last decades. And it's cheap. But traditional coal plants tend to be what we call "baseload". They don't ramp up-and-down quickly, not helpful for following load changes or wind energy production. Plus we are wrestling with global warming caused by increasing levels of carbon in the atmosphere, and coal is a leading contributor. As of press time the Washington Legislature was expected to pass a climate change bill. It could include language that would limit the use of coal, whether in a conventional plant or even when using the new IGCC technology at the plant proposed in Kalama.

That leaves the option of nuclear power. Carbon emissions aren't a factor, but a nuclear plant provides even less operating flexibility than a coal plant. They are expensive to build, assuming you could find a place that would permit one to be built. Nobody has even tried for 20 years. For years society has been trying to figure how to dispose of the waste products in a remote mountain in Nevada, without success. If not there, then where?

I write this column to try and put into perspective the difficult balancing act electric utilities and generators face today. The bottom line for our customers is an adequate supply of electricity is vital to economic prosperity and a modern way of life. There are environmental consequences and trade-offs, and likely greater costs. But we must figure out a way to get there.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Brian Skeahan". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Brian Skeahan
General Manager

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