



# CONNECTED

The Newsletter of Cowlitz PUD

Volume 9, No. 11

## Metal Thefts are Costly, Deadly



It's a problem that has become an epidemic in the utility industry. As a PUD customer, it's costing you money. And in at least one local case it has proven deadly.

"It" is the theft of copper wire and other metals used by electric utilities. Thieves, looking to recycle the metals for cash, are behind a rash of break-ins at Pacific Northwest electric

substations and thefts from power poles and construction sites in recent months.

BPA, which owns 75 percent of the region's transmission electrical grid, has reported a significant increase in metal theft over the past several months from substations scattered across Washington, Oregon, Idaho and western Montana.

### Cowlitz County is not immune to this serious problem

At Cowlitz PUD we have seen an alarming number of recent thefts of copper ground wires and other materials from job sites, power poles and four of our substations.

PUD substations can have 69,000 to 230,000 volts of electricity flowing through them. In October a 47-year-old 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 wiring worth a few dollars on the scrap market. He made contact with energized, high-voltage equipment and was burned to death immediately.

Our biggest concern is for the safety of our employees and customers. Copper ground wires are critical to absorbing energy in case a line feeding a substation is cut off by a fallen tree, wind or other accident. Without them there is a hazard for our employees reporting to the site. When thieves cut holes in fences of live substations or tamper with wiring, they also put innocent bystanders at risk.

Cowlitz PUD has spent thousands of dollars already on repairs and replacement materials and has budgeted for another \$100,000 in 2007. These costs are recovered through your electric rates.

### 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.

### Inside This Issue:

- Commission Activities
- Be Ready for Winter Power Outages
- A Message from the General Manager

**YOU CAN PAY YOUR PUD BILL ONLINE**

[www.cowlitzpud.org](http://www.cowlitzpud.org)

Debit or credit card (Visa/MasterCard)

# DON'T LET POWER OUTAGES TAKE YOU BY SURPRISE THIS WINTER

It is the time of year when high winds and inclement weather are more likely to cause your power to go out. **If you encounter a downed power line, stay away from it and never touch objects that are in contact with downed lines. Teach your children to assume that any downed utility line carries electricity and is dangerous.**

Report a power outage to the PUD immediately and any evidence of what may have caused it (downed lines, a loud noise, a flash of light, trees on lines, etc.). Please do not call 911 to report your power is out.

If you receive multiple busy signals or a recording while calling the PUD, there is a good chance your neighbors have already notified us about a power outage. Cowlitz PUD service crews are called out at the onset of a power outage. If you believe your outage is an isolated incident, please leave us a voice mail with full details.

## Help the Environment with Your Voluntary Purchase of Green Power - Only \$2 a Month!

Cowlitz PUD's Renewable Resource Energy program supports the further development of environmentally friendly "Green Power" in the Northwest.

Cowlitz PUD purchases green tags from Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF), a non-profit environmental organization that invests in several Northwest wind and solar power projects.

**TO PARTICIPATE**  
Join Cowlitz PUD's Renewable Resource Energy Program and pay just a monthly supplemental charge of \$2 per block for 100 kilowatt-hours of green power. Call our Customer Service Department at (360) 423-2210 or toll free in WA at (800) 631-1131 to sign up.

## Contact Information

Cowlitz PUD - 961 12th Avenue  
PO Box 3007 Longview, WA 98632  
(360) 423-2210 - Toll free WA (800) 631-1131  
website: [www.cowlitzpud.org](http://www.cowlitzpud.org)  
Email: [customercomments@cowlitzpud.org](mailto:customercomments@cowlitzpud.org)

## When the power goes out:

- If it's dark, grab a flashlight so you can find your way around. (Make sure you have one or more working flashlights on hand with extra batteries and know where they are so you can find them in the dark.)
- Turn down your thermostat(s) and turn off the circuit breaker for your water heater. This will help reduce initial demand for electricity when power is restored. Wait a few minutes after the power is back on to restore normal settings.
- Unplug any equipment with electronic circuitry — like computers, televisions, DVD players, video game consoles and microwaves — and do not turn this equipment on again until lights have returned to their normal brightness.
- Do not open the refrigerator or freezer when the power is off. A refrigerator keeps food cold for a few hours during an outage, while food in the freezer can stay frozen for 2-3 days — if the door remains closed.
- If you use a generator, please follow the manufacturer's instructions. A generator must be placed outside for proper ventilation while running. Never use a generator inside your home or garage.
- Leave a porch light switched on, as well as a light inside your home. This will let you and PUD repair crews know when service has been restored.



Cowlitz PUD's website has an electrical safety section with lots of helpful information. The time to check it out is now, before the power goes out.

**Cowlitz PUD's 24-hour dispatch center:**  
**(360) 423-2210 or toll free (800) 631-1131**

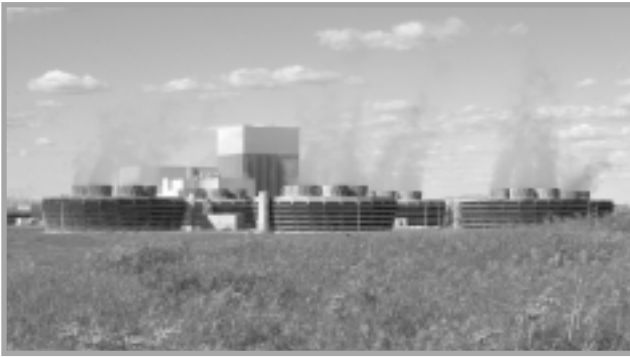
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GENERAL MANAGER: Brian Skeahan  
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## COWLITZ PUD'S FUEL MIX

According to data provided by the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development, here's the most recent breakdown of Cowlitz PUD's fuel sources:

<u>Fuel type</u>	<u>PUD mix</u>
Coal	5.7%
Hydroelectric (Water)	81.8%
Nuclear	10.2%
Other*	2.3%

*\*Includes the following fuel types – biomass, landfill gases, natural gas, petroleum and wind.*



*A little over 10 percent of Cowlitz PUD's wholesale electricity is provided by BPA from the Columbia Generating Station nuclear facility near Richland, WA.*

## Commission Activities



During its October meetings, the Cowlitz PUD Board of Commissioners:

- **Reviewed the preliminary 2007 electric and water system budgets.** The Board set budget workshops for November 21 and 28 and is expected to finalize the budgets at its regular meeting on December 12.
- **Determined that it is not necessary to request a property tax levy next year.** By law PUDs can levy a tax on property owners in their service territory, however Cowlitz PUD has never done so.
- **Accepted the highest bid of \$37,900 on the surplus property for sale on Cook-Ferry Road near Castle Rock.** Three bids were received. The appraised value of the property is \$29,000.
- **Approved a three-year plan for purchasing primary underground cable** to meet growth and replacement needs.

### Upcoming meetings:

Tuesday, November 14  
Tuesday, November 21 (budget workshop)  
Tuesday, November 28  
Tuesday, December 12

PUD Board meetings are open to the public. Meetings are held in the PUD Auditorium, 961 12th Avenue in Longview at 2:00 p.m.

Please consult [www.cowlitzpud.org](http://www.cowlitzpud.org) for up-to-the-minute Board meeting dates and times.

## Senior Discount Rate Sign-up Ends December 1

Cowlitz PUD's Senior Discount Rate (SDR) offers a 10 or 20 percent electric rate reduction for qualified low-income residential customers, age 65 and older. You must have been signed up for electric service for the past 12 months and have a gross annual income of \$19,800 or less.

**Friday, December 1 is the last day to sign-up.** Call CAP at (360) 425-3430 to make an appointment to see if you qualify.

## Customer Information Available

Information about Cowlitz PUD's electric rates and customer policies is available in our Annual Customer Report. The report is available on our website or can be sent to you at your request.

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

An advantage you have as a public power customer is top utility management staff and policy makers are accessible to you. If you have an issue with your PUD, you'll find a local office staffed with local people who will do their best to get you an answer. And every two years you have a voice in determining the policy makers – your PUD commissioners – via the ballot box.



More and more we hear from customers who don't fully understand as a consumer-owned utility, the Public Utility District exists solely for the benefit of the customers it serves. Our rates are non-profit based on our costs. Our business is open to public input.

If you ever have a question or comment about how we are doing business please call our office. You can also talk to a PUD employee you know, send an email or stop by the office to ask questions. The key is to let us know right away.

The PUD employee responsible for the decision or process you are questioning will get your inquiry and is responsible to respond. If their answer does not satisfy you, contact a department director, the chief operating officer and/or me. (I will add that we also appreciate hearing from you when you think we do things right!)

Here's a perfect example: Earlier this fall BPA said it was cutting wholesale power rates a little and also announced it was their fourth rate cut since 2004. After reading this in the newspaper, a PUD customer emailed us asking why Cowlitz PUD's rates were not going down when its major power supplier had cut rates four times. Great question.

That email was delivered to a PUD staff member who answers those kinds of questions. He called the customer and verified that BPA rates had dropped four times since 2004, but had also increased two times in that period. He explained the net gain was the equivalent of a three percent decrease to Cowlitz PUD residential customers.

However, during the same period the cost of electricity from the PUD's other wholesale sources had increased greatly. So essentially the slight reduction in BPA rates in 2004-2006 offsets the other suppliers' higher costs. This has allowed

Cowlitz PUD rates to remain the same as they were in October 2003.

The customer told us that upon reading the BPA article in the newspaper she first considered writing a letter-to-the-editor about it, but decided to first check the facts with the PUD. After hearing our description she was satisfied and thanked us for the information. We thanked her for taking the time to call us first.

Now if this customer had not been satisfied with our staff response, the next step would have been to contact the PUD Board of Commissioners. These are elected officials who ultimately have authority for PUD policies. They hold open meetings twice a month, their phone numbers are listed and their email addresses are posted on our website. They want to hear from you. You are the electorate.

During my 22 months as General Manager at Cowlitz PUD I have stressed the importance of open and consistent communications. By utilizing this newsletter, our new website and the information published or aired in the local media, we hope you feel more connected to the PUD and its daily business. That's our goal.

With 47,000 electric customers, 3,800 water customers, 1,800 miles of power lines and a hydro project, it is inevitable that Cowlitz PUD will have times when customers disagree with a decision or policy it makes.

If you ever find yourself in a position of disagreement with a PUD decision or policy, I have one request: Please communicate your concerns directly with us – first. Sometimes customers would rather just tell others about it or fire off a letter-to-the-editor. That should be the last step, for several reasons, not the least of which is it just isn't very effective.

Communication is a two-way street. When you need to talk to us, all we ask is that you come directly to us first. That's how the system is set up to work and how it will work best – for the PUD and for you.

Brian Skeahan, General Manager