



CONNECTED

The Newsletter of Cowlitz PUD

Volume 13, No. 12

Advanced Metering Project Reaches Milestone

Thanks to some hard work by our automated meter technicians and installers, all of Cowlitz PUD's residential customers now have a new digital electric meter. The last of the old meters was replaced in November.

All told 43,200 new residential meters have been installed in the 40 months since the project began, as well as another 4,500 new meters for business and industrial customers. About 600 more meters are left for the non-residential customers, which will be replaced in the first half of 2011.

We are also progressing on schedule with the other phases of the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) project. Computer hardware and software has been setup in 29 of 33 PUD substations and 75 miles of fiber optic lines are installed, with another 10 miles to go.

Most of the new electric meters are already communicating with the PUD. The power line connected to your home or business transmits the data from your meter to a Carrier Control Unit (CCU) in a nearby PUD substation, and from there the information travels to the server in the PUD office via the new fiber-optic lines.

We are already testing the performance of the meters and communication system and will continue that testing through 2011. So far the system is working very efficiently and accurately and we'll use 2011 to fine tune it.

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- Buying an Electric Vehicle?
- Energy Smart Electronics

Automated meter reading begins in 2012

The PUD will begin reading meters automatically by mid-2012. As we have noted previously, all Cowlitz PUD employees who previously served as meter readers have moved into other PUD jobs in recent years. The meter readers you see today work for a contract firm and were hired with the knowledge that their job would end in a few years.

Eventually the AMI will allow you to monitor your electric usage online and to set your own monthly billing date. Advanced metering will also provide the PUD information to manage electric loads and will help pinpoint who is out of power during an outage. Someday we will offer voluntary services like time-of-day rates and load management options.

When the PUD announced the AMI project in the summer of 2007, the plan was to install the meters by mid-2011 and launch the new system by late 2011. We'll meet our installation goal, however we decided awhile back to push back the system launch to customers until spring of 2012.

Why the delay? We are also in the midst of installing new Customer Information System (CIS) hardware and software. It will work in-tandem with the new metering system to provide the many new services to customers. It made more sense to wait a few months to "marry" these two new systems, rather than utilize the new automated meters with our old computer system for a few months, and then have to reconfigure it to the new CIS.

We look forward to completing these projects, which will allow us to offer you a variety of new services. We will keep you posted through 2011 on what to expect.

Purchasing an Electric Vehicle?



With the recent introduction and national advertising effort of some exciting new electric vehicles in the United States, we expect there will be interest among Cowlitz PUD customers. The PUD owns an electric vehicle and has had a good experience with it, so we encourage anyone interested to take a good look.

Our energy conservation staff members drive the 2009 electric plug-in hybrid pictured above and our stats show a real savings on fuel. Factoring in the combination of gasoline and electricity our plug-in Prius Hybrid uses, it has averaged 86.4 miles per gallon since June 2009. The average monthly electrical usage is 127.5 kilowatt hours, which costs \$6.53 at today's PUD residential electric rate.

If you purchase an electric car, we just ask that you let us know. Why? Some charging systems can use enough electricity that we need to know ahead of time to ensure the capacity and reliability of your electric service.

It's the same request we make of customers when they make a notable increase to their electric load. Anytime someone switches to electric heat from oil or gas, adds some new motors in a shop or builds a new addition on their house, a call to the PUD is necessary. The same is true with an electric car charging station.

We use that information to make sure the transformer and other electric infrastructure serving you is adequate to work reliably with the higher electric load.

We'll Need Information on Your Charging System

If you utilize a "Level 1" (120 volt) charging system, which is basically just a matter of plugging into a house outlet and using an existing circuit, chances are it will have a minimal effect on your electric load. That's how the PUD charges its electric car. In most cases no change to your PUD service will be needed.

Some people prefer a faster recharge and will invest in a "Level 2" (240 volt) charging station. It draws a much larger load, greater than an electric water heater. That's a notable increase in load at a residence, so a call to the PUD is in your best interest.

You can contact our New Services Department at (360) 423-2210 or (800) 631-1131. By not letting us know about a significant addition to your electric load, you are susceptible to erratic voltage and losing power due to a failed transformer, especially in the winter when usage is up.

YOUR SAFETY IS OUR PRIORITY

Using a ladder around the house? Carefully inspect the surrounding area beforehand to ensure no power lines are nearby. If you need to work near a power line serving your home or business, we will temporarily de-energize it at your request, allowing you to work more safely.

Need to trim a tree on private property where there's a power line nearby? Let us know and we'll send out a service crew to temporarily disconnect the power so you can work safely. We'll come back later and reconnect it when you're done trimming.

Can you tell the difference between an electric wire and a telephone/cable wire? Those wires look a lot alike, so if you have any doubt call the PUD before you work around them. It's safest to assume any wire is carrying electricity.

See a potentially unsafe situation? If you see a wire on the ground or hanging low, or showing signs of wear, call us and our trained electrical personnel will come inspect it and repair it, if needed.

STAY SAFE

Never hesitate to call Cowlitz PUD to assist. (360) 423-2210 or (800) 631-1131

What's Happening

Cowlitz County Habitat for Humanity

Cowlitz County Habitat for Humanity's home building for low-income families is a partnership effort and strengthens local families and our community. It is in need of donations and volunteers for upcoming home building projects.

Please visit the Habitat Store located at 1145 11th in Longview, open Wednesday-Saturday from 9 to 5 or call the Store at 636-6765.

To apply for a Habitat home, you can attend a mandatory homeowner orientation and application meeting on Wednesday, January 12, 2011 at 6:00 p.m., at the PUD Auditorium, 961 12th in Longview. Call 425-6177 to reserve your space.

Each month Cowlitz PUD offers this space to a non-profit group in Cowlitz County as an avenue to promote its activities (on a first-come, first-served basis). Send your request to: whats happening@cowlitzpud.org.



Contact: CCHFH
PO Box 1451
Longview, WA 98632
(360) 425-6177

RECYCLE THAT OLD REFRIGERATOR OR FREEZER YOU DON'T REALLY NEED...AND EARN \$30!

To find out if you qualify:
JACO Environmental (877) 577-0510
or www.cowlitzpud.org



Commission Activities



November 2010 highlights:

- **Held a public rate hearing** for the purpose of discussing a proposed January 2011 rate increase, and accepted comments from the general public.
- **Met with staff in two workshops** to draft the 2011 capital and operating budgets.
- **Held a joint meeting with the Beacon Hill Sewer District Board of Commissioners** to review the status of the transfer of the water system from the PUD to BHSD, scheduled to take place effective January 1, 2011.
- **Approved a staff recommendation** to renew the PUD's liability insurance coverage with Federated.

Upcoming PUD Board meetings:

Tuesday, December 28
Tuesday, January 11

These public meetings are held in the PUD Auditorium, 961 12th Avenue in Longview at 2:00 p.m. Please check our website for up-to-the-minute Board agendas, meeting dates and times.

Choosing and Maintaining Energy-Efficient Electronics

To protect an investment in a new large-screen television, the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance and Cowlitz PUD suggest shoppers consider these tips:



"Energy Forward" - Efficient Electronics carrying the bright orange "Energy Forward" button indicate they are among the best made today - and are at least 30 percent more energy efficient than the ENERGY STAR threshold.

Screen Size - On average a 52-inch LCD television uses two times more energy than a 32-inch LCD, according to an energy efficiency study by the technology website CNET.

Use a universal remote to power down TVs and other devices. Newer televisions don't use a lot of "vampire" power - power that is used even when the television is turned off

entirely. But some of the devices associated with your TV never turn off entirely. A cable set-top box with DVR uses 350 kilowatt hours of electricity a year (about \$18 on your electric bill). Switch off all vampire power by using a universal remote to power down all of the devices when you are not using them.

Control Your Viewing Environment - Reduced brightness means reduced electric use. The lower the ambient light, the lower you can set the TV's brightness, which actually improves picture quality. Control and reduce ambient light in the TV viewing area with window treatments. Position the TV so that it isn't facing a window, because the light will reflect back to the viewer.

Check out www.energyefficientelectronics.org to find out more.

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

We recently learned the disappointing news from CAP that the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding it receives from the Federal government will be basically cut in half the next 12 months.



In dollars and cents it means roughly a \$400,000 reduction in assistance available to help those in need with their heating bills from now until next September.

Our Credit Services staff members work closely with CAP, so we know firsthand how important these LIHEAP funds are to local citizens. Due to the economic downturn and higher unemployment the past two years, we've seen a growing number of customers needing assistance to pay their heating bills.

This includes many who previously had always paid their bill on time, but poor economic circumstances have now forced them to make tough choices on which bills to pay first.

My wife and I moved to Cowlitz County in 2003 and saw immediately that people here are extremely generous when it comes to helping others in need.

I know there are numerous causes and organizations in this world that help others and are very much worth donating your time and money to. If you are not already supporting the Warm Neighbor Fund, I'm asking you to also consider it for a charitable gift.

Last month in this newsletter we shared that Warm Neighbor has been around for 10 years now and our customers have given about \$350,000 in that time to help others.

The PUD collects the Warm Neighbor funds and sends them to CAP, which assists qualified, low-income Cowlitz County residents who are struggling to pay their winter electric bills.

In the face of the huge cut in LIHEAP this winter, along with the unavoidable increase in costs of electric service here and throughout the region, the Warm Neighbor program becomes all that much more important.

I'm pleased to share that our PUD employees are working together to raise funds to support Warm Neighbor. We have a Christmas raffle coming up, a weekly "jeans day" donation, and volunteer fund raising efforts like our bingo tent at the fair. I'm hoping we can raise upwards of \$10,000 this year from these efforts.

Please join me in making a voluntary donation to Warm Neighbor this holiday season. If you are already making a contribution consider bumping it up a little in 2011.

To contribute just add an extra amount to your next payment and note that amount on the space allotted on the front of your PUD bill.

Another way to give to Warm Neighbor is via a direct donation to CAP, which gives you the benefit of a tax deduction. During December CAP is conducting its annual Give to a Good Cause campaign and one option is to designate your gift (or part of it) to Warm Neighbor.

More than ever every little bit helps, and it's always appreciated. Thank you for being our customer. We look forward to the opportunity to continue serving you in 2011.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Skeahan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brian Skeahan
General Manager

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
Email: mailbox@cowlitzpud.org

CONNECTED is published by Cowlitz County PUD.
COMMISSIONERS: Buz Ketcham, Ned Piper,
and Mark McCrady
GENERAL MANAGER: Brian Skeahan
EDITOR: Dave Andrew