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Knowledge of fuses can ease problems

By DAVID STEINMETZ

When exploring the far reaches of your spacious one bedroom house, don't overlook that grey, metal box.

It's called the circuit breaker or fuse box and it's in every home, usually in the garage or back room.

The electricity for the entire house or apartment can be turned on or off by the main switch at the circuit breaker.

That is what should be done when having an electrical fire, for instance.

It is also possible to turn off the electricity for only a part of the house.

Here too, a fuse will "blow" or a switch turn off when too much electrical power is being drawn from the outside power line.

So, when the lights suddenly turn off, it may be because too many electrical devices are being used.

But if no fuse is found blown, and none of the switches at the box have turned off, there is probably an electrical outage in the area.

In this case, the circuit breaker for the hot water heater should be turned off — it is usually the top, left switch at the circuit breaker.

The master valve on the heater should also be turned off, and it can best be identified by calling EWEB, according to Tom Santee, EWEB community information representative.

If, on electric heat, thermostats should be turned down during an outage to reduce power use when the electricity does come back on.

A "brownout," which causes lights to dim but not go out, can damage refrigerators and other devices with electric motors.

They should be turned off until the lights come on complete-

ly, Santee says.

Heating oil is fairly safe, even if there is a "bad oil smell," according to Jan Kraal, Automatic Heat Company book-keeper.

However, natural gas is more dangerous. It can leak and easily ignite.

Though naturally odorless, it is treated with a highly odorous substance which allows a gas leak to be noticed.

The source may be a leaky pipe, a burner left on, or extinguished pilot light, but the best policy is to close the main shut-off valve and call the gas company.

The main valve will be on the pipe next to the meter, which is usually next to the house.

Northwest Natural Gas Company, which provides gas to the Eugene area, can have a serviceman there within two hours after a call.

While looking for the gas shutoff valve, also keep an eye out for the water shutoff valve, which is also often located outside.

This valve, also called the gate valve, is between the water meter and the house and shuts off all the house's water.

The gate valve can become very important when old, fragile pipes give way. The water running through them is set at a pressurization of about 50 pounds per square inch. So if that new swimming pool forming in the basement is too late for summer, either turn off the valve nearest the leak, or go right to the gate valve and turn off the whole system.

In addition to the gate valve, the sink shutoff valves under the sink stops the water going to the faucets, and there is a valve like the gate valve next to the water meter, which is near the street. It may be necessary to have a water utility serviceman turn it.

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