



Lauren Wimer Photographer

Starting in May, EWEB electric rates will increase by an average of 4.6 percent and 6.6 percent for residential customers, while water rates will increase 5.6 percent on average.

EWEB

continued from page 1

deterioration of EWEB's 23,000 mostly wooden power poles is an area of particular concern. Many of the poles themselves are at least 30 years old, while the poles are built to last only 40 to 50 years. Wooden cross arms on the poles are also breaking down, causing safety concerns, Robertson said.

Revenue from the increases will also be used to supply additional capacity to the Coburg Road region and other fast-growing areas, according to the release.

Although electric rates have increased nearly 50 percent during the past three years, Robertson said EWEB's rates are "about in the middle" compared to similar Northwest utilities.

"We're lower than three of the other four public utilities that serve central Lane County," Robertson said.

He added that the effect of the increases should be offset in late 2004 when the commissioners are expected to remove a 5.7 percent surcharge. The fee was implemented in 2002 to help EWEB recover from the energy crisis.

Senior Justin Valasek, who shares a house with several other students, said the rate increases are understandable because of the current economy. He said he does not expect the

increases to change his power consumption habits.

"I don't think (the rate changes) will affect us too much because we minimize our electrical consumption — we don't use heat during the winter," Valasek said.

However, junior Mia Leidelmeyer, who also lives off-campus, said the rate changes will adversely affect students, especially those who use electric heat and frequently leave their computers running. She said she uses heat and incurs large bills, especially during the winter.

"(The increase) makes me wish I had gas heat instead of electric heat — it would save me so much money," Leidelmeyer said.

She added that even students who are conscious of their power consumption cannot dramatically reduce their bills.

"Even if (students) try to conserve their heat, the (electric) budget is still going to be outrageous," Leidelmeyer said.

Robertson said the impact of the rate changes will be different depending on a client's power consumption and financial situation.

"Obviously, when you have a rate increase it's going to affect everyone's pocketbook," Robertson said.

Yet Valasek said he is concerned about the lack of electric service

RESIDENTIAL ELECTRIC RATE CHANGES

• April 2000 (8.5 percent average increase)

Monthly bill at 1,000 kWh: \$49.01

• April 2001 (5.4 percent average increase)

Monthly bill at 1,000 kWh: \$51.18

• October 2001 (3.6 percent average increase)

Monthly bill at 1,000 kWh: \$65.65

• April 2002 (2.6 percent average increase)

Monthly bill at 1,000 kWh: \$67.54

• May 2004 (6.6 percent average increase)

Monthly bill at 1,000 kWh: \$71.95

SOURCE: Eugene Water and Electric Board

options and regulation of utilities in Eugene, noting that EWEB is the only electricity provider in the city.

"The only concern I have is EWEB being a natural monopoly," Valasek said. "They have no incentive to keep their costs low."

Water service rates will also increase an average of 5.6 percent, with residential customers incurring a 6.4 percent raise on average. This translates to less than \$1 a month for average customers, according to the release.

The water rate increases will compensate for increasing operating costs such as wages and employee benefits, Robertson said.

Valasek said that a slightly larger water bill won't greatly affect him or his housemates.

"Our water bill is so low, especially compared to our electrical bill," he said. Leidelmeyer agreed.

"(The water bill) isn't as much of a concern for me as the electric bill is," she said.

Contact the state/city politics reporter at parkerhowell@dailyemerald.com.

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