

# Cold brings high bills

*Pacific Power says inclement weather to blame*

**By Emily Mentzer**  
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Power bill higher than expected? You're not alone.

Many in Polk County received power bills that were double what they were used to seeing.

Tom Gauntt, spokesman for Pacific Power, said the simple answer is people use more power when it is cold. "There weren't any major rate increases," he said. At the first of the year, a 0.6 percent increase went into effect. Depending on the days covered in the bill, that increase may be reflected.

Pacific Power charges consumers a few cents more for using more than 1,000 kilowatts in a billing cycle.

"The average use for folks is 800, so there's usually plenty of room," Gauntt said. "If we increase (the billing time), it starts stepping up in a pro-rated way. The higher rate wouldn't hit until you hit 1,300 kw hours."

Most billing cycles are about 28 days, Gauntt said, but many in Polk County said their cycle was 35 days last month.

Gauntt said the reasons behind a longer cycle are often because someone couldn't get out to read the meters.

Then, if a customer usually gets his or her meter read on Tuesday, for example, but the Pacific Power employee couldn't make it out, now that employee has to read all of Tuesday's meters along with all of Wednesday's meters, Gauntt said.

The flip side is that as Pacific Power meter readers get back on track, it could mean a shorter billing period next time, he said, meaning a lower-than-expected bill.

The power company does not regularly estimate someone's power bill, Gauntt said.

"That's something that sometimes happens, but in these cases when we know that there's potential to be a high amount, we don't want

## Heating

Simple ways to make your heating system run more efficiently:

**Pay attention to the thermostat** — Keeping the temperature a few degrees cooler can lower your heating bill and you can still be comfortable. Pacific Power recommends setting your thermostat to 68° to save energy.

Use a programmable or smart thermostat to set the temperature back automatically at night and while you're away from home during the day.

**Replace filters** — Check forced-air furnace filters regularly, and clean or replace them as often as once each month during the heating season. Shake reusable filters outside or spray them with a garden hose. Be sure they're dry before replacing them.

**Use window coverings to help insulate** — Drapes can add an extra layer of insulation to windows. Blinds also can insulate, but they aren't as effective. Keep your drapes closed at night and on sunny days, open the drapes and blinds to let in the sun's free heat, especially on the south side.

**Keep vents clear** — Don't block registers, baseboards, radiators or cold air returns. Air must circulate through and around them for maximum efficiency.

**Seal and insulate your ducts** — Seal heating ducts and insulate ducts that run through unheated spaces. You may be eligible to receive a cash incentive.

**Consider a heat pump** — If you have electric heat, consider installing a heat pump or ductless heat pump to increase energy efficiency. Heat pumps keep you warm in the winter and cool in summer. Look for the Energy Guide label that contains the SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) and HSPF (Heating Seasonal Performance Factor) energy ratings. Look for 9 HSPF and 16 SEER or higher. You may be eligible to receive a cash incentive.

— Source: PacificPower.net

to be guessing on something like that," he said.

Also, with kids out of school during the inclement weather and people staying home from work or running fewer errands, heaters have been on more throughout the day, as well as lights and other things.

"I have gas heat, but the fan is going that much more if it's cold and windy," Gauntt said. "Are you home more, you're cooking browines, the TV is on, the kids aren't at school."

He said with cold, windy weather, heaters and furnaces have to work harder to keep homes warm.

Turning down the thermostat while away is one way homeowners can save on energy costs, but Gauntt said not to turn them down too low, because it takes more energy to reheat the home.

Homeowners can take simple steps to decrease their energy costs without replacing every old appliance, Gauntt said.

"Not everyone can invest in a new furnace," he said. "Caulking is a simple, cheap thing."

Weather stripping helps, too, but those are things that may be difficult to think about when it's 15 degrees outside, Gauntt said.

"It's kind of a hassle, but a good idea," he said.

Weatherization and insulation help during the summer, too, Gauntt said.

"Even the simple thing of pulling your drapes helps keep heat in," he said. "Not everything's expensive, and they all add up."

For questions about your specific power bill: 888-221-7070. To read more about energy: pacificpower.net.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Dallas may use the block with Fire & EMS and the old RadioShack for a future PD.

# DPD building considered

**By Jolene Guzman**  
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — The city of Dallas is looking at its options for a future police facility.

Recently the city was approached about using the former Department of Human Services building in downtown Dallas as the site for a new police station.

Currently, the police station is at Dallas City Hall, 187 SE Court St.

City councilors Micky Garus and Paul Trahan were approached by the building owner, Rod Buchanan, about the city using the former DHS building for a police station. The state recently

completed a new building in Dallas on West Ellendale to house the Department of Human Services.

City Manager Ron Foggin said police staff toured the building, but the city had another option in the old RadioShack property that the city purchased in July.

"What we are working on right now is trying to identify a consultant that can help us better master plan the block east of us to help us better understand what can fit on that space and what is the best use of the funds moving forward," Foggin said.

He said the consultant will help the city decide if remodeling an existing building or building a new

one would be the most cost-effective.

"There's some analysis that we are hoping to get done in the next three to six months," Foggin said.

In other business, the city:

- Is trying to identify funding sources to seismically retrofit city hall. Foggin said the grant used to retrofit the fire station was awarded by the Department of Homeland Security.

"We are trying to figure out, is there a way we can use the police department space to make this building usable for those funds," Foggin said. "There's a possibility we can make that happen, so we are working on that."

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## NEW BRANCH MANAGER

First Community Credit Union is pleased to introduce Jessey Hodges as the new Branch Manager at its branch located at 372 E Ellendale Avenue, Dallas, Oregon.

Ms. Hodges began her career with First Community 7 years ago as a teller. She has worked in several locations but has fallen in love with the Dallas area and its residents. "I look forward to continuing to assist those in the community and show others what the First Community difference is all about!"

"Ms. Hodges is a valuable member of our team and this promotion is meant to recognize her for the exceptional contribution she makes," stated David Elmer, President/CEO.

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Monmouth: Amy Young  
(503) 838-1141, amybradish@windermere.com

Dallas: Nancie Rogers  
(503) 623-2333, nancierogers@windermere.com

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