

Local crews credited with July Fourth power restoration

Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

A power outage that disrupted Independence Day celebrations in Seaside and affected more than 8,000 customers was caused by a metallic-skinned helium balloon that got away, according to Pacific Power. The company originally reported a specialty crew from Portland was responsible for installing a new transformer to restore power. Later, after some local residents questioned the response, spokesman Ry Schwark said Clatsop County Pacific Power employees, not Portland crews, played the most important role in bringing the lights back on.

Among Clatsop County Pacific Power employees commended for their response were foreman Doug Peterson, Phil Kaplan and Larry Hoekstra, who were the first to respond when the outage occurred. They completed all the repair work, Schwark said. The Clatsop operations crew had power restored before the Portland crew arrived.

"This is what we knew at the time and told you," Schwark said, apologizing for the misinformation. "The Portland crew did some other work there, but it wasn't related to the repairs."

Seaside, Gearhart and parts of Warrenton were without power from about 4:40 to 10:20 p.m. as Pacific Power employees replaced the damaged equipment.

"We found unmistakable red, white and blue



The rather charred remains of the balloon that caused the power outage on the North Coast on the Fourth of July.

Mylar shreds when we did the repairs the evening of July 4," Steve McGrorty said. McGrorty is Pacific Power's operations manager for the North Coast.

Balloon turns out the lights

The balloon from a nearby celebration caused a main substation transformer to short circuit near Seaside Factory Outlet Center. Other equipment also was damaged on nearby poles.

"Balloons may seem like small things," Pacific Power Safety Manager Gene Morris said. "But when escaped balloons touch power lines or substations, even the smallest amount of metal content material can conduct electricity. This can interfere with lines, causing power fluctuations and outages."

When a balloon "gets in there in the wrong spot, it

Balloon 411

- Keep balloons indoors where they can't rise into overhead power lines or drift into contact with transformers or substations.

- Make sure each balloon's string is securely attached and short enough to control its direction.

- Attach a weight to the balloon's string so it cannot float away; and never intentionally release metallic balloons.

- Deflate balloons after the holiday to keep as a memento or dispose of properly. Birds and squirrels have been known to carry balloon remnants onto lines.

- Never chase a loose balloon across streets or attempt to retrieve a balloon from a power line or substation.

- If you notice a balloon near a power line, do not try to retrieve it. Report it to Pacific Power by calling 888-222-7070.

just basically short circuits the transmitting of the electricity," added Pacific Power spokesman Tom Gaunt.

As soon as the power went out, the Seaside Fire Department responded to the incident. The failed transformer had smoke coming from it, but flames

were not detected, Seaside Division Chief Chris Dugan said. There was not much for the fire department to do, he said, but they were told it would be a significant outage.

The second transformer at the substation that can provide backup was going through scheduled mainte-

nance and was not usable at the time, Gaunt said.

Emergency response

When the power went out, the city went into response mode and activated its Emergency Operations Center, headquartered at Seaside Police Department. All the city's department heads collaborated on how to collectively respond to the situation to alleviate the problem, Dugan said.

Usually a power outage is not a huge safety concern and does not activate the Emergency Operations Center, Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham said. Because it was Fourth of July, however, and there were throngs of people on the beach who mostly would be leaving at once, it caused some concern.

"You have an enormous amount of people trying to get off a relatively small

space, with limited avenues to flood out," Ham said.

Additionally, city staff wanted to have a contingency plan for the anticipated, post-fireworks heavy traffic when no traffic lights were in operation.

As part of its response, the city obtained several large light structures to set up at key locations throughout town, such as the Turn-around, the intersection of Roosevelt Drive and Broadway, the South Y and the North Y. Fortunately, power was fully restored at an optimal time — just as the fireworks show ended.

Before the show, the fire department also strategically stationed crews at three locations to respond to calls, since traffic becomes gridlocked once the fireworks are over, Dugan said.

Overall, during Fourth of July weekend, the department had 39 documented runs. Of the 39 runs, 25 were medical responses; five for fire alarms; three for fires, including two brush fires and the substation fire; two were public assists; one was for a motor vehicle accident; two were for fire investigations; and one was for an elevator rescue, unrelated to the power outage. No injuries were reported from the incidents, Dugan said.

Additionally, there were 15 reports of individuals missing children, or vice versa, he said.

Because of how dry this summer has been, Dugan said, he expected more brush fires. He said he believes people were aware of the heat and dryness and stayed alert and conscientious to decrease the risk.

Proposed changes to panhandler rules draw fire

Rules from Page 1A

"This is not a monetary issue, it's a morality issue," said Todd Irving, a traveling street performer known as Funkplastic.

Lisa Dooney, of Portland, said if community residents are concerned about panhandling or seeing homeless people on the streets, this isn't the way to handle it. No ordinance will make them disappear, she said.

"The way I was raised, it didn't matter if a person was begging or asking for help. You didn't ask if it went for booze, or drugs, or cigarettes or toilet paper. It didn't matter. What mattered was a person was asking for some help," Dooney said.

Additionally, many took issue with the \$50-per-day charge, which Irving said is "unprecedented." Sam Condron agreed, adding the way the amendment is written seems to be aimed directly at excluding

from Seaside homeless people who don't have an option except to solicit money from passers-by.

"By charging them \$50 per day, you're making that cost-prohibitive," he said. "You're making it cost-prohibitive for them to live, to eat, to sustain life. That's not fair to anybody."

Anne Danen, a working mother of two, also confronted the message she believes would be sent by passing the amendment.

"We want our nice, little town to appear to be something other than what it is," she said, later adding, "I can't afford \$50 per day. If I can't, what makes you think they can? Oh, but that's right — that's the point, isn't it?"

Those concerns were echoed by several people in the audience who engage in panhandling and said paying \$50 per day would be too much of a burden.

A few people offered possible solutions or different ways to mitigate panhandling and help homeless individuals.

"For me, pushing the envelope in terms of getting the housing and the food and the resources and the humanity to the people is a worthwhile cause," Eng said.

Irving and others talked about similar permits for panhandlers or street performers in other cities that carry a yearly fee of up to \$127, which might be more practical.

Seaside resident Angela Fairless also spoke against the council's tendency to do multiple readings in a single meeting — as was done with this ordinance June 29 — because it allows less time for public awareness and involvement. She described it as "a slap in the face of democracy," and suggested councilors take

more time to work through the process, especially when dealing with complicated or convoluted issues.

For instance, Fairless said, this ordinance would apply to children selling seashells or lemonade from a stand, and she suggested there could be an exemption for them.

Irving said the council needs to discuss what to do with the money brought in by the fees. He suggested putting it toward creating positive recreational outlets for youth.

After the public hearing, the councilors voted unanimously to table the ordinance to take the received comments under consideration.

No one spoke in favor of the ordinance, but Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham said the department gets numerous calls from people complaining about panhandlers and who see it as a livability issue.

City mulls regulating medical marijuana grow sites

Pot from Page 1A

The city currently has three areas zoned for industrial usage: the Seaside Factory Outlet Center east of Roosevelt Drive between Ninth and 12th avenues; the northern tip of Seaside, below 24th Avenue and between Holladay and Roosevelt drives; and east of South Roosevelt Drive and south of Avenue P, with most of the area south of Avenue S. This is the city's largest industrial zone.

Even in an industrial zone, grow sites may not be permitted within 1,000 feet of a school campus.

In addition to a general business license, growers

would need to obtain an annual license to grow medical marijuana within Seaside city limits.

During the licensing process, previously licensed growers may continue to operate until the status of their new application is determined.

Grow site owners, managers, operators, employees, agents and volunteers would be subject to criminal record background checks. Grow sites would be subject to periodic inspections by the Seaside Fire Marshal to ensure they remain in compliance with applicable Fire and Life Safety regulations, according to the ordinance.

The ordinance also covers license revocation or suspension, and penalties associated with violating any provisions in the chapter.

During a public hearing on the legislation, Eric Saucedo, a local cannabis producer, suggested the city consider grandfathering in existing operations if they meet all other qualifications except for zoning.

Seaside resident Angela Fairless asked if the zoning requirements could be expanded to include some commercial zones deemed appropriate, since the city is lacking in industrial-zoned land.

As a result of the state's passage of Measure 91, which went into effect July

1, residents 21 and older are permitted to grow up to four marijuana plants on their property for personal use.

The proposed city ordinance does not address rules for growers of commercial recreational plants. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission won't begin accepting license applications from those until Jan. 4, 2016.

The council voted 4-1 to approve a first reading of the ordinance. Councilor Seth Morrissey voted against it because he had only recently received and read the ordinance and did not feel prepared to provide input, he said. Councilor Dana Phillips and Mayor Don Larson were absent.

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