

Power of the People

By W. Marc Farmer,
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I've had some questions from several members recently and I felt others would benefit from the answers as well. I welcome the opportunity to communicate with members and am grateful that this forum allows many to gain the same information at one time from one source.

Q - "We've had three outages in the Chapman area and want to know why and for what we pay, shouldn't the Co-op provide us constant power?"

A - Let me address the outages first. The three outages in the Chapman area were due to 1) a planned outage for necessary maintenance of our substation to prepare for winter. During this maintenance we replaced a switch that was not closing and bad insulators which would have caused outages later this winter. Doing so now, before the weather gets cold, and during regular hours instead of waiting until the substation goes down and paying overtime if it went out during the night, on a weekend, or holiday, saves our members and the Co-op time, money, and potentially worse conditions for our crews and members. We prefer preventive measures rather than spending additional time and money to react after the fact. 2) The second outage was caused by a logger dropping a tree across one of BPA's lines that feeds power to the Chapman substation, and 3) the third outage was a large maple leaf that blew into the substation and landed on top of a voltage regulator, which caused one of the phases to ground (caused a short) and blew a fuse in the sub. Only one of these outages was anything we had control over and that outage saved money and future outages for our members. If we did not maintain our system, substations, lines, and tree trimming, we would be back to the long sustained outages of the past.

Providing constant power is

impossible for any electric utility. We even address this fact in our Service Rules & Regulations which states in Section 5:

"The Cooperative will use reasonable diligence to maintain uninterrupted service, but does not guarantee a constant or regular supply of electric energy..."

"The Cooperative may interrupt service to any member for the protection of life or property, for making repairs, changes or improvements in any part of its system for the general good of the service or safety of the public or when in the cooperative's sole judgment such interruption will prevent or alleviate an emergency threatening the integrity of its system, or will aid in the restoration of service."

No utility can control the effects of weather, trees falling across lines, people damaging poles, lines, or transformers, accidents, acts of God, animals or birds causing shorts in the system, or as we experienced, even a maple leaf blowing in the wind.

As to our rates being high enough to keep the lights on, I would respond with this dose of reality. If we charged each member a facility charge equal to what it really costs us to maintain our system, it would require an increase in our facility charge from \$17.50 per month to \$69.69 per member, per month. The money to run this system has to come from either the facility charge or the rates; those are the only two

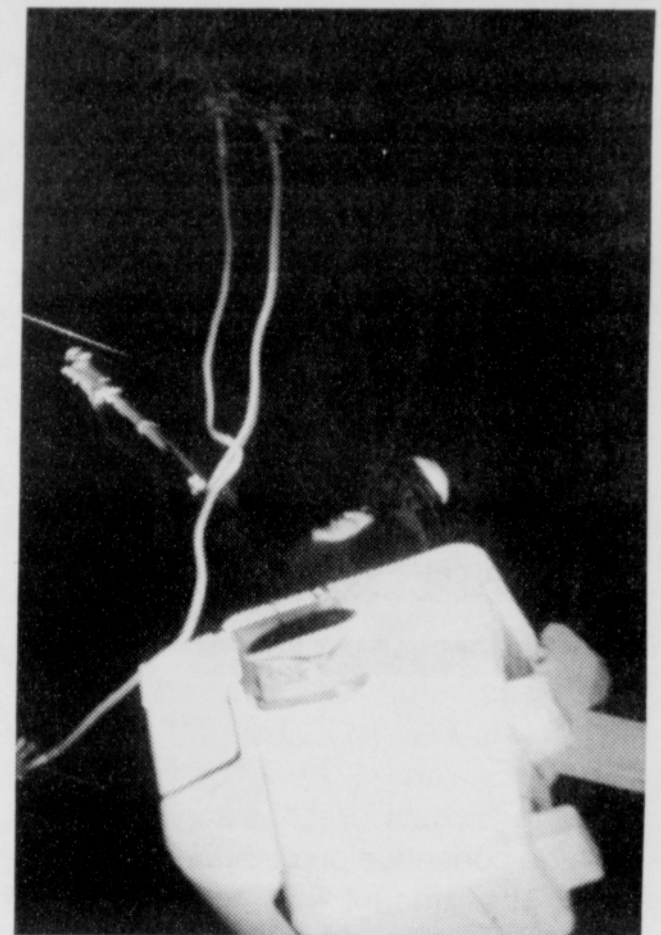
sources of revenue we have to operate. We have conducted in the past, and are undergoing a new cost-of-service analysis, and the amount stated, \$69.69, is our actual cost to service an average account. We can reduce our kilowatt hour rate to match the state average, but the facilities charge would have to increase in order for us to continue to operate, trim trees, maintain and repair the system, put in new lines and transformers, and pay for the power we all use. That is the reality of providing power in a rural setting with miles of lines through forests and rugged terrain, low density of members per mile of line, very little industrial and commercial load to balance residential load, along with low growth in our service area.

When a member makes a choice to live in a rural area with a lot of trees, they dramatically increase the risk of losing power and the cost of trimming those trees that we all love to live among and enjoy their beauty. There is a very real cost involved to live out here in forested areas. As I stated in my last article; if you want to have constant power, it will require a back-up generator for the times when forces beyond our control cause outages, or when we need to work on a line or substation to fix current or prevent future problems.

We strive diligently to keep the power on to our members. That is why your member owned cooperative exists. We understand the dependency we

all have on power for light, warmth, communications, work, and comfort. We ask for your patience when events occur, as they most assuredly will, due in large part to where we choose to live. Our crews work through the night and in all kinds of weather and conditions to restore power when it goes out. I personally can attest to their dedication, hard work, and loyalty to the members as they do their jobs.

Right, West Oregon crew works on wires after recent storm.



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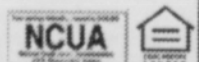
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