



CONNECTED

The Newsletter of Cowlitz PUD

Volume 10, No. 3

Winter's Colder Temperatures Bring Higher Electric Bills



In a home with electric heat, half of the total electric usage is normally attributed to heating. When the temperature drops, furnaces and heaters run more and for longer periods, which means you use more electricity. If you have a heat pump, it does not operate as efficiently in freezing weather due to the strip heat running more often.

That was clearly the case during the past December and January, as data provided to Cowlitz PUD shows outside temperatures were much lower than a year ago. This caused Cowlitz PUD customers' electric bills to run noticeably higher. You are not alone as this phenomenon was seen across Washington and Oregon.

Electric utilities measure the severity of cold weather in "degree days," which takes both the intensity and duration of cold temperatures into account.

In January the degree day readings totaled 817, compared to 607 in January 2006. That means heating requirements in January increased by 34.5 percent over last year. It was the coldest January in Cowlitz County since 1993. In a four-day stretch from the 12th to the 15th the average temperature was a frigid 26° F.

December 2006 was also colder than normal and the coldest month of December in six years.

Inside This Issue:

- Portable AED's
- Power Poles and Signs
- A Message from the General Manager

At renewal time, budget pay customers are likely to see the impact of this colder weather.

If you are a PUD Budget Pay customer don't be too surprised if your monthly payment goes up later this spring. That is typical following a colder-than-normal winter.

About 10,000 PUD residential customers are on this program and have their electric bills averaged into a flat monthly charge for 12 months, which is recalculated annually in the spring or early summer.

At the end of the budget year we look at usage over the past 12 months and add in any carry-over balance, to determine the payment for the next 12 months. A carry-over balance occurs when the budget payment amount did not cover the cost of the electricity you used over the past year. On the flip side, if you have a carry-over credit, that is also applied and helps reduce your payment in the next year.

You can get a better idea of where you stand by reviewing your bill closely. Budget pay bills always show your overall account balance. Please feel free to check with the PUD if you have any questions or would like to know where your budget pay account stands.

Please Don't Post Flyers on Power Poles – It's Against the Law

We have a favor to ask: Please don't hang signs on power poles. It's potentially dangerous for our employees and it's against the law. RCW 70.54.090 prohibits attaching signs, posters or other objects to power poles.

This time of year we see many signs advertising garage sales, flyers for missing pets, etc., stapled or nailed to PUD poles. While we understand these are very worthwhile events, hanging a sign on a power pole can create a dangerous situation for PUD line workers.



The nails and staples used to hang a garage sale flyer can damage the special protective clothing, boots and gloves worn by line workers, increasing the danger of electrocution.

Working on power lines is a dangerous job. In order for PUD line crews to ensure reliable service to all customers, electrical workers must be able to climb power poles safely in all kinds of weather – day or night.

PUD line workers count on your cooperation to assure their safety and to help provide you quality electric service. Thank you in advance for acknowledging this concern and for obeying the law.

What's Happening

Earth Day
Saturday, April 21
Cowlitz County Expo Center
10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.



Cowlitz PUD always looks forward to Earth Day, which is one of the most fun family events in the area. Many local businesses and organizations will be there and we encourage you to come join us on April 21.

The Port of Longview and Cowlitz PUD will team up to feature a wind power display and provide information about the White Creek Wind Project.

The PUD will also offer helpful energy conservation tips and information on heat pumps and appliance rebates. Plus, we will have electrical safety booklets for kids of all ages.

Mark down April 21 on your calendar and join us for Earth Day.

As space is available each month in Connected, Cowlitz PUD offers a brief listing to promote programs and activities for public, non-profit groups with wide interest in Cowlitz County (on a first-come, first-served basis). Send your request to: whathappening@cowlitzpud.org.

Did you know?

In the average month Cowlitz PUD mails out 9,000 reminder notices to customers who did not get around to paying their bill by the due date. The postage cost to send out 9,000 reminders is \$3,300 per month. Add the cost for employee time to process the reminders, envelopes and other miscellaneous costs, and we will spend over \$50,000 a year simply to remind people their PUD bill is overdue.

On one hand it is a cost of doing business. But for a public, not-for-profit utility the reality is that all costs are paid for by the customer/owners. We are always looking for ways to reduce your costs. So if you are in the habit of paying your bill after the due date, you can help reduce PUD costs by paying it a little sooner – which after all, is to your benefit. Thanks.

**YOU CAN PAY YOUR PUD BILL
ONLINE**

**www.cowlitzpud.org
Debit or credit card (Visa/MasterCard)**



PUD Buildings, Service Vehicles Now Have AEDs

Cowlitz PUD is prepared in case its employees are confronted with someone having sudden cardiac arrest. Over the last couple of months we have added

Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) at our office, the operation center and in service vehicles used by line crews, electricians and water and meter department employees.

An AED is a medical device designed to analyze the heart rhythm and deliver an electric shock to victims suffering sudden cardiac arrest, which occurs when ventricular fibrillation takes place or when the heart stops beating all together.

Without medical attention, the victim collapses, loses consciousness, becomes unresponsive and dies. There are over 220,000 victims of sudden cardiac arrest each year in America, many of which are at work.

The AEDs are not only intended for use in the case of a stricken PUD employee, but for the general public as well. In a typical day, Cowlitz PUD employees cross the path of many customers – both in the office and out in the field. Our employees are trained on how to use an AED and are willing to help if and when the need arises.

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Commission Activities



Here is a recap of significant action taken during February by the Cowlitz PUD Board of Commissioners:

- **Approved a 15 percent water increase, effective in March.** This raises the average residential customer's water bill by about \$3.50 per month. Cowlitz PUD provides water service to 3,800 customers in the outlying areas north and east of Longview and Kelso, including Columbia Heights, Beacon Hill, Lexington, Sunset Terrace, Cedar Gates, Ostrander and Cowlitz Gardens.
- **Met jointly with the Beacon Hill Sewer District Board of Commissioners to hear a consultant's analysis on a potential new operational and financial agreement between the two agencies, in regard to the PUD's water service.** BHSD is the sewer service provider for about 3,000 of the 3,800 customers with PUD water service, including those living in Lexington, Beacon Hill and part of the Columbia Heights area.
- **Approved the surplus and sale of a portion of the South Kelso PUD substation property to R.D. Olson Manufacturing.**
- **Authorized a contract with Wilson Construction, to provide additional line crew services to help complete transmission and distribution construction jobs during 2007.**
- **The Commission and General Manager will attend the American Public Power Association's Legislative Rally in March in Washington D.C.** That will result in the cancellation of the Board's regular meeting of March 13, 2007.

Upcoming meetings: Tuesday, March 27
 Tuesday, April 10
 Tuesday, April 24

PUD Board meetings are open to the public. Meetings are held in the PUD Auditorium, 961 12th Avenue in Longview at 2:00 p.m. Please consult our website www.cowlitzpud.org for up-to-the-minute Board meeting dates and times.

From the General Manager's Point-of-View...

The issue of global warming has really taken off in Olympia and Washington DC. I believe how we all respond to it could ultimately have a magnitude of impacts on our economy and way-of-life, similar to the impact of the spotted owl on the wood products industry or the Endangered Species Act on the electric industry.



In February Governor Gregoire issued an Executive Order calling for state agencies to develop plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels or lower. Also carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from new power plants can not exceed those from natural gas burning plants, making it difficult (or impossible) to use coal as a fuel source. Over a dozen climate change bills were introduced in the WA legislature. The governor has also entered into an agreement with the other Western governors to develop regional CO₂ reduction strategies.

There is also considerable activity in Congress, with sponsors from both parties.

Many investor-owned utilities, including some in the Pacific Northwest, are developing policies and actively lobbying Congress. Industry is also considering steps to reduce carbon emissions. And Al Gore won an Academy Award for his climate change documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" and he has been nominated for a Nobel Prize.

All this activity has caused me to stop and look more closely at the issue of climate change. I hope you are as well. Unfortunately the issue has brought out a rather partisan edge, with folks at the extreme staking out their positions. Some are convinced that a global catastrophe is near. Others think this is nothing but a conspiracy cooked up by environmental extremists.

So what do I think? I see considerable agreement among scientists that carbon concentration is much higher – and increasing rapidly. There seems to be substantial agreement that it's mostly a result of human activity.

There is less agreement on what the effects will be. Some anticipate major climate impacts, while others think the

impacts will be much less significant. Even less certain is what steps, if any, we should take now.

There are more questions than answers. Should a high-tech power plant that creates synthetic gas from coal (as proposed in Kalama) be encouraged because it emits much less CO₂ than conventional coal? Or should it be discouraged simply because it uses coal, no matter how sophisticated the technology? Should we rely on more natural gas power plants? The controversy over the LNG facility illustrates there are issues there too.

The Governor's Executive Order and most of the bills in the legislature focus on the utility industry reducing carbon emissions. This is interesting because most of our electricity in the NW comes from clean hydro power. Electricity produced by burning coal is a significant contributor of carbon emissions nationally, but the use of coal is minimal by comparison in our state.

We are feeling a "Catch-22" in the NW electric industry at a time when customer electrical demands are growing. On one hand we are challenged to reduce emissions, yet we have been forced to reduce clean hydro production at NW dams by court orders to spill more water for salmon recovery.

A new state law mandates the use of wind and other non-hydro renewables. But wind power needs a backup system on calm days. The hydro system and its ability to store water to run when we need it is the ideal back up. But again our ability to use hydro for that purpose has become significantly limited. If we can't use hydro then that gets us to natural gas, which is counter-productive to reducing carbon emissions. And more expensive.

The issues are difficult and the solutions won't come easy. Trade-offs will probably be necessary. My advice is to pay attention. This could be big.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "B. Skeahan". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Brian Skeahan
General Manager