

Media release

COWLITZ COUNTY PUD

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Vandalism Behind Woodland Power Outage

Following the power outage that left nearly all of Woodland without power early Tuesday morning, Cowlitz PUD crews discovered 1,300 feet of overhead wire damaged or stolen in the vicinity of where the outage originated. The PUD filed a criminal report with the Cowlitz County Sheriff's office on Thursday.

The PUD found evidence that thieves, likely in search of copper, had pulled down and cut an overhead neutral wire along a stretch of Dupont Road south of Kalama. It appears at some point during the vandalism the neutral wire snapped and jumped up into a 115,000-volt transmission line above it on the power pole. That transmission line links Kalama and Woodland. The end result was a fault in the transmission line that caused the power to go out at 4:00 a.m. in most of Woodland. All power was restored by 5:50 a.m. that morning.

Bonneville Power Administration's electric fault locating software was instrumental in determining where the fault on the PUD's line occurred. Upon identifying the location of the fault, PUD workers found the damaged wire, wire cutters, a knife and a long string used to hook the neutral line to pull it closer to the ground. Repairs to the damaged line were completed on Wednesday.

"The person or persons who caused this damage were lucky that they contacted the neutral wire, which in this case was not energized but can carry thousands of volts of electricity," PUD Spokesman Dave Andrew said. "If they would have known that the wire was a copper-weld material with a minimal recycling value, maybe they would not have risked death to steal it. It was incredibly lucky for them that no one lost a hand or a life when the neutral wire contacted the 115 kV line."

Last October a 47-year old man was killed while attempting to steal copper wire in a Clark Public Utilities power station near LaCenter.

Anyone with information about this incident is urged to contact Cowlitz PUD at (360) 423-2210 or the Cowlitz County Sheriff's Office at (360) 577-3092.