

Don't Blame the Meter!

After electric bills are mailed—especially when the weather has been unusually cold, like this past winter—the phones ring at Klickitat PUD.

“I couldn't possibly have used that much electricity,” customers say. “There must be something wrong with my meter.”

The customer services staff will always work with you to determine why usage is high. If you are still convinced the meter is at fault, Klickitat PUD will send a serviceman to perform an audit.

Whatever the problem, it is almost never the meter.

“The older meters always slow down or stop,” says Mike Courtney, White Salmon serviceman. “They never speed up. Of all the audits we've done, the meter has always been slow, to the customer's favor.”

Rick Pimley, Klickitat PUD senior meterman/substation serviceman, agrees.

“The older electro-mechanical meters have jeweled-bearing movement that slowly wears over time, resulting in the meter slowing down,” Rick explains. “Of the thousands of meters I've tested, I've found only one that ran fast, and that was by less than one-tenth of a percent.”

Even if the audit shows the usage is correct, a customer can still ask to have the meter replaced. You should be aware, however, that usage might be slightly higher with the new electronic meter, because it will not slow down like the older ones do.

This spring, Klickitat PUD audited at least 56 accounts for high usage and responded to 167



Rick Pimley installs equipment next to the meter on a consumer's house.

requests for meter changes. None of the high usage on these accounts could be attributed to a faulty meter.

Of the meters that were changed, those found to be faulty had either slowed down or stopped, which is to the customer's advantage.

How to be an Energy Detective

Ron Schultz, White Salmon Branch Manager, suggests people do a little sleuthing around the house before they blame the meter or call the PUD.

“The best way to determine where the highest usage is coming from is to watch the meter,” he says. “If the meter is spinning fast, the usage is high. Have someone turn the breakers off one at a time, while you watch the rotating disk. If there is a marked decrease when a breaker is turned off, that's probably the source of the high usage.”

Miquette Ihrig, energy services specialist, says it isn't uncommon to find “small” portable heaters plugged in and running in a poorly insulated home or an outbuilding.

Those small heaters can easily consume 30 kilowatt-hours (kwh) a day. That compares with about 5 kwh used by a large 200-watt light bulb left on all day.

The most common causes of high usage are: small portable heaters; a burned-out water heater element or stuck water heater thermostat; a block heater on vehicles; or high-wattage lights left on for extended periods.

“It all adds up,” Miquette says. “We have found heaters in motor homes to keep them from freezing, hot tubs not wired correctly or with elements out, and a lot of other things plugged in that people don't stop to think about.”

Every time a customer calls for an audit or meter change, it is an added expense to the PUD. Those costs must be absorbed in electric rates.

The PUD staff is eager to guide customers in identifying and managing their own energy use. We appreciate your cooperation in holding down costs. ■