



High Bill Season

A few days ago, a friend called to complain about his bill being much higher than normal. I guess he called me because he knows me. To actually do something about it, I referred him to the experts in the front office.

His complaint was that his bill was \$80 more than usual. One possible explanation would be a meter reading or entering error. We admit we do make mistakes. We try hard to put out an accurate bill, but we are human. To err is human. To really foul up takes a computer. We have all heard of the utility bill the senior receives for several million dollars.

Here at Klickitat PUD, we have an exception report to look at bills that vary significantly from last month or last year. This catches most errors before they get out in the mail. For this instance, it could be a misread of a thousand kilowatt-hour (kWh) dial. That would equate to a \$66.50 error.

Many of our customers read their own meters. We try to use the digital dial rather than the old odometer types for these accounts. The old style is easier to misread. I know this from experience.

The other option is the electricity went through the meter. Winter usage is affected by how cold it is. We track this each year with a degree-day meter. This meter measures how much heat is required. A degree day is measured when the average temperature falls below 65 degrees. So, if on a winter day the average temperature is 35 degrees, we record 30 degree days.

I knew this winter seemed a little colder. Were we just seeing the results of a cold winter? People with heat pumps can have this magnified when the backup resistance heat kicks in because the pump no longer can extract heat from the air.

Last month, we registered 1,016 degree days compared with 939 a year ago. You would expect the heating portion of the usage to increase 8 percent, so it's probably not the culprit this time. But the heat pump is still a possibility. You need to have the unit checked regularly and replace filters. The resistance heat can still come on due to malfunction.

Even if you don't heat with electricity, many items are on thermostats. A few years back, a house heated with wood had a humongous bill. It took a lot of detective work, but the culprit was traced to a faulty hot tub thermostat.

One way you can manage usage is by knowing your daily usage. Your bill has a section that details this for the past two months. Armed with this, you can read your meter and head off problems.

I know not many people pay attention to the meter until the bill comes, but I also know some of you check this on a regular basis. If you do have high usage or just want to get your usage down as low as possible, Klickitat PUD has people who can come out and work with you. Call our office and set up an appointment.

Oh, and my friend with the high bill? Meter reading error.

Tom D. Svendsen, General Manager

WA-18

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