

Power outage affects more than 16,000

Most people had electricity returned in 30 minutes

BY DANIELLE KUEHNEL

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STAYTON — Last Thursday, a power outage at 10:05 a.m. left 16,585 Pacific Power customers in Stayton, Albany, Scio, Lions, Jefferson and Hazelwood without electricity.

At 10:32 a.m., the affected-customer count dropped to 3,032, and by 11:21 a.m., all customers were returned to full service.

According to Bonneville Power Administration Press Officer Mike Hansen, a faulty Pacific Power line, which in turn tripped out the BPA substation, causing the power outage.

“Our substation obviously read there was a problem in a line,” Hansen explained. “Therefore, it tripped out and was not going to serve that line because it had a fault.”

Pacific Power and BPA, two area power companies, often purchase power supply from one another or contract each other’s transmission lines for more efficient power usage.

While Pacific Power was unsure of the exact cause of the line glitch, trip-outs are often caused by lightning strikes, trees falling into power lines or vehicles crashing into the poles. The trip-out affected such a large population because, said Pacific Power Spokesman Dave Kvamme, it came from a transmission substation, which carries bulk power. When individual power lines simply “trip out,” fewer customers are affected.

“Reliability is something we’re always looking to improve,” Kvamme said. “We try to find where there are weaknesses and then upgrade the equipment. We have a program where we do that continuously.”

A substation, Kvamme explained, may last between 40 and 50 years without needing to be updated. Also, the stations are not constantly manned, Hansen said.

In the case of the July 12 power outage, many customers had their power back within a half-hour by what Kvamme called “switching around power areas.”

“If we have an alternative way of bringing power into the area, we try to do that,” he said. “We use different transmission lines, and we try to load up more lines, but there are limits as to how much power a line can have.”

“We look for alternative pathways,” he continued. “In this case, that’s what happened.”