

Volume 17 Issue 1

April, 2007

## **CANNABIS FACTORIES – A REAL MENACE WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES**



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*As much as our IURPA organization and many other stress the importance of Revenue Protection, I felt like it was important to remind everyone of something that is very important to our business, and that is ALWAYS CONSIDER SAFETY.*



Jeff Cornelius  
IURPA Chairman

Electrical safety impacts everyone, electricity is so common to all of us and ingrained in our lifestyles, business and workplace. We walk into a room, flip on a light switch and a dark room becomes light. We have warm water to bathe in because electricity allows our hot water heater to work. Electricity makes our lives much easier and unfortunately we many times forget how dangerous electricity really is.

*Think about these things.....*

Electrocutions are the fifth leading cause of accidental death in the U.S.

One person is electrocuted in the home every 24 hours.

One person is electrocuted in the workplace every 36 hours.

More than 700 people lose their lives every year because of accidents associated with electricity and electrical products.

111,400 residential fires occur annually.

More than \$1.3 billion is lost on property damage.

*You can help protect yourself from electrical related injuries by.....*

Checking outlets and extension cords to make sure that they are not overloaded. Check all electrical cords to make sure there are no frays or cuts in the cord. Additionally, do not place electrical cords under rugs.

Make sure you place the proper wattage light bulb in the light fixture lamp.

One of the most important precautions is to install smoke detectors in your house or business, test them often and replace batteries annually.

Install a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter of GFCI. A GFCI is an electronic device for protecting people from serious injury due to electric shock. However, even if the GFCI is working properly, people can still be shocked.

If you have an old house with old wiring, consider having it re-wired. Electrical systems age and can become overloaded. Over the years the more lighting, appliances and equipment are

added, the electrical system can become overburdened and problems and develop. If circuit breakers trip often or fuses blow frequently, repairs need to be made. Call a qualified electrician.

Utility lines are buried throughout your communities so digging to plant trees, building fences, or excavating can be dangerous. If you are going to be digging, call your local utilities to notify them of the work being done, so they can come out and mark their lines.

While you are working outside this spring, observe the following rules regarding power tools near live electrical wire or water pipes. Metal ladders conduct electricity so look up and around before using a ladder. Make sure all outdoor receptacles are protected with ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI).

Water and electricity don't mix. Never leave electrical appliances plugged in where they might come into contact with water. If a plugged in appliance falls into the water, NEVER reach in the water to pull it out, even if the appliance is turned off. UNPLUG it first.

At the writing of this article there are several projects being organized by your IURPA organization. On March 6-7, 2007 we have our Advanced Revenue Protection Training call that is being held in Altamonte Springs, Florida and the Hilton Hotel. I have received many requests from other utilities around the United States asking that we have the training in other regions, this will be discussed at our annual board meeting in June.

With help from SCURPA & SURPA through conference call and meetings, plans for our annual IURPA Conference are coming along well. The conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza in Atlanta, Georgia, June 12-15, 2007. The Crowne Plaza is located very close to the airport as well as a short driving distance to many attractions. For all the details simply go onto our website at [www.iurpa.org](http://www.iurpa.org)

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## METER INTERFERENCE AND CANNABIS FACTORIES

By IAN MAIN • UKRPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, REVENUE MANAGEMENT OFFICER, SCOTTISH POWER

As I write this article, with winter well and truly upon us in the UK, I thought I would take this opportunity to write about the parts of Scotland with their very own sub-tropic temperatures and 24-hour light. I am of course being rather facetious as I am referring to the ever-increasing number of 'Cannabis Factories' being uncovered in the West and Central areas of Scotland. In years gone by this was a problem which was more prevalent in the south of England, however it has now gradually made its way northwards and is now a real menace within our communities which literally costs hundreds of thousand of pounds in stolen electricity.

*...it has now gradually made its way northwards and is now a real menace within our communities which literally costs hundreds of thousand of pounds in stolen electricity.*

There are very close links to cannabis cultivation and meter interference and we have forged strong relations with the Police in Scotland who have set up a central force, known as the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency (SCDEA) and are based in Glasgow. At present the SCDEA are uncovering around 3 per week, all with meter interference with an estimated annual electricity consumption of £20-£30k per property. The estimated street value of the cannabis can be anywhere between £300-£500k per property depending on the number of plants being cultivated. This is real organised crime, which is an obvious major money earner to the criminal fraternity.

There is a lot of careful planning involved in setting up these 'factories' and the ones that are being uncovered seem to follow the same pattern:-

A large detached house is rented in quiet residential area from a landlord.

All windows are blacked out

House is totally 'refurbished' with walls knocked down etc.

Rewiring work is carried out to accommodate the many heat lamps and extractor fans, with timer switches to regulate the heat



A separate electricity supply is run direct from the incoming supply, by-passing the meter

The 'factory' is then functional 24 hours per day

One of the tactics deployed by the SCDEA is the utilisation of Thermal Imaging Equipment which detects the heat source (from the heat lamps etc) and we have recently purchased 2 hand-held cameras on their behalf. Quite often when the Police carry out a raid on the premises, there is no-one present and from our perspective, there is often no registered customer and we have therefore no means of recovering our losses from the illegally abstracted electricity, although we have stopped the theft from continuing, which as mentioned previously is very substantial.

We are continuing our work with the Police and although many are going undetected, we still feel we are doing our bit from both a safety and financial perspective, not to mention assisting the community in the fight against the drugs menace. Within my area, we also carry out presentations to our staff, meter readers etc, and to external agencies such as Emergency Services and Housing Associations and we are now making them aware of the 'tell tale' signs to look out for which may indicate the presence of cannabis cultivation.

I hope you found this interesting and please feel free to get in touch if you would like any further information on this subject. Please remember to visit the UKRPA website at [www.ukrpa.co.uk](http://www.ukrpa.co.uk)



Ian Main



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**“WE DON'T NEED NO STINKING TEST LATCHES...”**

By JAMES ROSCOVICH • PECO ENERGY

PECO, an Exelon Company, serves Philadelphia and the surrounding county regions including the City of Philadelphia. Its 11-member Revenue Protection Team come across anywhere from five to 12 switches attached to the open test latch on the back of our meters and /or open or missing test latches daily. The switches we find cover the gamut from 240 volt single phase metering up to and including three-phase transformer rated meters. We have found switches on residences, gas stations, motels, grocery stores, anywhere and any place that there is test latches on a meter.

In one case, a three-phase self-contained meter was found with one switch controlling all three phases. The three test latches on the back of the meter were opened, and single continuous wire was wrapped around the top screw of the test latch and another single continuous wire was wrapped around the bottom screws of the latch. The two wires fed a switch on a wall in the business that enabled the customer to shut down all three phases of the meter with the flick of the switch. They did not have to bother with three separate switches for each phase of the meter.

The potlatch was originally designed for testing purposes for the meter shop. New electric meter testing equipment has made the potlatch obsolete. Unfortunately for PECO, there are more than 2 million electric meters in our territory with potlatches.

The potlatch makes is incredibly easy to rig for the customer/fixer. The customer/fixer cuts the seal of the meter ring/fitting, pulls the meter and the opens the two screws that keep the test latch closed. Wires are then attached to the two screws that range from Bell Telephone wire, speaker wire and even household extension cords. The wires then feed a switch, which can be any type from toggles, to dimmers, to the ordinary flip switch. The dimmer switch is probably the best way to beat the system because customers can control the pulse and/or disk rotation of the meter and it will not shut the meter down completely as you would with a toggle and/or flip switch.

The hardest part of the installation of the switch is drilling through the back of the meter fitting, then through the property to feed the wire to the switch. We have seen the customer drill through wood, concrete, brick and metal to run the switch wire, while in other cases the switch itself is just laying inside the meter fitting, with the customer removing the meter fitting cover to activate and/or deactivate the switch.

Others try to hide the switch wires, running the wire behind the load cable and covering the wire with black electrical tape, feeding it through Greenfield, armored cable, service troughs, dropped ceilings, and behind walls. Others are hidden in the circuit breaker panel where a customer can open the panel door and flip the breaker switch feeding the meter's test latch.

The switches themselves are another story, they are placed anywhere and everywhere. Technicians have found them inside the meter fitting, with the customer removing the meter fitting cover daily when s/he came home from work to activate the switch (off goes the meter) and deactivating the switch when s/he went to work (on comes the meter). Or at the nightclub where the fixer installed a 30amp three-polarity switch inside the current transformer cabinet, the three switches were in a metal box attached to the rear of the cabinet with sheet

metal screws. Can you imagine the person attaching the metal box with the switches inside the cabinet with energized equipment all around him? Switches have been found on the exterior of the meter fitting (drill a hole in the fitting, attach a toggle switch) in ceilings, under stair steps, in bathrooms, in pad-mount transformers. If you can think of a place to put it we have found a switch there.



Jim Roscovich

On numerous occasions we find that the test latch has been completely removed from the meter. We get a flag that the meter is not registering properly, we go to the property to inspect the meter, and the meter is indoors with no access. We leave a notice for access; the customer makes an appointment, the tech arrives at the property for the appointment, pulls the meter and finds that the customer has installed his own hand made test latch (usually made of a piece of thin foreign wire) to make the meter start registering again.

I guess the customer believes the tech won't notice the foreign wire being used as a test latch. Others open and close the latch (too lazy to install a switch), the tech shows up on an inspection, the customer delays them at the door (“Oh I have to put the dog out back”, even though they do not have a dog, then the television and lights go off and come back on while you're waiting for access). They finally let you in, you do the inspection of the meter, you can't help but notice that the test latch is closed, but the test latch screw heads are so scratched and burred from being tightened and loosened by the customer opening and closing the test latch that you know that they have been tampering with the meter.

All of this tampering raises the question: To have a test latch or not to have a test latch? We have tried both. The meters without the test latch are not tamper-proof, if the customer finds no latch on the meter, they will then drill a hole in the meter cover, insert a foreign object (broom straw, toothpick, paperclip, etc.) into the drill hole to slow and/or stop the disk from registering the meter's usage. Others will just take off the meter's cover, jam the disk, file the gears, lower and/or raise the disk, disengage the register face, turn the dial hands back, remove, replace the AMR transmitter, and a hundred and one other things to affect the registration of the meter.

So what do we do? What is the solution? (We are currently ordering new electric meters without potlatches.) To eliminate all the electric meters with potlatches will take a significant amount of time. PECO has a robust automated meter reading system and we are able to detect through reports how often an electric meter module has stopped recording usage then starts recording. These reports are an excellent way for PECO to detect this type of theft).

Do we test latch our meters or not? There is no good answer. We can slow the rate of theft down with locking devices, seals, check meters and good reports from our AMR system, but nothing is foolproof. I do not believe that we will ever eliminate theft. We could remove our meters, install jumpers to energize the meter fitting and bill the customer on a flat rate, but I believe that the customer would remove our jumpers and install his own because they thought they were beating the system, it just human nature.

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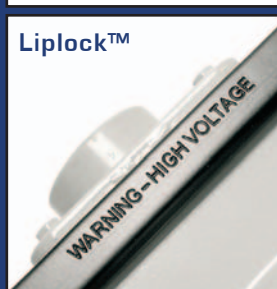
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## THREE TALES OF WATER THIEVERS

By BEATRICE DORRIES, METER SERVICES PROGRAM COORDINATOR • CITY OF YUMA, ARIZONA

If you think that water thefts are probably pretty boring, that's not always the situation. Here's a few cases from one city's history files that say otherwise.

**Residential Water Theft.** A customer who had been disconnected for nonpayment cut the padlock and reconnected his service. The meter was removed and the service relocked, but that didn't stop him. He cut the second lock and put in a "jumper", a makeshift pipe from the service line to the customer's line, allowing unmetered water. His big mistake was making the jumper out of the spout from a portable gasoline can. That meant there was a slight possibility of contamination back flowing into the system which couldn't be ignored. The distribution main line was thoroughly flushed at the nearest hydrant. Beside the criminal damage fine, this customer's restitution charge included the unmetered water theft, padlocks, the cost for personnel and vehicles for everyone involved, and the cost for all that water used to flush the line.

**Commercial Water Theft.** Two industrial companies on the edge of town were sharing a very large lot. The water service to that property had been inactive for many years and the meter was removed. It was always presumed that they were using the well on the property. At some point, someone had installed a jumper, giving that property unmetered water. It may have continued unnoticed except that the two companies were also sharing electricity, properly metered and billed. One company decided the other company was using too much and cut their access to it. The company without electricity got mad and got even. They reported the illegal water connection. This ended their free water ride too, but they didn't care - their half of the property was the half with the well.

What? Stolen Sewer? Not exactly stolen sewer. It's stolen sewer treatment, aka illegal sewer dumping. Seen as another form of utility theft, illegal dumping saves pumping and hauling outfits from having to pay high fees at the county dump, while their illegally dumped load eventually gets treated without payment.

A pumping outfit was hired to pump out a restaurant's grease trap holding tank. The holding tank was at the rear of the building, quite hidden from view. It was late in the afternoon, and the truck operator decided to dump his truck's load into the tank, rather than pump the tank out. Unfortunately for him, he was spotted by a building inspector who was checking new construction which happened to be directly in the line of site of the rear of the restaurant. Utilities personnel verified that the truck operator was indeed dumping his truck's load and called for law enforcement. A highway patrolman stopped by, having heard the call on the scanner. He thought he'd do the utility a favor while everyone waited for the police, by putting the truck driver and his rig through a commercial truck inspection. It turned out the driver failed several tests and had more than one ticket to worry about.



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Whether it's just the usual or a not so ordinary case, theft is theft, and it costs everyone. Service follow-up, an aggressive enforcement policy, and support from law enforcement and the judicial system are the keys to drastically cutting the number of utility thefts and aiding efforts towards revenue recovery. Western States Utility Theft Association (WSUTA) is committed to developing and supporting an ongoing effort to combat revenue loss through theft of utility services, which reduces the unfair financial burden placed on other ratepayers.

**Join us at the 2007 WSUTA Annual Conference, scheduled for Aug 15, 16, and 17, 2007, at Harrah's Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.** It will offer lots of valuable information regarding all aspects of utility theft and revenue recovery, along with the ability to network with others with similar experiences from all utility backgrounds. Special speakers with exciting topics are being lined up and vendors will be on hand to showcase their anti-theft products.

Visit the WSUTA website for more information and to register for the conference.

## UNEXPECTED COMPETITION FOR THE ISRAEL ELECTRIC COMPANY

By ITZICK MICHAELI, AFULA REGIONAL MANAGER, ISRAEL ELECTRIC CORPORATION

At a IURPA/NURPA convention which took place during the month of October 2006 in Foxwoods, I presented one of the most severe cases of power theft from the Northern district of the Israel Electric Company that we have faced during the last past years. This affair was brought to the public's attention recently since the people involved were detained by the Israeli Police. The affair will remain with us for some time due its criminal characteristics and the legal proceedings which will be shortly initiated against those involved.

Ten months ago, a team head engaged in connecting homes in the Afula area reported that he has detected, in the area he normally works in, in one of the Arab villages near the city of Nazareth (which is located in the northern part of the State of Israel), a connection from an electricity pole to a house and a meter cabinet, which was not installed by his crew. Within the meter cabinet was an Electric Company meter, connected to the current. A check of the meter's serial number revealed that in the customers' systems of the Electric Company, this meter was listed as stolen from the location where it served for the street lights of another town in the North. It was also made clear, that the cover of the meter was opened, the seals falsified and its metering system was set to zero and advanced by several hundred kilowatts.

We have checked and found that the three story building was built in deviation from the building permit obtained by its owners, and therefore they can not receive a populating certificate form, which, according to the Planning and Building Law customary in Israel, only the supply of this certificate form to the Electric Company, enables the power connection to the house, receipt of a meter and connection to the current. The phenomenon of illegal construction is especially widespread in Arab villages, mostly located in the Northern part of the State of Israel, and preventing the Electric Company to connect many constructed homes, which are compelled to connect in an unsafe way to other homes which were constructed according to the law, and which have safe and regular power supply.

It seems that the home owners figured that they can not legally connect to electricity and therefore they approached a "private contractor" to arrange for them the connection. At this early stage we have yet to solve the riddle: why would

a person illegally arranging for himself the supply of electricity, connecting in a pirate manner to the Electric Company network, also receive for the same price an electricity meter. If the case is one of stealing electricity why document its scope by means of a meter?

Several days later we started getting reports from our meter readers, of similar cases in several villages, and in the city of Nazareth. We realized we are facing a new and alarming phenomenon of a double sting. Part of the people ordering the illegal connections, were led to believe that the money paid by them to the connection broker, is used as a bribe payment for the Electric Company's employees, who will arrange for a legal connection to the network, will install a meter and the "new customer" will



Itzick Michaeli

join the Electric Company's customers list, whose electricity meters are read bi-monthly and an invoice will be presented to them in a regular manner.

We approached the security department of the Electric Company since it was our experience that espionage activity is necessary in order to collect information and solve the mystery. Indeed, the initial information received revealed the activity of a group of people, all professionals in the electricity field, which have actually established a "competing company" to the Israel Electric Company. This gang was very diligently engaged in arranging pirate electric connection, under the cover of legal connections to the electricity network and for a hefty payment ranging between \$300 and \$6,000 depending on the size and type of power connection required. We started getting reports, that during the nights, on weekends and holidays, connections of power installations are performed in private homes and business structures, by people driving Electric Company vehicles, dressed in company work uniforms. All the installations were performed with equipment articles used by the Electric Company, professionally and in the manner in which we normally operate. Pirate connection locations were discovered daily and at the same time reports multiplied, of meters being stolen in various places in the north of the country.

The security department of the Israel Electric Company dived deeply into the matter and set in motion experienced

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*It seems that the home owners figured that they can not legally connect to electricity and therefore they approached a "private contractor" to arrange for them the connection.*

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private investigators to collect data from the field. Video pictures documenting the performers of the connections were taken, as well as various meetings with brokers and various electricians in the field. During the months which have passed, employees and meter readers in the field working in the city of Nazareth and surrounding settlements have increased their reports of pirate connections from electricity poles and unfamiliar meters. Dozens of stolen meters appeared and were discovered in various places. Information was also received of the presentation of fictitious invoices and payment collections for the use registered by the stolen meters. Occasionally, worried "customers" appeared at the Electric Company offices, homeowners who paid for the pirate installation came to check when they will receive the connection. Data started accumulating, and the Israeli Police in coordination with security department and the Unit for the Protection of Revenues in the Afula district, started to organize for the closing of the affair and perform arrests.

In early December 2006, an Electric company employee was detained after he completed performing a pirate installation at a garage in the city of Nazareth. The 42 year old employee who serves as a deputy foreman of a home con-

necting crew, admitted at once to the connection of 50 structures and led the police investigators to several locations where he worked. These days, the police assisted by Electric Company employees, is collecting evidence and getting ready to file charges against the employee and make further arrests. According to the Police's estimate there are additional gangs engaged in brokerage and performance of the connections. Indictments will also be filed against those who order the pirate connections; those are estimated to be about two hundred.

Above the economic damage which was caused to the Israel Electric Company, estimated at hundreds of thousands of dollars, the reputation of the Company and the good name of its employees were also hurt. Many additional expenses will be caused to the Electric Company as a result of the need to dismantle all the pirate connections and ascertain the safety of the electricity network. Needless to say that the Electric Company will sue all the homeowners who were illegally connected, for the electricity use as was recorded on the stolen meters, and it is reasonable to assume that a majority of the cases will reach civil action in the courts.

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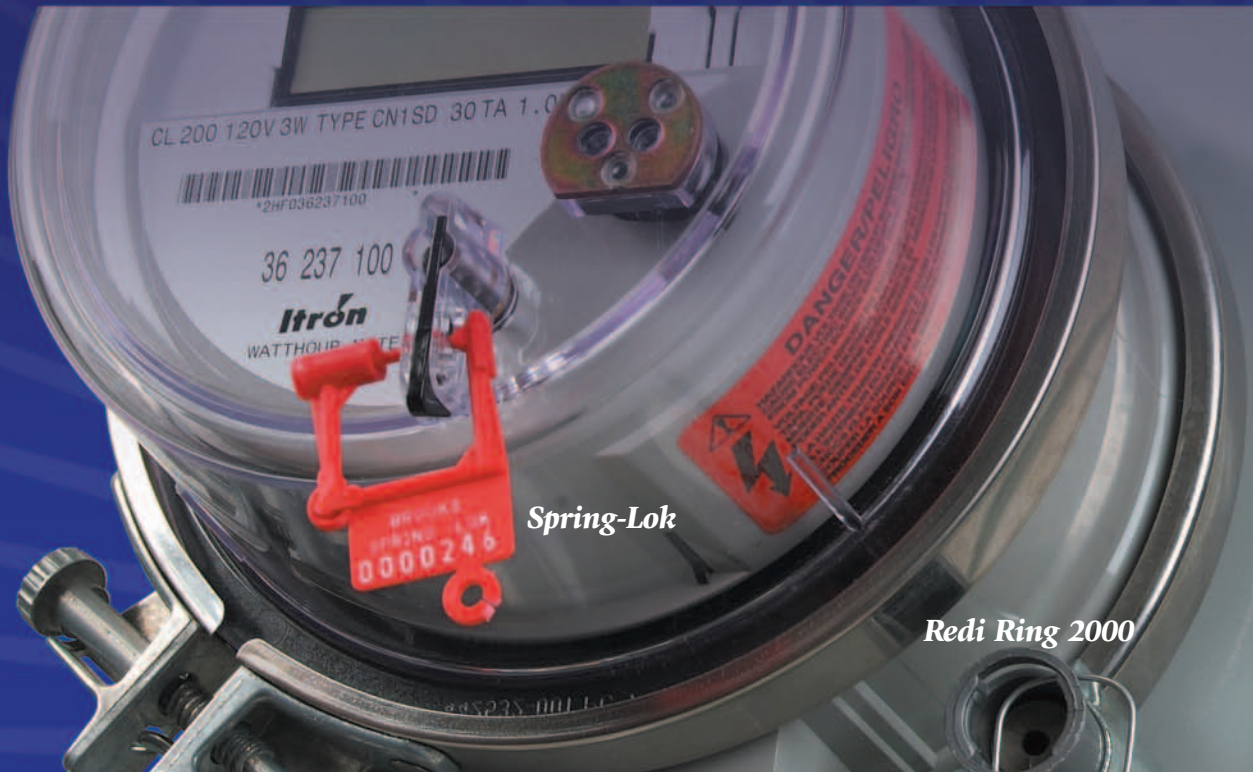
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## DATA, DATA AND MORE DATA

By PATRICIA UHLMAN • NSTAR ELECTRIC & GAS CORPORATION

It seems like yesterday that we were training our field personnel to look for visual clues to indicate that there may be a possible loss of revenue condition. With the reports from the field we started our investigation by checking numerous systems for information and then we would go to the field to gather the evidence necessary to make a determination of a theft of service or other loss of revenue conditions. We reacted to the reports and observations from our field personnel and at the same time all of us in Revenue Protection knew that there was additional proactive work to do. We tweaked our high low checks, looked for any kind of use pattern to indicate gas and electric services that were not recording all of the use. We collected and analyzed data but at the same time we still had our meter readers to check the customers' property monthly. We had the field reports for the bulk of our work. Then AMR, although talked about for years, actually became our reality. What the heck do we do now that we were not visiting all of our customers on a monthly basis?

*What the heck do we do now that we were not visiting all of our customers on a monthly basis?*

We no longer have the monthly presence of a meter reader on our customers' property but we do have the constant presence of a meter. It is the data from those meters that now provides the information and reports which find revenue loss. At NSTAR, we read the vast majority of our meters with a drive-by mobile meter reading system. Monthly we extract data from the meters, the reading, tamper counter, demand reading, date of reset and date of reading. We then use that data for billing and for creating use patterns for each of our customers. So what do we do with all this information and how do we apply logic to that vast amount of data? We are using vendors to do some the analysis as well internal sources to analyze the information from the other controls that are in place in our customer information system. Our RP analyst is working daily on ways to take all of this data and to tell the RP Specialist where to look for revenue loss and possible theft of service.

The sheer volumes of tamper counters have made us apprehensive to use them as valid data. They are but one piece of the puzzle just as the cut seal was in the past. In RP we do not make a final determination based solely on a cut seal or a change in a tamper counter but either one will make us take a closer look at an account.

Reading and use patterns are even more important than ever. Was there a drop in use? Is there zero use or erratic use? Why was the van unable to obtain a reading? Is the meter still on site, in the socket or sitting on the floor while jumpers are in the meter socket or flex hose attached to the meter fit? We have had a few large thefts of service cases

since we installed AMR demand meters that were found because of numerous estimates along with a drop in use or abnormal use for a certain type of business. There were no tamper counter changes because the customer was tampering with the current transformers and not the meter. With a lap top and a probe a long diagnostic report obtained from the meter can tell a powerful story. It is difficult for a business to explain why the meter is powered off for days or weeks at a time when they are an active popular establishment. Metering DNA-it is valuable data that we are using to recover revenue. In Revenue Protection we love the story the meter data tells and the thieves (and their attorneys) know it is time to pay up when they see data that cannot tell a lie.

We have this information literally at our finger tips. We are learning how to read it, validate it, and let it tell us it is time to investigate further. Our field reports are not gone. Field personnel are reporting problems to us daily. The ex-spouses and ex-business partners are still calling with theft of service tips. But we are adding reports from a new source.....from a computer with an analyst at the keyboard.



Patricia Uhlman

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## 2007 NURPA CONFERENCE & TRAINING SEMINAR

The 2007 NURPA conference will be held at the Queensbury Hotel in Glens Falls, NY. The conference dates are September 19, 20 & 21. This year's agenda promises to be interesting, informative and diverse. Presentation topics will include Gas, Electric and Water.

The Queensbury Hotel has been a favorite meeting spot for the Northeast Conference. Located ten minutes from Lake George Village, the Queensbury serves as a cornerstone for elegance and acts as the "Gateway" to the Adirondack Park Region. The Lake George area is well known for its attractions.

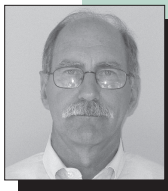
Room Rates are \$89.00 per night. Reservations can be made directly by calling the Queensbury at 1-518-792-1121. Please mention the NURPA conference to receive this special rate.

Information will be posted on the IURPA web site as soon as it becomes available. We hope to you there.

**2007 NURPA CONFERENCE  
QUEENSBURY HOTEL  
GLENS FALLS, NY  
SEPTEMBER 19, 20 & 21**



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**Theft of Energy on The Rise**  
**Record Temperatures Pushing Energy Consumption to All Time Levels**  
**Washington Officials Say Theft of Energy is a Major Problem**  
**Record temperatures drive energy use to all time levels**  
**Washington Officials Say Theft of Energy is a Major Problem**  
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## GOT SUPPORT?

By JESSICA BADALAMENTI AND MARISSA OCAMPO • PROGRESS ENERGY, PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

I am a 15 year employee of Progress Energy, Florida and a veteran investigator. Previously to my employment with Progress Energy I worked as an Electrical Contractor. As an electrician throughout the years I have seen some creative and dangerous wiring in homes and businesses. It wasn't until my career path lead me to the Revenue Protection Department at Progress Energy in 1996 that I now have a true understanding of how creative some customers can be.



Jessica Badalamenti

In the jingle below, Signorelli (IURPA 2nd Vice-President), Kelly Thomas (SURPA Past President), Mike Trudell (SURPA Steering Committee), Tim, Max, and Steve are all Investigators with Progress Energy FL. Jessica and Marissa are Support Specialists and Tess is the Supervisor.

As we were working on this article, we knew that Christmas would pass but we still wanted to write a little something to make you laugh.....

### “Twas the Night before the Theft”

'Twas the night before theft, when all through the house  
Not a light bulb was burning, not even a mouse (computer).  
The wood was stacked by the chimney with care,  
Due to no power for heating and air.

The children were freezing all in their beds,  
While visions of cartoons and video games danced in there heads.

And Mama in her muumuu, and I in my cap, had just rattled our brains for an electrical tap.

When out on the roof there arose such a clatter,  
I sprang from my chair to see what was the matter.  
Away to the window I saw a bright flash,  
My neighbor turned on my meter, and tossed his tools in the trash.

The arc and the spark on the meter base jaws  
Gave an indication of theft and an unsafe cause.  
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,  
A Progress Energy Revenue Protection team was here.

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,  
I knew in a moment it must be (Signorelli).  
Quicker than electricity, his team came,  
And he whistled and shouted and called them by name:

“Now Kelly, Now Mike!  
Now, Tim and Max!  
On, Steve! On, Marissa  
On, Jessica, get your hard hats”!6

To the top of the porch, where Tess stood with a grin,  
She new her Revenue Protection team was at it again.  
As dry leaves caught fire and the sparks did fly,  
The customer just new the fees would be high.  
So up to the top of the house RPI flew,  
With the bucket full of tools, and Signorelli too!

And then, in a twinkle, I saw out in the yard,  
Mike pulling my meter while Gary stood guard.

So I called Progress Energy to make arrangements with Support,  
Jessica answered “NO DEALS will be made,  
Nothing of the sort”.

I was stressed and worried,  
Wanting power on in a hurry.  
I disputed the charges and argued the theft,  
My dingbat neighbor next door did it, then left.

Progress Energy advised  
“If you would like to dispute,  
Fax in your notarized lease  
And 2 forms of ID too!

I spoke not a word, but went straight to pay,  
Hoping this Progress Energy problem would soon go away.  
I called in my receipt number, no longer needing to be nervous.

I sprang to see that Revenue Protection was there to restore my service.

As they drove away I heard them exclaim,  
In a familiar voice that was strong but not lame,  
Don't do it again, don't steal our power,  
No matter the day, No matter WATT hour”!

At Progress Energy, FL, the Revenue Protection Support staff plays a very key role in the success of the Revenue Protection Department. One might ask, How so?

One function involves managing the clerical side of the field investigations throughout Progress Energy FL's 32 county, 20,000 square mile service territory. The support staff consists of two Specialists, Jessica and Marissa, who collaborate with numerous Government agencies such as local police and Sheriff's Departments, Housing Authorities, Code Enforcement, Department of Children and Families, and many other area utility services such as water, telephone, gas, and cable TV companies.

Supporting the six investigators is a full time job. Daily, many different scenarios play out, both on the phone and in person. Each investigator typically averages ten field investigations per day, most of which develop into cases of theft. Needless to say, the office climate can become hectic once the Investigators hit the streets.

Once the Investigator calls in the case information, Support's most critical role begins. Calculating the lost revenue and entering accurate case information on the computer in a timely manner then allows the Customer Service Associate to answer the call and disperse the correct information to the customer. Many times, even before RPI has left the premise, the customer is calling to ask how much money will be required before restoration of service. Having all the particulars noted on the Customer's account and premise level makes it quick and easy. Premise Obligations placed in CSS by the Support Specialist also prevents a reconnect from being released until the case is satisfied. Henceforth, it is clear to see how Progress Energy FL recovers over \$2 million annually.



Marissa Ocampo

But the job doesn't end there. Daily, the Support Specialists may take 50-60 calls from various people within and outside the company, review more than 100 Collection Inspection Orders (accounts that have been disconnected for Non-Payment and remain unpaid 10 working days later), respond to dozens of emails, uncover thousands of dollars through internal office investigations (Fraud), and process paperwork for Property Liens. Often, Support personnel can be heard talking to the Investigator on one line, the customer on another, and someone from Management or Customer Service at her desk, asking questions.

As you can see, the day in the life of a Revenue Protection Support Specialist is full of demands and high expectations. The ability to multi-task, work under pressure of time constraints, and handle all questions pertinent to the department makes the Support Specialist's position a very busy one. The value of such personnel is threefold: they help keep the customer's rates lower by pursuing the money due, adds to the Company's bottom line with recoveries that may have been lost, and allows the Field Investigators to spend more time in the field. Revenue Protection Support is here to help make it happen. A testimonial to the importance of the select few that have worked in the capacity of Support Specialist is stated very plainly by our Management Team: "Without Support, the Revenue Protection Department would struggle to make the goals set by Management."

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## LOCK IT? YOU DECIDE

BY RICARDO H. VELARDE, DIRECTOR OF SALES & MARKETING • DEWALCH TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

Utility services theft continues to be a growing problem around the world. It costs utilities and its customers billions of dollars every year, and even worse, the death of thieves and innocent people. Did you know that at least one person dies or is severely injured everyday due to energy theft?

As alarming as that may sound, most utilities do not have a Revenue Protection program in place because combating utility services theft has regrettably not been a priority among top Utility Executives. Why? Here are some possible explanations:

1. **Financial:** There is no need to invest in a revenue protection program and locking equipment if the utility can pass on most non-technical losses to paying customers. That is UNFAIR to the paying customer.
2. **AMI:** AMR equipment manufacturers may be selling this technology as "the solution" to all of a utility's meter reading cost issues, as well as energy theft and detection. In reality AMI technology does little to nothing to PREVENT theft.
3. **Political:** Corporate image is important to top executives and the company may not want to offend some non-paying customers by disconnecting their service or locking their meters up. Hence, theft of service is ignored in low-income areas, writing it off as a form of philanthropy and passing the cost to the honest customers.
4. **Perception:** We are at a time when utilities are searching for ways to reduce cost, and unfortunately, locking hardware purchases are often eliminated or significantly reduced because they are perceived as an expense, rather than as an investment that will yield returns for many years in the future. Should one compromise safety and security for short-term budget pressures? Locking hardware ought to be an important part of a sound revenue protection program and should be considered a long life capital item rather than an expense allocated to the current budget cycle.

Sadly, Revenue Protection is still not being regarded within power companies as a necessity and has not been given the importance that it ought to have. If that were the case, most utilities would have locked up the majority, if not all of their meters. Keep in mind the meter is your cash register!! Are not most vehicles, homes and buildings locked?

### PROS AND CONS OF LOCKING UP EVERY METER (ESPECIALLY AMI METERS)

#### PROS OF LOCKING UP EVERY METER

- **Physical Security:** Prevention can be accomplished by application of physical means such as locking hardware to provide indication and inhibit access to parts of the system vulnerable to tampering. Especially now with the use of AMR and SMART meters, these meters will be left unattended for long period of time, so you want to secure that meter more than ever. Many companies are using a 5 to 7 flag detection system as an indication to investigate possible theft. A thief can pull a neighbor's meter to use on their home or fix their own meter in 2 flags. This type

of theft could go undetected for months. Furthermore, with budget pressures mandating lower headcounts, there is frequently not enough manpower to investigate every flag. Detection is not enough; you want to prevent theft of energy at the meter.

#### \* **KEEP HONEST PEOPLE HONEST:**

Sorry to say, it is human nature to be tempted to want to steal valuable things that are not protected and locked. Locking up the meter will most likely deter the honest guys from stealing and will prevent the less persistent thieves from stealing as well.

- \* **R.O.I:** Based on survey conducted by DeWalch Technologies Inc. during the last 3 years of over 30 Power Companies, the decision to reduce expenditures on locking hardware clearly overlooks the fact that revenue protection departments have an average return on investment (R.O.I.) of 6:1. In addition, locking hardware, if installed permanently on a meter, can be a good preventive tool that will allow utilities reduce millions of dollars in future losses due to theft.

Most Utilities should be reminded that investing in locking hardware will not only return the investment in less than a year, but it immediately translates into millions of dollars recovered and possibly lower prices to end customers. Regrettably, power companies spend much effort and money to justify the purchase of AMR technology, cutting or eliminating purchases on most auxiliary products, such as locking equipment.

- **Safety:** Significant health risks exist if the meter is not locked up. An improperly wired meter can create serious dangers and damage can range from fires to the burnt limb of a utility worker or even death. The possibility of electrocution in illegal connections is real.

#### DRAWBACKS OF LOCKING UP

- **Physical limits of equipment:** There are limits in the ability of hardware to deter theft, but one of locking hardware's purpose is to provide evidence that tampering has occurred. Locking hardware will not stop extreme measures taken by dishonest customers.
- **Locking Investment may be wasted if not managed properly:** Locking hardware may not be an effective means of securing the meter if the following applies:
  1. Keys are lost by utilities' field personnel
  2. Keys are illegally or easily duplicated
  3. Customers drill meter cover and interfere with disk

There is no question that energy theft will not cease and this problem may be getting worse. All IURPA members have the responsibility to fight it, so next time you have a chance to talk to your supervisor remind him or her not to overlook theft and spend \$1 to recover \$6! Good luck with these efforts and I wish you a successful 2007.



Ricardo Velarde



## THE OL' WATERING HOLE

By JEFF HARRIS • MISSOURI GAS ENERGY

Hello everyone, and welcome back to The Ol' Watering Hole. The last time we got together, we talked about the importance of partnering with Law Enforcement. As promised, this time around I'd like to share a couple of quick stories that demonstrate how "Roll Call Training" sessions on diversion recognition and Officer Safety can pay off.

A few days after conducting one of the Roll Call sessions that I described last time, I received a call to meet one of the Officers at an address. He was driving the patrol wagon that day (you know - prior to "political correctness" they were called "paddy wagons") and had been dispatched to meet a couple of Officers on a disturbance call who had made a couple of arrests. While standing on the front porch, waiting for the charges to be written, he started looking at the gas meter on the front of the house and recognized that "something just didn't look right". Upon my arrival, I found that the gas, which was supposed to have been inactive for the past several years, had been turned back on illegally, and the electronic ert had been removed so that it would not register any usage. Needless to say, the Officers ended up with one more charge to write.

On another occasion, I received a call from two Officers who had been dispatched to an address on a Domestic Violence call. During the course of their investigation, one of the Officers just happened to notice a gas meter sitting on the floor of one of the bedroom closets. He went outside to look for the service line on the side of the house and discovered another meter which was hooked up and leaking. Upon my arrival, I discovered that the meter in the bedroom closet was the original meter which had been shut off for non-payment (we were still picking up the read on it which was showing no consumption). The meter that was hooked up had been stolen from a vacant property a couple of blocks away. Once again, the Officers were rewarded with a little bit more paperwork.

This last example is of what I would describe as an Officer thinking outside of the box to address a problem area.

I received a call from this Officer one morning regarding an address where there had been a huge disturbance at the night before. Some of the residents/occupants ended up throwing rocks at the Police, and an "assist the Officer" call was put out (basically, available Officers are dispatched red light and siren to assist). They ended up making several arrests, but it was apparent that the problems were not over there. This Officer, who was assigned to one of the "Community Action Teams", was back in the neighborhood and just thought that he would check to see if the utilities



Jeff Harris

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*While these aren't the most exciting stories that any of us have ever heard, they are good illustrations of how conducting Roll Call training sessions with Law Enforcement can pay off.*

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were all on legally at this "problem house". After checking the address, I advised him that there was not an active account there and that there shouldn't

even be a meter there. He told me that there was a meter present, and that the gas was in the on position (he attended one of the Roll Call sessions as well). By the time that I had arrived and completed my documentation of the stolen meter, the Water Department and City Codes Officer had arrived. It turned out that the water had been turned on illegally as well. The resident was arrested for theft of service, the house was posted as unfit for habitation, and everyone was kicked out on the spot. Sometimes, in the world of Law Enforcement, the best thing you can do with a problem is displace it.

While these aren't the most exciting stories that any of us have ever heard, they are good illustrations of how conducting Roll Call training sessions with Law Enforcement can pay off. It is a huge benefit to have all of those extra "trained eyes" on the streets (and may I add - at no additional cost to your Company). In all of these examples, there is no telling how much longer these potentially dangerous incidents of theft would have continued to go on.

Remember, if you have a story that you are willing to share, or a topic that you would like to talk about, just e-mail me at [jeff.harris@sug.com](mailto:jeff.harris@sug.com).

## STEALING ELECTRICITY WITH A ROTVEILER ASSISTANCE

By ITZICK MICHAELI, AFULA REGIONAL MANAGER, ISRAEL ELECTRIC CORPORATION

Israel Electric's customer from the city of Bat - Yam near Tel - Aviv, thought of an original way to avoid paying his electricity bills. First, he stopped paying the bills, and after his supply was cut off, he self reconnected, fenced the electricity cabinet and tied his aggressive Rotweiler dog to the fence, to guard his fortress. The Police and the Veterinarian Services assistance was needed to break into the place.

When Israel Electric's disconnect team reached the premises, they were surprised by the attack dog. The house was disconnected throughout year 2005, for \$ 7,000 electricity debt. Fencing the electricity cabinet, made the approach to it impossible, and the only way to reach it was through the customer's house.



There was no other way but to ask for the police assistance, since the electricity cabinet contained other customers meters too. and there was no way to read them, or replace the company fuse when needed.

Tel - Aviv police detectives ended the story, joining forces with Israel Electric team and the Veterinarian Service. After a dog catcher took control of the dog, the supply was disconnected and the customer was asked to visit Israel Electric offices, for settling his bill that reached \$ 9,300.

Source: www.ynet.co.il 9 January 2007

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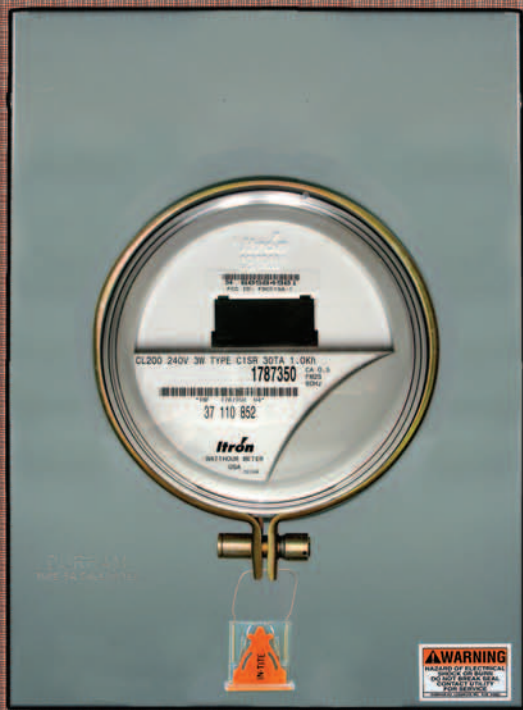
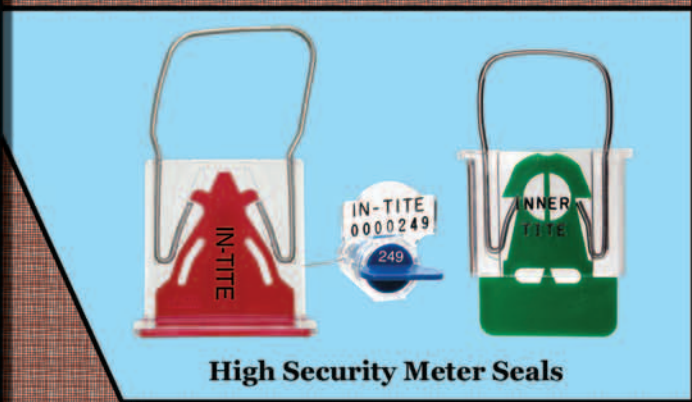
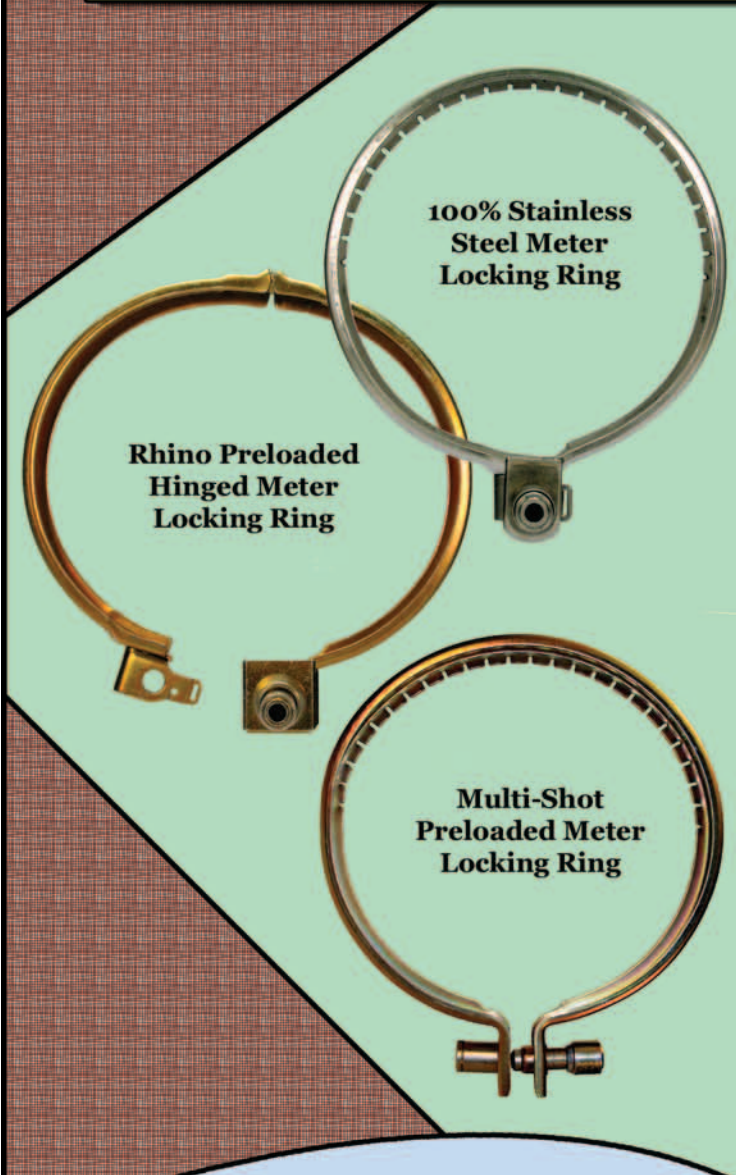
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The International Utilities Revenue Protection Association was founded in 1990 to protect member utility companies worldwide from revenue losses associated with unauthorized use of service. In fifteen years, the organization has grown from a small regional group into an association that includes representatives of more than 400 utility companies around the world.

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