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## What's Happening

**F**irst of all, I would like to welcome all IURPA members as we start a new year. Last year, the IURPA Board was very excited about the significant increase in the number of members we enlisted. Hopefully, the word is getting out that IURPA is here and a major player in the world of Revenue Recovery. We are here to assist every Revenue Protection Department to be successful entities within each respective company. This newsletter, I am proud to say, is just one example of what IURPA brings to the table, every day.



Gary Signorelli  
IURPA Chairman

I have finally begun to realize what we are about to experience for many years to come. Oftentimes, I speak with Revenue Protection Agents and Supervisors from around the globe. Words such as “busier than ever” or “overwhelmed” seem to be the most common. I know that investigating lost revenue is a rewarding venture for all of us, but I wonder how and when we will be able to stop or deter the Theft of Service within our own service territories. The way things are going, my guess is never. I still remember my first taste of Revenue Protection where I was told “ever since our product was first produced, someone was thinking of a way to steal it”. Now, it seems to be happening at an alarming rate.

At this time of the year, upcoming training seminars are being announced. Plans are underway among the Regional Boards to offer excellent training opportunities for those interested in honing his or her investigative skills. For those who’ve never been to a Regional or International Conference, you have no idea what you’re missing. Thankfully, I’ve been able to go to these since 1988 and I have always returned to work feeling refreshed with knowledge that I attained from the presentations or people who I made contact with during the conference. It’s a worthwhile experience that you will share with others in your department and company. Ask your management team today if you can attend one close to home. The costs are always affordable, especially when you consider the training you’ll receive. You can find the closest seminar by going to our website, [www.iurpa.org](http://www.iurpa.org) for dates and locations. Also, products are proudly displayed by Vendors with ideas regarding locking hardware and detection devices that can be made available to you. Having all the proper tools can make your job easier. Don’t be afraid to become a part of the team of people who organize and lead these seminars. There’s definitely something there for everyone.

Once again, I want to say how proud I am of anyone who works in the Revenue Protection area. Without your hard work and dedication, your company would not be able to realize the effectiveness and benefits you deliver every day. It’s not an easy task, but extremely fun nonetheless. I know firsthand that those who steal our product have no regard for safety or the fate of others who are honest rate paying customers. Stay safe and always be aware of your surroundings. Safety is number 1 with me and should be a part of everyday life for you. Your family, friends, and the people you work for depend on it.

In closing, I would like to say thanks to everyone for a successful last year and I look forward to 2011 being even better. To our IURPA Board members, keep up the superb work. Together, we are a great team. I know I can’t do it without you. As I always brag to everyone else, I am the most fortunate man in the world (of IURPA).

*At this time of the year, upcoming training seminars are being announced*

As I write this Chairperson’s article, registration is going full speed ahead and I would like membership to accelerate and exceed last year’s numbers. The annual membership fee is only \$50 (US). If the numbers increase again this year, my thought is that it provides all of us a greater chance to network with the experts in the Revenue Protection arena. It’s such a huge benefit to have the knowledge and expertise at your fingertips. The experts are only a phone call or email away. Recently, a membership reminder was sent to everyone on the mailing list. Let’s spread the word and make this year another successful one. If current members enlist other associates from neighboring utility companies, we can only grow stronger. Can we count on you?

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## UTILITIES, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SAFETY

By WAYNE WOHLER, LA DEPT. OF WATER AND POWER

**T**heft of utilities occurs as a result of many factors including the economy, illegal drug activities, and the misconception that no one will ever know! As the current unemployment figures continue to rise, the temptation to tamper or bypass utilities also increases. This results in lost utility revenues and public safety issues. Many cities attempt to deal with this challenge having only limited resources available from both the utility and law enforcement. Developing a good working relationship between the two can increase effectiveness exponentially.



Wayne Wohler

Within the City of Los Angeles it would be impossible to file criminal charges against every theft of utility case identified because of existing court caseloads as well as staff hours needed to testify in court. As a result, guidelines for filing criminal charges have been developed. These include filing criminal complaints for all narcotic related cases, utility fixer's, employees threatened or assaulted, repeat utility theft offenders, and/or if the amount of loss exceeds \$5000.00.

Since the 1990's at Los Angeles Department of Water and Power the Revenue Security Unit (as well as internal security) have worked together to develop a relationship with law enforcement which allows an effective response in a timely manner whether theft or threat.

Also, as part of Revenue Security outreach to law enforcement, materials have been developed for training during roll call. Revenue Security personnel are available as well to provide utility theft / safety recognition training for the narcotics officers of LAPD. This training has broadened the city's ability to both identify and process utility theft cases more efficiently and with a greater degree of safety.

When safety issues are identified (and rectified when possible) by Revenue Security personnel in the field, law enforcement is able to work more safely in the areas where theft or tampering with utilities is occurring, and the utility theft investigators can properly document and accurately identify the utility losses for possible recovery.

Partly as a result of Revenue Security's on-going training in both safety and theft recognition, LADWP (in conjunction with various law enforcement agencies) has identified and taken steps to recover revenue of over \$984,000 (during the period July 2010 thru January 2011) that would have been otherwise lost due to the theft of utilities at illegal indoor marijuana grows alone. The Department has had over a 98% success rate in all criminal filings with the majority of all cases usually paying full restitution within three years from the date of conviction. Is this a perfect way to get the utility company paid? No. But, in many cases sentencing includes full court ordered restitution.

Developing a relationship with law enforcement can allow for increased revenue to the utility. A safer working environment benefits utility staff and law enforcement personnel as well as the general public. The city is therefore a safer place for everyone to live and work.



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## "BE PREPARED"

BY DAVID WHIDDEN, REVENUE PROTECTION SUPERVISOR,  
THE UNITED ILLUMINATING COMPANY

One of my passions in life is scouting. Having three sons that have been involved in scouting has made this much more enjoyable for me. As many of you know, their motto is "Be Prepared." These two simple words apply to so much in life and, if you're inclined to follow this philosophy you can save yourself a great deal of unnecessary stress. As much as I try to follow this motto I realized that there are certain things that you should prepare yourself for in your career. So this story is what I would term "my wake up call" or staying with the scouting theme "Reville".



David Whidden

*The world may be changing but the drivers that create a need for Revenue Protection are not going away.*

I came to United Illuminating in 2004 as an Investigator to work with George Balsamo. My first few years were very busy ones as both the department and I grew. There were many changes in the company and in the industry. I have written before and pined for the days when life was simpler (i.e. basic, hands on theft of service). Today we're busy learning the complexities of fraud and identity theft and everything seems to come at you at warp speed. The world is changing quickly and it's all we can do to keep up with it. One day last July George came into the office and stated that he had an announcement to make but he needed to see me in private first. Now, ever since I arrived here George and I had almost been joined at the hip. I was new to the state of Connecticut and even to the type of investigations we performed. In my former revenue protection job we didn't have the same technology and the methods of investigation were drastically different. Lately George had not been himself and seemed almost distant. My first thought when we closed the door to his office was "Something is very wrong! He's got cancer and he's dying"! I was relieved to learn that I was wrong. He was only announcing his intention to retire. In 2 weeks!?! I was both happy and floored at the same time. George had accepted another challenge and felt confident that the department would continue to do well. Unfortunately, two weeks was not much time for any of us.

I always thought that I had the opportunity to take the reins from George one day but I hadn't expected that day to come so soon. I had been so busy being an Investigator that I hadn't paid much attention to what it takes to make everything run. There is so much that goes on behind the scenes that I never realized



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George was responsible for. George had been doing this job for a quite a while and had grown into it so well that he made it look effortless at times. Even though we spent a lot of time together car pooling, strategizing and discussing philosophies, I had two weeks to absorb as much as I could about the job so that the transition would be somewhat seamless when he departed. Virtually impossible!! At the very least, I had to be able to make the department run until a replacement was selected.

The point of my story is this. The world may be changing but the drivers that create a need for Revenue Protection are not going away. I'm very lucky in that I can still call George whenever I have questions and we stay in touch regularly. Not everyone has that luxury and there are situations where we are thrust into a job and don't have that option. I remember a test I had to take as part of an application for a management position in my old company in NY called "the in box". The basic premise was that this hypothetical inbox full of tasks belonged to someone who was no longer here and it was up to you to figure out how to handle each task. It was a real test of your skills but much of it was just common sense. It's important that supervisors and managers take the time to show one or two subordinates how to perform those daily tasks that you run through each day with ease. It's just as important that the team take the time to learn some of those tasks. You don't always get to pick the timeframe for change and it's better to hit the ground running than to be blindsided. It's so much better for everyone to take the time to "Be Prepared."



## 2011 JOINT IURPA / NURPA FALL CONFERENCE & TRAINING SEMINAR

Date: September 20, 21, 22 & 23  
Location: Queensbury Hotel, 88 Ridge St., Glens Falls, NY  
1-518-792-1121  
Room Rate: \$94 per night before Aug. 20  
Upon availability after Aug. 20

Plans for the 2011 joint IURPA / NURPA Conference have been underway and the executive board would like to extend an invitation for you to attend this event. Once again we have the opportunity to take advantage of the Adirondack Region, in New York State, for the upcoming conference.

The Queensbury Hotel, in Glens Falls, New York, has been well received by attendees at previous conferences. An Agenda will be posted shortly along with conference fee and registration information.

**Room reservations are to be made directly to  
the Queensbury Hotel at (518) 792-1121.**

**\*\*\*PLEASE MENTION "NURPA" AT THE TIME OF  
REGISTRATION TO ENSURE ROOM AVAILABILITY\*\*\***

**\*\*\*Please Note: In order to provide the hotel the needed  
information for this conference BOTH Hotel AND Conference  
Registrations MUST be completed by August 20th. \*\*\***

**All available rooms at the hotel have been held for this event.  
As a result some rooms will begin to be released in July.  
Any remaining hotel rooms will be released on August 20th..  
The prevailing rate will be applied.**

## 2011 META CONFERENCE MAY 4TH & 5TH, 2011 COMED COMMERCIAL CENTER 1919 SWIFT DRIVE OAK BROOK, IL 60523

The 2011 Midwest Energy Theft Association Conference will be held in the auditorium of the ComEd Commercial Center at 1919 Swift Drive Oak Brook, IL 60523. The META Board has waived any registration fee for up to four attendees per utility and there is a \$350 registration fee for vendors. For each attendee over four per utility the fee is \$50.00 (max of 8 per company based on space). We intend to start later in the day on May 4th to allow for travel time and we expect to end mid Thursday afternoon, again to allow for travel time.

An off-site vendor reception/dinner is being planned for Wednesday, May 4th. There is no additional charge for this reception/dinner for registered participants. Additional guests/spouses are welcome at \$40 per person.

If you require overnight lodging you are encouraged to make your own arrangements. For further information, please visit the conference info tab on the IURPA website ([www.iurpa.org](http://www.iurpa.org)).

Although there is no registration fee for up to four attendees per utility, pre-registration is required in order to make appropriate accommodations and meal plans for everyone. Please refer any questions to Jeff Meyer, META President. Phone: 414-221-4752

Email: [jeffrey.meyer@we-energies.com](mailto:jeffrey.meyer@we-energies.com)



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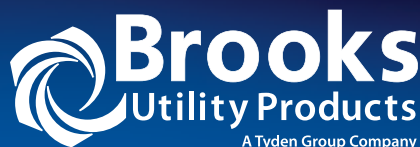
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## NEWS FROM THE NORTHWEST

BY STEVEN SPRAGUE, PORTLAND GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY

By the end of 2010 Portland General Electric Co. (PGE) finished the 825,000+ meter exchanges needed to complete the move to automated metering. It's exciting for PGE's Energy Recovery Unit in the fact that it brings many new leads and opportunities for revenue recovery and lost energy savings



Steven Sprague

At the same time, we're losing over 100 meter readers who have contributed greatly to the success that we have had over the years. Lost are the eyes and ears in the field that brought us so many leads about drug houses, thefts, unmetered service and safety related issues.

With "smart meters", however, comes new ways to generate leads and quicker identification of problems in the field. In some cases, the meter can't provide all of the information that meter readers did, but in many other cases we are alerted to certain conditions quicker and with more information than we ever had before.

*... "smart meters" .... if someone pulls the meter, we will know.*

The meter doesn't care if access is limited or the customer is trouble, but if someone pulls the meter, we will know. Not only that, we will know what day and what time of day the meter was pulled – and we will even be alerted to the fact when it happens. Moreover, the meters send signals in on conditions such as overheated services, voltage problems, no-coms and unauthorized reconnects.

As we prepared for the advent of automated metering and the alarms they generate that are received by our head-end system. For efficiency and quick response, we then had to build a path for the data to flow from the meters to our Revenue Protection department. To do that, we constructed what we called the Lead Generator where all the alarms and alerts could be scored and prioritized on their way to the portal to ensure that when the work orders came up in the morning, all the safety alarms or other priority jobs were at the top of the list.

This was important because we knew from everything we have learned and heard at these conferences that false alarms could be a show-stopper. So, we built filters to automatically screen the leads against all the other PGE work systems to ensure that we would not be chasing leads that were not really leads after all – just routine work in the field that other work groups were performing. In other words, to avoid chasing our tails.

One important aspect of our new system is that the smart meters are able to distinguish between a true outage and a meter being pulled from the socket. This was one of my biggest concerns going in.

So, as far as the advanced metering world goes, PGE is off and running and the Revenue Protection group has not only been able to maintain its current capability, but we have actually showed an increase in revenue with the new technology.

Although we've only been using this new system for a relatively short period of time, we have found some interesting things so far with the smart meters. We have been able to leverage the alarm capabilities of the system and create several new categories of leads, such as being able to identify unauthorized reconnects immediately. This has helped to limit losses and damages associated with these tamperers. For instance, we have found electricians using our meter seals to try to cover up work, stolen meters, open bases and stopped meters as they stop instead of months later when someone happens to notice.

Of course, we all know that some of our biggest losses and challenges come from people tapping into the service ahead of the meters. Although the new meters may not be able to detect it, they do offer some things that can help in an investigation. Like utilities across the country, PGE continues to have troubles with the large marijuana grow operations and must find ways either through kilowatt-hours analysis, primary metering or some type of audit program to expose and limit the losses connected to these operations.

I can assure you of one thing: if you do not proactively deal with these grow operations your problem will only increase. As a utility you may choose to not pursue or deal with these uncomfortable situations, but whether you decide to play or not the grower is going to grow and in many cases steal the power. For us, smart metering is another tool in that battle and, in some cases, a more effective one than relying on a meter reader or other field personnel.

So as far as smart metering is concerned, there are definitely challenges in implementing such a system -- and certainly set backs along the way – but there is a tremendous upside and unlimited potential going forward. And, if done right, smart metering will allow us in the revenue protection world to take things to another level.

The key is that we all need to communicate and share our experiences as we go along, and I can't think of a better way to do that than to be a member of IURPA and your regional theft association. Utilities need revenue protection more than ever and we need to show our utility management why and what we can do to ensure the success and safety of automated metering.

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## CURIOSITY PAYS

By ITZICK MICHAELI, REVENUE PROTECTION MANAGER, ISRAEL ELECTRIC CORP.

On January 22, me and Judith my wife embarked the Oasis of The Seas, Royal Caribbean's biggest ship, and started our cruise to the Western Caribbean Sea.

Our second port of call was Cozumel Mexico, where we boarded a ferry, that took us to Port De Palaya Del Carmen, on our way to visit Cancun.

Our excursion group was walking through the picturesque streets of the small town, towards the tour bus that was waiting for us. Most women were eye checking the stores, making notes where to stop and shop before returning to the ship. Most men were pointing out the bars, hoping to catch a few beers at reasonable price, before re-embarking the vessel.

As for myself, I was walking and stumbling, while looking constantly up, towards the overhead grids and poles, hoping to be able to locate any of the famous Mexican "Diabolitos", those makeshift drop wires that are thrown and hooked to the grid, and supply "free" electricity to the needy "customers".

I was always curious to see them.

"Diabolitos" I didn't see, but turning a corner, my eyes fell on a niche, holding an electricity cabinet. And there it was, a live electricity theft case.



Itzick Michaeli

The bypass was quite simple and clear. Two illegal wires inserted to the base of the removed meter.

I took a few pictures, temporarily rested my case, and happily joined the line of eager tourists that were boarding the bus to Cancun.

As for my curiosity to see "Diabolitos" from close, it will still be there, until my next visit to Mexico.



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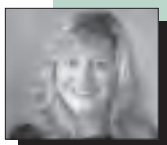
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## UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF REVENUE PROTECTION

By JEFF MEYER, META PRESIDENT

Let me start by saying thank you to the IURPA Board for their excellent work in presenting a first rate publication such as this. The ability to communicate through such a medium is a bit of a lost art and, being old school like I am, I like this communication conduit. This is the segue into my next point, which is the value of the contacts made through an organization such as IURPA.



Jeff Meyer

There have been many occasions when I had questions to ask of industry peers but two recent events exemplify why IURPA is of value. Last December, Rich Brennan of Innertite Corporation (an IURPA supporter for many years), once again sponsored the Illinois Revenue Protection Conference in Naperville, Illinois. Approximately 30 Revenue Protection professionals, throughout the Midwest, from utility companies such as We Energies, Peoples Gas, City of Naperville, ComEd, Ameren and Detroit Edison attended the 23rd annual conference. All in attendance benefited from the spirited exchange of information presented by very competent and knowledgeable speakers. Rich Brennan's commitment and enthusiasm is contagious and typifies all the vendor representatives supporting IURPA.

The other occasion that demonstrates the value of contacts through IURPA occurred when I called Southern Company in Georgia and asked to speak with Greg Lee. Greg's name came up while I was discussing report writing and database systems relevant to Revenue Protection applications. Greg received my message and called me from his car to describe a system they were implementing. As useful as the information was I was more impressed, but not surprised, at the quick response and amount of time Greg took to answer all of my questions.

Now, let's move on to other business. One issue that seems to be raised with increasing frequency is, "How do we continue to justify our Revenue Protection Programs?" To those of us who do this work, we can think of countless reasons; however, I'm discovering that as more of us report to individuals who have never had practical experience in this type of work, it gets more difficult to justify what we do.

The following example illustrates the justification difficulty:

Five years ago you may have had 7% of your non-pay shut offs self reconnected and stealing energy. At that time, you may have been able to re-lock them in a week or two (or more depending on resources), with a certain theft amount that was subsequently re-billed. You probably claimed the theft amount as recovered revenue.

Now, through aggressive efforts, which may include police intervention for deterrent, you experience a self reconnect rate of 5% and you can re-lock those within 3-5 days. The theft amount you can claim is less because your efforts have resulted in fewer self reconnections and less stolen revenue per occurrence.

Although this is a success story in that you have lowered the theft amount from your company, you recovered less money, thus the assumption of less productivity. Unfortunately, this can easily be viewed as an inefficient Revenue Protection Program when, in reality, it's a very successful one.

There are obviously other scenarios to this but the better we get, sometimes the worse we look on paper. I recently prepared a presentation about our customer verification program and as I looked back over the data for the past 3 years I discovered exactly this same trend. Fewer referrals to verify identity and a lower denial rate (indicating that more individuals, who did present identification, were truthful). Although on paper it appears that we did less work, in reality it would indicate that our efforts over the past several years have properly shaped our customer behavior to realize it's pointless to attempt to use false identity to open an account. This is exactly the direction in which we should be going.

*"How do we continue to justify our Revenue Protection Programs?"*

Consequently, I think it would be advantageous to all of us to consider the value (cost) of what did NOT happen when justifying our programs. One of several areas we are looking at is trying to place a monetary value on safety hazards that were corrected as a result of our efforts. Unfortunately, the only time a monetary value is placed on a safety hazard is when the jury awards the judgment from the lawsuit after the injury or death. Can we place a monetary value on the prevention of injury or death when justifying our programs? Improper metering conditions such as defective or improperly wired meters, incorrect meter multipliers and drive rates and company errors that we discover should be brought to the attention of managers as this all effects the bottom line. At We Energies we already report frauds avoided as a contributor to our annual financial goals but we will take a close look at that in the future to see if we can categorize other non-traditional savings through preventive actions and deterrence. In addition to being investigators and problem solvers we must now include educators onto our resume. By educating company managers to the complete role of what we do, true dollar recovery in addition to dollar loss prevention (through theft and non-theft), we will shine brighter than we do already.

As one final note I invite everyone to check out the IURPA website for information on the upcoming META Conference scheduled for May 4-5 in Chicago, IL. Our host this year will be ComEd and the META board has prepared what we believe to be a strong agenda with topics germane to our current priorities. I look forward to your continued cooperation in the future.



## 2011 SCRPA / SURPA CONFERENCE JUNE 7TH - 10TH, 2011

It is time to make plans to attend our 2011 SCRPA/ SURPA joint conference, which is scheduled for June 7th-10th. This year's conference will be held at the Courtyard By Marriott & Conf. Center in beautiful Cocoa Beach Florida.

As always, this year's planning committee is diligently working to provide interesting speakers and demonstrations on various critical subjects related to the protection and assurance of utility revenues. We will update the IURPA webpage [www.iurpa.htm](http://www.iurpa.htm) > [www.iurpa.org](http://www.iurpa.org) shortly with a tentative agenda. Feel free to offer any suggestions you may have regarding speakers or subjects as we build a strong agenda. Follow this link

< <http://iurpa.org/download/2011surpa-scrpareg.pdf> >  
<http://iurpa.org/download/2011surpa-scrpareg.pdf>

for the registration form and further details regarding fees and hotel reservations.

I look forward to seeing you there and don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions!

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## You Might Be A Pot Grower If...

By TIM FARRENS , REVENUE ASSURANCE INVESTIGATOR, PROGRESS ENERGY FLORIDA

*This is a comical approach to a serious problem within our industry. Individuals involved in Revenue Protection understand the variety of investigations they must be prepared for and the inherent safety risks that are associated with this type of work. IURPA recognizes the difficulties and frustrations individuals within this profession are faced with and the importance of maintaining a positive attitude throughout this process. This article takes a lighter side to a universal problem and is presented in the style of a well known comedian.*

I know this is a crazy title for an article, but Revenue Protection professionals spend a lot of time behind the windshield, sometimes in deep contemplation and sometimes not. My name is Tim Farrens and I work for Progress Energy Florida as a Revenue Assurance Investigator. (Revenue Protection, Current Diversion, it's all pretty much the same thing. Does every company change the name of the department about once every two or three years) I have been with Progress Energy for 23 years with the last 13 in this department and I really enjoy my job.

When Gary Signorelli asked me if I would like to write an article for the IURPA Newsletter I was a little stumped for a subject, but as I was thinking about what subject to discuss in this article, it dawned on me that I was listening to the radio and the comedian I was listening to had worked out something very similar in his comedy bit. I had been thinking of all of the small details that myself and my fellow investigators have observed in the many grow houses that we have worked here in Florida since I started in this line of work, as well as the stories that I have been told by former investigators that were always backed up with slides or photographs. I have listened to and watched on the television all the shows on the marijuana trade and it being the largest cash crop in the United States, and when I see the video of the grow houses they all look almost alike, and maybe I think I worked bigger ones than that one. So I started making a little list.

I have come up with several, generally broad descriptions for the type of grow house that we have come across. They can be described by four general categories: the professional, the wannabe, the redneck, and "the Signorelli," named after my friend Gary Signorelli.

The first is the professional grow house. This is a work of art, a real beauty set up by a skilled electrician. There are no dangling wires (ok maybe a few), the wire ties are all trimmed,

the underground tap is attached to the two hot legs and the neutral and foamed to protect against the elements, or the overhead is cut out in the eaves with precision and great care. The load is balanced, the breaker panel is in great condition, everything is nice and tight; even the local law enforcement professionals are not afraid to go near the breaker panel or the wires that are exposed. This individual may have had lineman experience or is a residential or commercial electrician who takes great pride in the work they do even though it's not legal. Let's face it, it's pretty and you almost don't want to help the local law enforcement destroy it (for those of you in other states other than Florida as of July 2010 they only have to keep a sample of the equipment the rest is destroyed on site.) But you do have a good time watching or maybe handing the narcotics agent the sledge hammer.

The next type of setup is considerably more dangerous, the Wannabe. This is the setup that I think causes the most danger to everyone. This is the individual or group that looked everything up on the Internet and then said "I can do this, No Sweat." They have hooked up their underground tap with only the two hot legs, no neutral. (Oh it won't go bad and then explode) The tap is wrapped in the plastic bag the clamp bolts came in or in a leftover fertilizer bag, really weather resistant. The wires going into the breaker panel are loose and all the wires are just hanging or placed in metal hooks along the wall. When you walk in the place, the hair on the back of your neck stands up and you are not sure if it's the live electricity or just the bad set up. The local law enforcement, for the most part just stand back and let you do your work, and then they ask the all important question. Will this shock me if I touch it?

The most challenging, and also the most dangerous of them all to me, is the Redneck setup. This is a setup found in the most rural of areas or just in an area where the neighbors do not talk to each other or want to. The overhead tap is attached to the bare wire that has been skinned off with hose clamps to hold it together. (We have pictures to prove this one) For an underground tap the wires are still skinned but instead the tap is held together with duct tape. (Ah it's just a little rain it won't hurt nothing: Boom.) This is the one where you, as the professional, walk to the door, take your photographic evidence, put your camera in a secure location, put your hands in your pockets and tell everyone to stay out of this room. You then call for the local line department to not only cut everything loose, but to make sure that there is no electricity going to the location. The water is flowing on the floor or thru the floor, live wires are on the ground and the place gives you the (in Redneck terms) the Hebe jibes.

The last of these setups is named after my friend Gary Signorelli, also one of my fellow investigators. We call it a



## YOU MIGHT BE A POT GROWER IF... (CONTINUED)

Signorelli grow. This is a completely metered grow operation. I know the end product is not legal, but they are good paying customers and they normally pay the bill on time. The setup of the operation may be the same, bad wiring, added breaker panels, code violations, etc, but they are paying a really big bill. The situation becomes a large tradeoff; expanded revenue or illicit narcotics. I will leave the politics to the other guys.

Now for the list (Think of this in the best Southern Drawl you can imagine)

You Might Be a Pot Grower if:

1. If every window in the house is covered in Mylar or Drywall from the inside you might be a pot grower.
2. If you have four 5ton ac units in the backyard of a house that only needs one 3ton unit, you might be a pot grower.
3. If you have a Cadillac Escalade, a BMW, and a white panel van, and no job you might be a pot grower.
4. If you have a voodoo shrine in every room of the house you might be a pot grower (this one made me a little nervous)

I changed this up a little bit for all of us

Now it's You Might Have Found a Grow House if:

5. If the dead plant in the ground, in front of the meter base, is still in the pot from the local store and still has the tag on it from that store... you might have a grow house.
6. If the ground around the meter base is still soft and when you open up the meter base the smell of marijuana is enough to make you hungry... you might have a grow house.
7. If your local line department has been to the same location 4 times because the service line going to the house keeps burning down... you might have a grow house.
8. If you are doing inspections on your lines with a FLIR camera and the temperatures show twice what they should be... you might have a grow house.

Feel free to add your own, send them to me to add to the list;

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## SARPA EMBARKS ON REVENUE RECOVERY PROJECT

By RENS BINDEMAN, SARPA TECHNICAL ADVISOR

When the theft of electricity was first identified around 1994 in South Africa, we struggled to find a suitable name for this apparent threat facing electricity supply authorities countrywide. As we deliberated what we should name the concept of combating “energy theft” and find processes to perform this task, we never imagined that there were already similar processes utilized in other parts of the world. However, after doing our homework in this regard, we realised that we should not be “redeveloping the wheel”, but should rather follow the international trend and also call our process “Revenue Protection”



Rens Bindeman

*The concept of developing Revenue Recovery processes is not a new one ... but it has most probably never received so much concentrated attention before in Revenue Protection circles.*

The South African Revenue Protection Association (SARPA) was subsequently established and we have since developed numerous Revenue Protection orientated guidelines, as part of the Associations effort to assist our members in performing their tasks more effectively. This was achieved by analysing best practices in Utilities worldwide and motivating local experts in the field, to share their knowledge with us in this regard. Over the past year we have been in the process of revising all the relevant revenue protection specifications namely NRS 055- Code of practise for Revenue Protection, NRS 096 – Sealing standard for electricity metering, NRS 059 – Recommendations to minimize the problems associated with the theft of transformer neutral earthing copper conductor, NRS 080 Quantifying and reporting of energy losses in electricity distribution networks. We also developed a new guideline namely NRS 101 – Guidelines for the reduction of the theft of Utility service metals.

During these workshops we realised that there were certain specialized revenue protection, credit control and metering issues that were not receiving the necessary attention it should in most Utilities in South Africa. However, we determined that these issues were too complex to discuss in the time allowed for the NRS processes and decided that we should rather address them in another forum. It was therefore decided to list these issues and then form a Workgroup, which could analyse the effect these issues have on Utilities revenue losses countrywide.

Furthermore, if it was found that these issues were indeed contributing to higher revenue losses in Utilities, SARPA should develop a new strategy, in order to find an effective way to address these matters.

This time around we were again faced with the dilemma of naming the concept. We therefore decided to derive the name by focussing on what we would actually like to achieve with this strategy. After some deliberation between industry experts, it was clear that most of these issues were focused on finding solutions to recover Utilities lost revenue. We therefore decided to develop a “Revenue Recovery Strategy” and initiate such a project within SARPA to assist ailing Municipalities.

The concept of developing Revenue Recovery processes is not a new one and I am pretty sure this issue is been addressed all over the world in all Utilities in one way or another, but it has most probably never received so much concentrated attention before in Revenue Protection circles. We envisage developing this concept into a very effective tool that could be utilised to effectively combat revenue losses in Utilities across the globe.



Eastern Cape Branch Workshop

At the recent SARPA Convention in Johannesburg in July 2010, it was quite noticeable that presentations by Utilities were very different from previous years, as it was not anymore focused on all the good things that Utilities plan to do or have been done up to date, but was rather focused on what have been going wrong and what need to be done to fix it! The reason for this change in approach can possibly be due to the fact that most Service Providers in South Africa are experiencing some kind of financial difficulties. This includes big Metros, as well as medium and smaller Municipalities and some have already been placed under administration. Knowledgeable persons from the Industry have also been seconded to assist at Senior Management level, in order to assist these ailing Municipalities.

It was also noted that some of the larger Utilities in South Africa have already started introducing a new professional post

## SARPA EMBARKS ON REVENUE RECOVERY PROJECT (CONTINUED)

for a “Revenue Recovery Specialist”. It seems that at last someone has come to terms with the plea by revenue protection managers in South Africa that the process of recovering lost revenue could not be allocated to a specific Department or Directorate within a Municipality, as it requires different skills and knowledge to address all the relevant issues. Due to the big financial component in this process, it is clear that these specialist should have a very good financial background first of all and secondly some technical know how and last but not least some knowledge regarding law enforcement and judicial issues. It is a well known fact that one cannot acquire most of these skills overnight and therefore I agree that this should be a “specialist” post. In Revenue Protection I have learned that you cannot teach some skills (as it comes with experience), but you could actually teach individuals through a mentorship programme to follow best practises quite easily. It was crystal clear that there are too few of these experts available at this stage in Southern Africa to impact effectively on the industry, which are losing huge amounts of revenue each day.

We at SARPA therefore realised that we needed to do something drastically to address this issue as soon as possible. As a starting point we invited all the known Revenue Protection experts in the country to attend a “Revenue Recovery Work group meeting”. The goal of the Workgroup was to determine a Revenue Recovery Strategy and identify possible methods that could be utilized to assist ailing Municipalities.

The good thing about putting such knowledgeable persons in one room to discuss a new concept is the fact that you know that all the relevant issues would be identified and receive the necessary attention. However, the challenge is to manage the process and find enough time to give everyone the chance to make his or her point and still be able to discuss each issue effectively. From the discussions held at the work group meeting, it was soon clear to all those present that each Utility has in some way or another developed best practices or processes that produces excellent results in minimizing and recovering lost revenue. However, it was clear that not one Utility in South Africa were able to deal with all the aspects of revenue loss management effectively. This is a very worrying factor and could be the main reason why most Utilities are experiencing high revenue losses in the region. Furthermore, certain of the processes are clearly not been implemented at all in most Utilities, due to either the lack of information, resources or the necessary funds.

EDI Holdings (a Government owned company that was tasked to restructure the distribution of electricity in South Africa), gave the workgroup members feedback regarding ring-fencing exercises that were recently conducted in several Municipalities in South Africa, as part of their mandate. Some

very interesting statistics were obtained during these exercises and it was for the first time possible to make some assumptions with regard to revenue loss issues. According to these statistics, the “accepted norm” for revenue loss figures in South African Utilities with regard to electricity could be estimated at 7 % and those for non-technical losses at around 3%. It was also noted that many Utilities clearly needed urgent assistance in order to minimize revenue losses, as the average loss figure in the country could be calculated at approximately 15%. What is even more worrying is the fact that some Municipalities are losing as much as 30% of their revenue on a daily basis.



*SARPA NRS Working Group*

The Work group therefore decided that SARPA should do something drastically in order to assist such ailing entities. A strategy was therefore compiled which proposed that the Association form Task teams, (consisting of revenue protection experts within its membership), which would then over a period of approximately a week analyse shortcomings at targeted Utilities and then propose measures to rectify such issues. We decided to start off with a “dry run” at a stable Utility, in order to test our processes of gathering information regarding losses before embarking on a few pilot sites. A list of special questions was developed, which will be used to obtain the necessary information from a Utility, in order to identify the shortcomings. It is envisaged that information obtained during this project will benefit everyone, as persons that form part of the task team will be exposed to best practises (which they can take back to their Utilities to implement). This cross-pollination process will be one of the many positive spinoffs that we envisage from this project.

This proposal was at first frowned on by Consultants, due to fact that they felt that we were encroaching on their turf, but after the processes were discussed at the Convention, it was clear to all that they would actually benefit from such a project. It was



## SARPA EMBARKS (CONTINUED)

envisaged that part of the strategy would be to supply all ailing Municipalities with a list of SARPA Affiliate members (Consultants, suppliers and revenue protection/credit control companies) and what services each of them could provide. Whenever the shortcomings are then identified, the Utility will be able to refer to the list to obtain the services they need, in order to implement preventative measures.

The strategy was presented to the SARPA Executive first and then at the Convention and Branch meetings. All members have since vouched their support to the project and we are now ready to commence the project during October 2010. Up to date Drakenstein Municipality in the Western Cape area has been identified as the site for the dry run and several other Municipalities have already indicated that they would like to be involved with the project or be used as a pilot site. The Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) has also indicated that they are very interested in sponsoring this project.

The South African Revenue Protection Association is proud of its achievements and is currently going from strength to strength. The Association holds a yearly Convention in July of each year with the 2011 one to be held in Polokwane in the Northern Province. There is seven Branches which meet on a quarterly bases, mostly in tandem with the AMEU (Association of Municipal Electrical Undertakings) at nice venues across the specific branch area. SARPA's current projects include apart from the Revenue Recovery project, also the expansion of revenue protection practises into the rest of Africa, combating of Utility Metal thefts, sharing of information through the electronic media and presentation of training courses. We are currently conducting Revenue Protection Branch workshops (at no cost to the Utility members) in each Branch area, where participants can choose from a long list of issues and processes what they would like to discuss. As the process of sharing knowledge is one of our primary goals, we would hereby like to invite Utilities worldwide to interact with us in this regard and if possible attend our yearly Convention in July. For more information visit our website at [www.sarpa.co.za](http://www.sarpa.co.za) or our SARPA Revenue Protection Group on LinkedIn , or myself at [rens@mweb.co.za](mailto:rens@mweb.co.za)

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