

## DECISION MEMORANDUM

**TO:** COMMISSIONER HANSEN  
COMMISSIONER SMITH  
COMMISSIONER KJELLANDER  
JEAN JEWELL  
RANDY LOBB  
DAVID SCHUNKE  
DON HOWELL  
SCOTT WOODBURY  
BILL EASTLAKE  
TERRI CARLOCK  
JUDY STOKES  
BEVERLY BARKER  
RON LAW  
TONYA CLARK  
WORKING FILE

**FROM:** KEITH HESSING

**DATE:** OCTOBER 4, 2000

**RE:** PETITION FROM THE CUSTOMERS OF ATLANTA POWER COMPANY.

On September 11, 2000, the Commission received a petition from some of the residents of Atlanta, Idaho, enumerating concerns they have about the service being provided by Atlanta Power Company. The Commission Staff reviewed the many signatures on the petition and identified the names of six customers of record. Some of the others apparently are not customers while others are members of households where one member is the customer of record. A copy of the filed petition is attached to this memorandum.

The petition requests "a formal investigation into the reliability of electrical service for the Atlanta townsite." The petitioners state they "have experienced problems with both the consistency and quality of the electrical power provided." The petitioners further state that these same problems have been brought up before and that they remain unresolved.

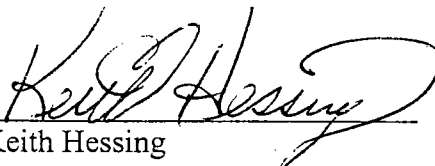
### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff contends that it is premature to open a formal investigation at this time. Staff proposes to conduct an informal investigation into the reliability of service. As part of that

investigation the Commission Staff proposes to audit the Company, compile outage information, identify potential improvements and associated costs and survey customers concerning their desire to improve service reliability and the amount they are willing to pay to do so. At the conclusion of its investigation Staff proposes to report its findings to the Commission with recommendations for further action. Staff estimates that the investigation will take approximately four months.

### COMMISSION DECISION

Staff proposes to conduct an informal investigation of the electric service provided by Atlanta Power Company and to submit a written report to the Commission with recommendations for further action. Does the Commission agree with Staff's proposal?

  
Keith Hessing

Attachment

KH:gdk:i:dmemos/decision memorandum

JIS

RECEIVED  
FILED

2000 SEP 11 AM 9:12

IDAHO PUBLIC  
UTILITIES COMMISSION

Dear Secretary of the  
Commission -

You may address  
your response to the  
enclosed petition to:

Doris Helge  
P.O. Box 32  
Atlanta, GA

83601

Commission Secretary  
P. U. C.  
P. O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-074

August 25, 2000

Dear Secretary of the Commission:

The following citizens of Atlanta, Idaho hereby request a formal investigation into the quality of electrical service for the Atlanta townsite. We have experienced problems with both the consistency and quality of the electrical power provided. If the P.U.C. deems it useful to hold a meeting or a hearing, we request that the meeting be held in Atlanta so that the maximum number of citizens can attend.

As far as we know, we pay the highest rate per kilowatt hour of any consumers of electricity in the United States. Yet, over time, we have experienced problems which have not been resolved.

We have the following needs.

- Consistent, quality power
- Resolution of any power outages or other problems in a timely, responsive manner.
- An accessible person to address electrical outages and other problems.
- A pre-arranged and adequately trained person to back-up up the primary person responsible for power.
- Both people need to have been pre-cleared to do their duties. In other words, they should not be placed in the position of being afraid to act because of potential liability issues for attempting to fix the power source.

Thank you. We look forward to your response to our concerns.

*Donis Doye*  
*Mary E. Dote*  
*Joe Ryan*

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P. U. C.  
P. O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-074

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Anne Aastum  
Property Owner, Davis Addition  
Atlanta, Idaho

Mailing Address:  
6710 Randolph Drive  
Boise, ID 83709

  
Manuel Leon, Spouse

Mailing Address:  
6710 Randolph Drive  
Boise, ID 83709

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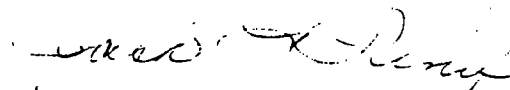
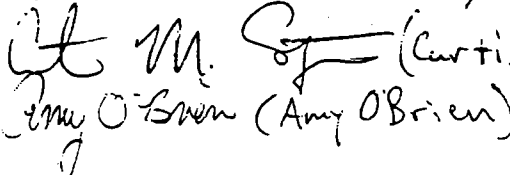
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We have the following needs.

- Consistent, quality power. (During most of the month of May, the town was without reliable power. Atlanta has also experienced a variety of emergencies for which power was essential but not consistently available. The firestorms are only a recent example. Because the town water association was unable to secure a reliable source of quality power that met state compliance guidelines, the association eventually changed to solar power.)
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Thank you. We look forward to your response to our concerns.

  
  
Curtis M. Stigers (Curtis M. Stigers)  
Amy O'Brien (Amy O'Brien)

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*Doris Edge*  
*May E. Duke*  
↑

*David (Dick) Jenkins*  
*Evelyn Jenkins*

*W*  
*originals*

*contained*  
*on other*  
*pages*

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*Colleen Hopkinson*

*John B. Jim*  
*M. W. M.*  
*Don [unclear]*  
*Robert Picotte*  
*Karen [unclear]*  
*10-2*

*Kashryn G. Picotte*  
*Maurin Joe Picotte*  
*Jutta May Picotte*  
*Shyoko Picotte*  
*Rita [unclear]*  
*Doris H. [unclear]*



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Don [unclear]

Kathryn G. Picotte  
Maurin Joe Picotte  
Jutta May Picotte  
Siyoko Picotte  
Bill UHP  
Coris Holge

## ADDENDUM TO 8-25-00 LETTER:

**EXAMPLES** of our concerns include the following.

### **NO BACK-UP GENERATOR:**

It is our understanding from speaking with a P.U.C. employee that a back-up generator was included in the current rates which were set in 1992 or 1993. (Three diesel generators were put into the rate base but have not remained in the community, and the generator that was last here was not maintained so it no longer works.) When one of us asked Mr. Stevenson about his having a back-up generator, he said we would have to take up a collection from the citizens, which is an inappropriate response because (1) According to a P.U.C. employee, three generators were put into the rate base, and (2) Mr. Stevenson cannot raise the rates without going through due process, as established by the P.U.C. (He cannot unilaterally raise our rates.)

Not only do we pay the highest rates per kilowatt hour of any area that we have researched in the U. S., Mr. Stevenson's business has grown due to increased construction and repairs in the area, mining tailings repair work, and hooking up new residents. More importantly, we pay a service charge for the availability of power (on top of the base rate for power). Yet, power is not always available, so we are paying for goods not received. This is different from any other power company in the U.S. (and we aren't receiving quality service.)

Mr. Stevenson said in a telephone conversation on 8-15-00 that the increased load from new construction in the area is causing a problem. In the same conversation, he said that he is not receiving enough business to provide a back-up generator. Obviously, these two statements are inconsistent.

### **WE FREQUENTLY DO NOT HAVE A RELIABLE TROUBLE-SHOOTER.**

Mr. Gill appears to know a good deal when he is available, however, he is a man with many jobs and is not always accessible. A recent example is that on 7-31-00, Mr. Gill was working on one of his private jobs. The power was out for 3 hours, and the citizens could not locate Mr. Gill. (This also happened during 8-13-00 to 8-16-00, as elaborated below.)

There is no trained, reliable back-up person to solve problems in Mr. Gill's absence.

When we once again requested that Mr. Stevenson handle this ongoing problem, he said it was up to Mr. Gill to trouble-shoot. he also remarked that he has now realized the problem and will handle it. We've previously received this response and would like to see problem-solving occur this time – before the next crisis.

Why are the above issues a problem? The most recent example is described below:

8-13-00:

The power went out about 3:00 p.m. and was out until about 8:30 p.m.

8-14-00:

Electricity out by 10:00 a.m. and not back on until about 6:00 p.m. Mr. Gill would be on vacation for several more days. Although at least one local citizen asked Mr. Gill to ensure that a backup was trained before he left town, no local citizen was designated as a backup person who felt comfortable going onto the power plant property and taking care of things in Dave's absence.

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Electricity out by 9:45 a.m. and not on the rest of the day. P.U.C. (Judy) was told by Lynn Stevenson that we'd have electricity by evening, but we didn't. In the late morning, Mr. Stevenson said by telephone that he was bringing a diesel generator to Atlanta that afternoon, but he didn't.

8-16-00

Please note that this is the FOURTH DAY of electricity being out either all day or a good portion of the day.

After being out all day, the electricity was back on about 3:45 p.m.

When we spoke with Mr. Stevenson, he gave a series of timelines by which he would have the problem solved, and each one came and went. Finally, about 3:45 p.m. on 8-16-00, we had power. The problems wasn't totally solved even then because the new transformers would not be in Atlanta until the following Thursday.

As described above, Atlanta citizens went for almost four consecutive days with precious little electrical power. (It is important to note that this was before the firestorms came through the Atlanta area.)

Even though the August 13-16 power outages were unrelated to the fire storms, we are mentioning the firestorms in this letter because some citizens (e.g., those using a well water system) were attempting to do their best to protect their homes against fire but had no access to water without electricity. This type of emergency makes it even more imperative that our ongoing problems be corrected.

**Aren't there any guidelines specifying that a community of bill payers should have power restored in a reasonable length of time? If so, what is defined as reasonable?**

During a previous long power outage during the winter, Mr. Stevenson told us that 33 1/2 hours straight "is not a long time for the people of Atlanta to be without power" and that he "wasn't required to provide power within a reasonable length of time." He also said "Dave's always around to fix things," even though he was aware that this isn't true.

When some of us have complained in the past, we were verbally threatened by Mr. Stevenson who called our homes late at night. (During one conversation, he made comments prefaced by, "We can do this the easy way or the hard way . . ." ) As a specific example, he called late at night on 12-1-98, threatening to disconnect our power and asked a lot of personal questions.

We called P.U.C. the next day and confirmed that as long as we continue to pay our bills (which we always do), he can't disconnect our service. We also received validation that he had no right to call us at home late at night (especially on an unlisted, unpublished number that he said he got off the Internet – but it isn't on the Internet) and verbally harass us.

He threatened to either raise the rates (which he can't do single-handedly) or to stop providing power. He didn't do so then, and since his business continues to grow, I doubt he will do so.

On August 17, 2000, we called the P.U.C. and asked Judy to tell Mr. Stevenson not to call our home again. Once again, he had threatened to raise our rates and had asked personal questions. He also said the town should take up a collection for a backup generator – an inappropriate comment.

#### **OUTAGES MR. GILL KNOWS ABOUT IN ADVANCE:**

It would be courteous to know when the electricity will be turned off for maintenance or extra work that Mr. Gill elects to do so that local citizens can plan their power usage schedules accordingly. E.g., on 8-4-00, the electricity was off at 5:25 - 6:00 p.m. while Mr. Gill elected to set up special arrangements for a private event called "Atlanta Days," and there was no warning.

In the past, P.U.C. personnel said that citizens are to be notified when power will be turned off for routine maintenance, but we never are.

Jerry C Stanley  
300 Pine Street

Original  
Signature  
#23

Return-Path: <aaastum@primenet.com>  
X-Sender: aaastum@pop.primenet.com  
Date: Sat, 26 Aug 2000 19:45:23 -0600  
To: Shimoda Publishing <shimodapub@mindspring.com>  
From: Ann Aastum <aaastum@primenet.com>  
Subject: Re: from Doris in Atlanta

From Anne Aastum

Hi Doris:

Thank you for being on top of this - I would like to add:  
On May 26, 2000 the power went off at our cabin at about 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon. We were trying to work on the cabin. When I asked Dennis - who was standing around on Chris' property what had happened - he said Dave was working on the line in our area, approx. 100 feet away and a fuse had blown. There was no prior notice that the lines were being worked on - and that we could possibly be without power because he was working on a neighbor's line. He knew we were there but didn't bother coming over. Again he was only a very short distance away (100 feet - this is inconsiderate and professionally inexcusable). The power was out again 2 or three times that weekend.

Also our contractor was up there on August 15, and was delayed on construction due to unavailability of power. This is inconvenient to say the least.

Not to mention that my power bill for May was 3 times the normal rate. We have been using the cabin on a regular basis with power equipment to add the addition, however, this month was very strange. I mentioned this to Lynn Stevenson. I called PUC and they said I would have to contact Lynn Stevenson first.

How do I sign this letter to you? Do you want me to print out the first portion dated August 25 mail to you in an envelope with just your address?

SHIMODA - 4140 HITS!  
"SHIMODA PUBLISHING" - 0 HITS  
MINDSPRING - 3025 HITS  
SHIMODA MINDSPRING - 32 HITS

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In the past, P.U.C. personnel said that citizens are to be notified when power will be turned off for routine maintenance, but we never are.



Copy

This provides  
evidence of  
November 20, 1998

Ongoing  
problems.

Attention: C.J.  
Commissioners  
Idaho P.U.C.  
P. O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-0074

Dear C.J. and Commissioners:

I appreciated talking with you today and chose to put in writing that my concerns are the same as Mike Uhl has expressed.

I, too, am unclear why regular maintenance is not done on the Atlanta Power to avoid problems that are costly for all of us -- lost income and food, etc., not to mention inconvenience. Should I bill Mr. Stevenson for lost income when my computer and fax machine don't work?

We have a situation in which we pay the highest rates I'm aware of with little, if any regard for real service. We are supposed to be grateful for having power available, even if it is available on an unpredictable basis.

Even when outages are predictable (e.g., maintenance or new people being hooked-up), we are not told that they will occur. Often, I have been typing on my computer, in the middle of the day, and the power has vanished.

From my experience of living here in the past, I know that the outages are frequent in the winter, and I would like to see the system maintained so that the winter outages are not any more frequent or serious than necessary. In fact, some days, my computer powercell seems to "beep" on a non-stop basis. Genuine weather problems I can understand. Problems that could have been avoided should be.

I would also like to see a back-up generator installed so that, even if Dave's full-time highway district job or other responsibilities keep him from fixing any problems, Dennis or another local citizen can turn on a back-up system.

I know Terry Applegate has volunteered to be trained for back-up duty. I know William Uhl would be happy to be trained for back-up duty, and he is excellent with mechanical equipment.

Bill

Page 2  
Helge to P.U.C.

Please continue to speak for us. It is not right that we are without power for over 24 or 36 hours at a time as happened this summer and this month. So much can be prevented, and it would be cheaper for Mr. Stevenson to do routine maintenance than to wait for problems.

I'm unclear why it takes years to buy batteries for a back-up generator when the rates for power are as high as they are in Atlanta.

Also, Mr. Stevenson loses money when the system is down for long periods of time, so I don't understand it when he "cries poor" as an excuse.

I will appreciate your taking action so that Mr. Stevenson ensures:

- Maintenance of the system on a regular basis.
- A back-up crew that knows how to assess and fix problems.
- A back-up generator that really works
- People who can operate the back-up generator.

I'd also like to attend any hearing you arrange on this matter.

Thank you,



Doris Helge  
P. O. Box 32  
Atlanta, ID 83601

Marked 11-17-98  
November 13, 1998

Attention: Commissioners  
Idaho P.U.C.  
P. O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-0074

Dear Commissioners:

The purpose of this correspondence is to put in writing what I've voiced in person to P.U.C. employees C.J. and Rose since this summer. When I called Rose again this morning, she explained that you are reviewing the problems in Atlanta.

I came here in mid-June and began to pay the highest price for power in Idaho (and probably in the nation). Twice since that time, my food has ruined and I have lost income due to long-term power outages. (Part of my household income depends on having a fax machine, computer, and printer that run so that I can meet deadlines. We are also four hours from a grocery store, so the inconvenience of food loss is as important as the economic loss.)

When the outage happened this summer, I called P.U.C. and was told that the person in charge, Lynn Stevenson, was supposed to have a (1) back-up generator and (2) a back-up operator, and that we should never experience such a long-term power outage.

I had hoped that efforts were being made to correct the problem, but the problem recurred this week. We were without power for 33 hours before Mr. Stevenson came to look at the problem. Once here, he solved the problem in about 3 1/2 hours. I understand that there have been other recent outages of shorter duration. To be fair, I will only comment on those which I personally experienced. During the outage this week, we were without power for over 36 1/2 hours. When I called C.J. this summer, we were without power for over 24 hours.

The weather before the outage had been clear, and the problem was not weather-related. In fact, it is my understanding that the problem could have been avoided if appropriate maintenance had occurred.

Specifically, I was told that the system needed new brushes. Since all of us know that brushes wear out, wouldn't regular maintenance have prevented the problem? Maintenance does not appear to be a big priority for Mr. Stevenson. For example, wire poles have been leaning all summer by Yuba River. There is a 99% or greater chance that the poles will fall during a winter storm. Maintenance is not only preferable to problems, but it is definitely less expensive to do maintenance during the summer than during the winter.

The power plant is a part-time business for Mr. Stevenson, and it is also a part-time responsibility for Dave Gill, the Atlanta operator, as Dave has several other jobs, including being full-time head of the Atlanta Highway District. Of course, when storms/heavy snow occur, electricity and roads both require a full-time person to keep up with problems.

Since we all know that, is there any reason why a back-up person isn't trained? A large percentage of the time, when problems occur, Mr. Gill is doing one of his other jobs. This time, he was out of town when the problem occurred at 2:01 a.m. on November 11 and he isn't scheduled to return until November 15. The only other person who had any familiarity with the power plant is Dennis, and he does not have the expertise to deal with problems, including replacing brushes – a problem which could have been avoided with a routine maintenance schedule. However, Dennis could have been trained to start and maintain a generator (back-up system) until Mr. Stevenson arrived.

Mr. Stevenson appears to have little, if any, regard for his customers. When Jim and Karen Sayko called him to ask him to solve the power problem, they repeatedly said, "Don't come by way of James Creek. It's got too much snow to get through." That must have given Mr. Stevenson an easy excuse, because he called the evening of November 11 and said he had made an attempt to get into Atlanta via James Creek and couldn't get through, so he'd try to get in on November 12.

Quite frankly, most of us doubt seriously if Mr. Stevenson made an honest attempt to get into Atlanta because: (1) he was forewarned not to go the direction he allegedly went, (2) he knows the weather patterns of Atlanta, and (3) he didn't call back until the evening, saying he couldn't get in. If he really tried to get in on November 11, why did he not try another route, versus allegedly going back home? Lodging would have been available in Atlanta if he had needed to stay here overnight.

We all realize that power outages don't happen at "convenient times," but when you take people's money and say you'll provide a service, you have a responsibility to act in a timely manner. Showing up 33 hours after the outage is not acting in a timely manner.

Mrs. Applegate heard from Mr. Stevenson on the evening of November 11 that he "didn't think the problem could be fixed but he would come up on November 12." That's a curious response from someone who hadn't even been in the area to assess the problem.

Even if Mr. Stevenson is not interested in his adult customers, school had to be called off. The teacher had arranged for a guest speaker from Australia to talk to the kids. The kids had to meet in the bar for the part of the day that the guest speaker was here because the event was planned.

When I talked to the P.U.C. this summer, we were told that Mr. Stevenson had no batteries for a back-up generator, because they had been stolen – several years ago. We were also told that he didn't have a place to lock up batteries, yet there is a building at the dam. A lock system could be designed for the generator itself, like for other heavy equipment.

How long does it take to come up with a back-up system? It is our understanding that he has been saying that the generator hasn't worked since 1993. Yet, the locals have been faithfully paying their exorbitant power bills. This may be a part-time business for Mr. Stevenson, but we pay our outrageous bills on time, every month.

As the public regulatory agency, we are asking that you take action so that Mr. Stevenson ensures:

- Regular maintenance of the system
- A back-up crew that knows how to assess and fix problems
- A back-up generator that really works
- People who can operate the back-up generator

If you hold a hearing on this matter, we would appreciate an invitation to attend.

Thank you,  
Mike Uhl  
c/o: P. O. Box 32  
Atlanta, ID 83601

RECEIVED  
FILED



2000 SEP -7 PM 3:24

IDAHO PUBLIC  
UTILITIES COMMISSION

Please add the  
enclosed 4 new  
original signatures  
to the Atlanta  
petition.

Thank you,

Doris Helge

P.O. Box 32

Atlanta ID

83701

Commission Secretary  
P. U. C.  
P. O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-074

August 25, 2000

Dear Secretary of the Commission:

The following citizens of Atlanta, Idaho hereby request a formal investigation into the quality of electrical service for the Atlanta townsite. We have experienced problems with both the consistency and quality of the electrical power provided. If the P.U.C. deems it useful to hold a meeting or a hearing, we request that the meeting be held in Atlanta so that the maximum number of citizens can attend.

As far as we know, we pay the highest rate per kilowatt hour of any consumers of electricity in the United States. More importantly, we pay a service charge for the availability of power (on top of the base rate for power). Yet, power is not always available, so we are paying for goods not received. This is different from any other power company in the U.S. (and we aren't receiving quality service), yet over time, we have experienced problems which have not been resolved.

We have the following needs.

- Consistent, quality power. (During most of the month of May, the town was without power. Atlanta has also experienced a variety of emergencies for which power was essential but not consistently available. The firestorms are only a recent example. Because the town water association was unable to secure a reliable source of quality power that met state compliance guidelines, the association eventually changed to solar power.)
- Resolution of any power outages or other problems in a timely, responsive manner.
- An accessible person to address electrical outages and other problems.
- A pre-arranged and adequately trained person to back-up up the primary person responsible for power.
- Both people need to have been pre-cleared to do their duties. In other words, they should not be placed in the position of being afraid to act because of potential liability issues for attempting to fix the power source.

Thank you. We look forward to your response to our concerns.

*Leo J. Inman*

*Jerry J. Inman*

P.O. BOX 125 - ATLANTA, ID

SEPTEMBER 2000 Atlanta, Idaho

Commission Secretary  
P. U. C.  
P. O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-074

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*Alexa Greene, Greene Valley Ranch 9/5/00*



Commission Secretary  
P. U. C.  
P. O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-074

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John B. Din  
M.W.M.  
Don Brown  
Robert Picotte  
Kathryn G. Picotte  
R. D. H. D.

Maurin Joe Picotte  
Justin May Picotte  
Siyoko Picotte  
R. D. H. D.

Robert W. Vaughten  
D. H. D.