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Tue, 25 Mar, 2014

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BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Edison blunder costs customers

Douglas W. Motley

Senior Writer

A wind-caused power outage that sent a tree crashing onto power lines during an intense wind storm late in the evening of January 31 not only brought darkness to hundreds of Cedarpines Park residents, but also an apparent power surge when power was restored in the early morning hours of February 1 that resulted in thousands of dollars in damages to dozens of Southern California Edison Company's customers' electronic devices and home appliances. Rubbing salt in the wound is the giant power company's refusal to make good on customers' claims for damages.

Dozens of Cedarpines Park residents have contacted The Alpenhorn News over the past few weeks with horror stories about refrigerators, dish washers, computers, televisions and stereo systems rendered useless by an early morning power surge that literally exploded many of their household appliances. Some victims said they had received generic letters from Edison telling them that their claims for damages had been denied and that only recourse was to sue the company in small claims court.

One such victim, Dan Malmuth, told *The Alpenhorn News* Monday that, even though his damages were minor, consisting of only a few hundred dollars in damage to a telephone answering machine, a photocopier and several light bulbs, his claim for reimbursement was routinely denied by Edison officials.

Malmuth said he wrote a letter of complaint to Edison's chairman of the board, who then referred him to the company's risk management department. "They denied everything," Malmuth said adding, "They even told me there was no record of a power failure on that date." Malmuth, who said he is a former employee of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, said he is intimately familiar with public utility power systems. "The system has detailed records of all failures," he said.

Cedarpines Park resident Ken LaRue said Tuesday that his power, at first, went out briefly and when it came back on he witnessed sparks and smoke coming from wall sockets in his bedroom and living room. "My dogs freaked-out and I thought my house was going to burn down," he said adding that he was left with a television, DSL router, power tools and electric blankets that were rendered inoperable. "When I took take my television to the VOE School weekend dump collection site, I saw at least 50 other TVs that were dumped there."

Even though his losses amounted to around \$700, LaRue said he didn't bother filing a claim for damages because he was told he would need the actual purchase receipts for each of the damaged items, none of which he had saved.

"I was sleeping when I heard explosions inside my house," said longtime Cedarpines Park resident Maureen Mann. She said her surge protector had exploded, as did a freestanding floor lamp. "I couldn't go back to sleep after that, thinking there could be a fire smoldering inside the wall of her house. Despite her losses, said Mann, she does not intend to file a claim. "I'm just glad that my losses were far less than others," she said.

Yet another victim, not wanting to be identified, said she lost a refrigerator and two televisions to the power surge. She said her claim was denied because the damage was caused by "an act of God."

According to another victim, an apparent blunder by an Edison employee who reportedly hooked up a 440-volt connection to hundreds of the company's Cedarpines Park customers' meters, instead of the customary 120 volts used by most homeowners, is responsible for the sudden deluge of destruction. The victim, who did not wish to be identified, said an Edison Company employee, one of several who were going-door-to-door in her neighborhood replacing apparently damaged electric meters, told her that about 50 percent of the meters needed replacement. The employee or company representative then gave her a card to fill out to file a damage claim.

Benjamin Hagggar, manager of Ace Hardware's Radio Shack department in Crestline, said Tuesday he recalled dozens of Cedarpines Park residents coming into the store following the outage and subsequent power surge. "At least 18 persons, perhaps as many as 36, came into the store complaining that everything electrical was blown out. You name it, refrigerators, DVD players, televisions, washing machines, I mean everything, was destroyed. They wanted bigger TVs than we have."

Edison Company spokesman David Song told *The Alpenhorn News* Tuesday that customers whose claims have been denied have the option of reporting their losses to their homeowner insurance provider. When informed of the alleged blunder that may have been responsible for the surge, Song said he was unaware of it and that he would attempt to verify the authenticity of the report.

In closing, Song said, "There are some developments going on now that I can't divulge that may change the color of this story." *The Alpenhorn News* will continue to follow this story as new developments are presented.

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