Mayor calls power company onto carpet at council meeting

Vogler criticizes communication between SoCal Edison, city
By BEAU YARBROUGH
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October 17, 2007 - 8:41PM

Mayor Rita Vogler
It was the very first item of business at Wednesday's Hesperia City Council meeting: Southern California Edison public affairs representative Nancy Jackson stepped forward to explain why the company pulled the plug to almost 14,000 residents last Tuesday.

Jackson referred to the blackout on the east side of town for more than an hour around lunch time as "the incident that occurred in Hesperia on October the 9th."

The root cause, she said, were the thieves who broke into the unmanned substation at the corner of Sultana Street and G Avenue some time Monday night and stole 300 feet of copper wire.

"The culprits had compromised our grounding mechanism," Jackson said.

In the event of a downed power line somewhere in the area served by the substation, the system would power down the lines as a safety precaution without affecting service to neighboring customers -- that is, if the thieves hadn't stolen the wire for sale to a recycling center.

In order to repair the system, SoCal Edison workers turned out the lights on approximately 13,850 customers at 11:07 a.m.

"The power was out for about 71 minutes, to the credit of our crews," Jackson said.

But Mayor Rita Vogler wasn't impressed. Although she agreed the breakdown of the grounding mechanism was a serious situation, she criticized the company for not letting city officials know what was happening early on.
"Edison absolutely needs to look at the concerns of the consumer," Vogler said. "Businesses did not know which way to go."

Vogler owns a travel agency, Wonderland Travel, located on Main Street.

"The community was disrupted," she said.

The problem, Jackson said, was in her office.

"We do have a protocol in place to get the word out to our cities as soon as possible," Jackson said. On Tuesday, though, Jackson was out of the office when the page came in alerting her, and her assistant was not notified and told to contact Hesperia officials.

The company needs "a back-up system to notify the city manager," Vogler said. Once the city knew what was happening, and how long the outage was expected to last, "we were able to use our [automated Connect CTY telephone service] to communicate to our residents."

Jackson promised to exchange cell phone numbers with city officials to prevent a similar communication breakdown from happening in the future.

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