



BPA readies for Mother Nature's worst

Bonneville Power Administration

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Editor's Note to television reporters: B-roll shot in Beta SP in both Beta and 3/4-inch formats is available. Footage shows BPA's dispatchers at work in the power system's control center. Call Perry Gruber (503) 230-5359 for more information.

PORTLAND, Ore. - With winter coming, the initials B-P-A take on a new meaning at the Bonneville Power Administration: Bonneville's Prepared for Anything.

The Bonneville Power Administration, which manages most of the Northwest's power infrastructure, is heading into winter with its best record yet.

This past fiscal year (October 1994 through September 1995), BPA transmission lines had the lowest number of outages in any five-year period. Last year, BPA reduced its five-year average for the number of electrical power outages by 39 percent. At the same time, the overall duration of outages was the lowest in the last three years.

"Consumers will never notice most of the power outages in this region. They're a mere blip, a flash of lights. We try to be ahead of the game to recognize potential problems and correct them before they become major outages," says Don Gold, manager of BPA's Dittmer Control Center dispatching.

That means a lot of tree trimming and thinning along transmission rights-of-way. Special winter crews patrol the lines looking for seasonal hazards, such as creeks undercutting transmission towers, before major damage occurs. In the last five years, system troubleshooting along BPA's nearly 15,000 circuit miles of transmission lines has contributed to the record-breaking system reliability.

BPA prepares well in advance for weather extremes. At a centrally controlled operations center, BPA dispatchers work around the clock to spot outages and reroute the flow of power over a complex transmission highway to make sure the lights stay on.

Weather-related factors are the key challenge for electrical transmission lines. Last year, BPA recorded 132 power outages caused by wind, ice and falling trees. But while cold temperatures, heavy rain, high winds and snow are to blame for some outages, the chief culprit is lightning. Last year there were 270 outages due to lightning. Unlike other weather problems that occur almost entirely in the winter, lightning strikes from thunderstorms are a year-round headache.

Each year, thousands of lightning strikes are recorded in the Northwest. Portland and Seattle each see an average of seven thunderstorms every year, and cities like Helena, Mont. - with an average of 32 yearly thunderstorms - pose an even greater challenge for BPA, whose job it is to keep the power flowing

smoothly.

“Winter is when we tend to see power outages of longer duration. The weather simply makes it harder for us to get to the problems and fix them,” says Roy Ellis, BPA manager of operational information.

BPA manages most of the Northwest's power infrastructure, delivering power to 181 electric utilities, federal agencies and direct service industrial customers.

THINGS THAT GO SNAP, CRACKLE AND POP

FACTS ABOUT POWER OUTAGES IN BPA'S SERVICE AREA

In the winter, people start worrying about power outages due to wind and ice storms. Following are BPA outage statistics for Fiscal Year 1995. These represent interruptions in power to BPA's utility and direct service customers.

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Number of outages in FY 1995</u>
Lightning.....	270
Trees (includes outages due to trees cut, blown down, or otherwise felled by weather).....	64
Weather (includes ice and wind).....	68
Vandalism (includes shooting power lines and insulators).....	16

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Total hours of downtime during outages in FY 95</u>
Lightning.....	202 hours
Trees.....	123 hours
Weather.....	68 hours
Vandalism.....	27 hours

Following are National Weather Service figures for the average number of thunderstorms occurring each year in various Northwest cities:

<u>City</u>	<u>Number of Thunderstorms</u>
Boise, Idaho.....	15
Helena, Montana.....	32
Lewiston, Idaho.....	16

Missoula, Montana.....10
Pendleton, Oregon.....24
Portland, Oregon.....7
Seattle, Washington.....7
Spokane, Washington.....11

For more information, contact BPA Media Relations, 503-230-5131, mediarelations@bpa.gov.
