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## Vandals Damage Power Equipment With Axe

### Bonneville Power Administration

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Clarkston, Wash. - On Nov. 17, a Washington Water Power helicopter pilot spotted a utility pole that had been recently severed with an axe. If stormy weather occurs before a crew from the Bonneville Power Administration is able to access the latest vandalism site, the line is likely to come down, causing an electrical outage. For the second time this fall, vandals have caused costly and dangerous damage to the Walla Walla - North Lewiston 115,000-volt line in southwest Washington. BPA is offering up to \$1,000 for information leading to the vandal(s) that committed both of the recent crimes.

The vandalism took place in an area approximately two miles north of the North Lewiston substation. The Walla Walla - North Lewiston line runs through Walla Walla, Columbia and Garfield counties. Although the exact time and date of the vandalism is unknown, it most likely occurred during the week prior to its being spotted on Nov. 17. Gunshot vandalism damaged insulators along this same line in early October.

BPA does have a suspect they believe is responsible for the damage and the Whitman County Sheriff's office has been notified and will continue to patrol the area. The FBI has also been advised of the criminal activity. Anyone with further information concerning this incident or other vandalism to BPA property is encouraged to call BPA's Crime Witness hotline, 1-800-437-2744. Information could be worth up to \$1,000. Witness names are kept confidential.

BPA spends almost \$500,000 every year to replace transmission equipment damaged and destroyed by vandalism. The cost for this single incident will be in the thousands of dollars to access the area, dig a road, move in equipment and repair all the damage. The previous incident cost close to \$8,000 to repair. Economic consequences, when there is a loss of power to customers, make the price significantly higher.

The recent vandalism was especially dangerous because it almost brought a power line to the ground. Downed lines can cause fires and lethal ground voltages that can kill or seriously injure the vandals themselves, as well as other people. Fire departments, police and hospitals are all dependent upon a reliable supply of electricity to be able to respond to emergencies. When vandals, thieves or illegal dumpers manage to put a line out of service, it's not "harmless" horseplay.

In an effort to curb these infractions, BPA created the Crime Witness Program an aggressive, large scale, neighborhood watch-style program. Again, anyone who sees or suspects a crime to the BPA transmission system, property or personnel is encouraged to report it by calling 1-800-437-2744. Cash rewards of up to \$1,000 are paid for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons committing crimes against BPA. Names of witnesses and reward amounts are kept confidential.

"In the long-term, the Crime Witness Program should not only reduce vandalism, it should keep costs and rates down," says Robert Windus, security manager at BPA. "In the last 18 months, more than 100 incidents have been reported. Eight have led to arrests. Three others involving illegal dumping resulted

in the mess being cleaned up at the dumpers' expense Ð not the ratepayers. More than 40 other cases involving trespassing, poaching and illegal dumping on non-BPA property were referred to appropriate law enforcement agencies. With almost \$500,000 in savings to BPA this year alone, the program is already paying off."

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