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Vandals cause power outages; Reward offered for information

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Bonneville Power Administration

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: THURSDAY, Aug. 30, 2001

PR 78 01

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ASTORIA, Ore. — Shots fired at a Bonneville Power Administration transmission line caused brief electrical outages in the Astoria, Allston, Clatskanie and Birkenfeld areas of Clatsop and Columbia counties in Oregon on Aug. 28. The event also affected the Cathlamet and Grey's River areas of Wahkiakum County in Washington.

BPA is offering a cash reward of up \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the people responsible for the vandalism. The Clatsop County, Ore., sheriff's department is investigating. There are no suspects.

According to Pete Jeter, BPA security specialist, "The Aug. 28 vandalism was not casual in the way most damage from gun shots is. This was malicious and deliberate. It required a lot of effort to destroy insulators designed to be resistant to bullets. We are very eager to catch the people who did this."

The vandals destroyed insulators that hold high-voltage transmission wires on towers. The damage was sufficient to cause the wire to sag and send electrical current into the ground, a potentially very dangerous event. A witness reported seeing a flash approximately the same size as his pickup at about 6:16 a.m. on the day of the vandalism.

"It was very fortunate that the witness was not any closer," said Jeter. "When electricity from a transmission line shorts to the ground, there is potential for serious

injury. We are also very concerned about setting off brush fires during the dry, hot weather we have been experiencing.”

The incident, which took place about half a mile off highway 30 just east of Astoria, caused outages of from 11 minutes to 27 minutes at seven substations operated by four utilities — Clatskanie PUD, West Oregon Co-op, PacifiCorp and Wahkiakum County PUD.

This was not an isolated incident. Helicopter patrols of the area revealed other transmission structures suffering from gunshot damage.

Vandalism accounts for millions of dollars in damage to the Northwest power system each year. These costs get passed on to customers and ratepayers. Beyond these monetary costs and inconveniences is the possible disruption of essential services – fire, police and medical – that depend on reliable electric service.

Since 1994, BPA’s Crime Witness program has generated hundreds of tips resulting in dozens of arrests, thousands of dollars of recovered property and, most important, deterrence of future crime. Cumulative savings since the program began total more than \$3,900,000. Informants can call toll free 1-800-437-2744. The identity of informants is kept strictly confidential.

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