



## CENTRAL OUTER WEST RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION

# COWRA Newsletter

November 2013

### FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK

## POWER OUTAGES

BY ALAN SMALDON

### Main causes for outages

A few months ago our Association held a meeting with an official from the eThekweni Electricity Unit. This was held due to the high number of outages experienced by residents of Stockville Valley during the past 18 months. He gave us an insight on the causes of the outages down there and I feel they are probably the same for most of the Outer West.

Cable faults are responsible for 25% of outages; a further 13% are caused by tree's shorting overhead lines, 8% due to Main Voltage jumpers burnt. An unknown factor is the cause of

15% of faults whilst factors responsible for the balance are burnt fuse assemblies, overhead lines down, pole type transformers leaking oil and various others minor problems.

Most of the cable faults are due to contractors damaging the cables whilst their staff is digging trenches in order to lay water pipes, Telkom cables, attend to traffic light faults and the like. Another difficulty that besets the unit is that after removing illegal connections in an area, those responsible for these links get revenge by cutting street light cables nearby.

Although there are apparently sufficient funds to deal with most problems there are unfortunately, insufficient skilled and competent staff.



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### SOLAR ELECTRICITY

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# SOLAR PANELS

## Avoid the pitfalls

There are numerous benefits to installing solar electric panels to generate your own electricity. There are some points to note though.

The benefits of generating your own electricity are many:

1. Independence (or partial independence) from grid supply.

Be it for reasons of cost, continuity of supply, or unavailability of a grid connection, many may choose to generate their own electricity.

2. Backup when grid supply fails.

A solar electric installation is usually paired with a battery storage system, where the solar energy is charged into batteries, for use in the house at a later stage, say in the evening. This is especially beneficial if grid supply is intermittent or unreliable.

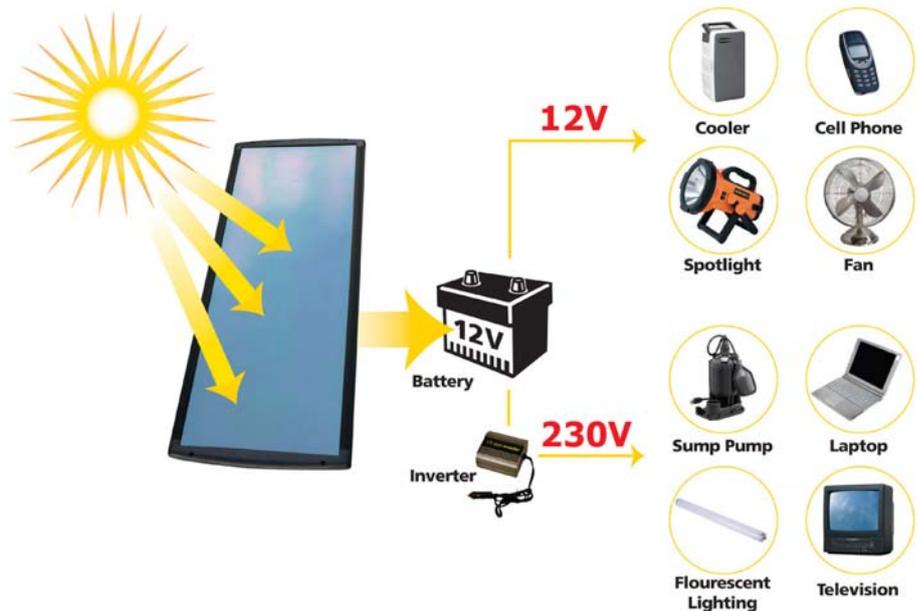
3. "Free" electricity while the sun shines

Once the installation is paid for, every bit of sun energy you can use or store for later use, is "free", as long as the sun keeps on shining.

4. Refunds on your electricity bill

Here residents should take care. Although it is common practice in Europe and USA for residents to get paid for excess electricity generated, the author is not aware of any municipality in South Africa that

## How Solar Works



offers residents rebates, refunds, or even discounts for excess electricity.

The only real discount you can expect to see on your bill is the reduction in usage from the grid.

Ethekwini does not have a policy to refund residents for excess electricity.

A COWRA member recently had the experience where her electricity usage during the day was less than the amount generated from her solar electric system. The system was connected to the grid to allow the system to draw electricity if their usage was greater than being generated. When the system generated more than was used though, it fed the excess energy back into the grid, effectively causing their meter to run backwards.

In good faith the resident notified the council, who promptly installed a meter that will not run "backward", even if excess energy finds its way back into the grid.

Mr. Lance Greyling, MP, has this to say:

"... it is largely left up to municipalities to decide how they wish to handle the issue of reverse metering. The challenge for many municipalities is that electricity sales often make up a large proportion of their revenue which they often use to cross-subsidise other services. A further complicating factor is that municipalities pay different rates to Eskom depending on what time of the day and during what season they are buying electricity. Electricity is essentially a commodity whose value changes according to the interaction of the demand and supply curve which changes all the time. The difficulty that this then poses is that the municipality often charges households an average tariff over the course of the month regardless of when that household uses the electricity. This means that the municipality takes a bit of knock on the electricity that can be used in the peak hours between 5 pm to 9 pm during the week but makes up for it on electricity sales during the day."

He goes on to say:

"... many municipalities would not be able to afford to allow reverse metering on a simple one to one basis. If they did they would be offsetting the cheapest generated electricity during the daylight hours with the most expensive energy during the peak times."

This sums it up nicely. After all, the municipality has to balance its funds, and it doesn't make economic sense to buy back electricity at a higher (or even equal) price than you sell it for.

Where does this leave residents with solar electric systems?

1. Should I inform the council that my meter is running backwards?

If you are generating excess

electricity and your meter is running backwards at times, you should notify the council. If there are not fines in place yet for instances like these, there likely will be soon. At the risk of having your supply disconnected due to a dispute, it may not be worth keeping quiet about it.

2. Is it worth it? Is solar electricity economically viable?

This would be difficult to answer. Each resident may have a different need which he hopes the system will satisfy. The initial installation cost is high, and it takes a long time to get a return on investment. With additional maintenance costs, payback takes so much longer. It is the author's opinion that an installation based purely on economic justification is not viable.

However, with the many recent increases in electricity costs, and the continuous improvements in technology, and subsequent lower equipment costs, this opinion may soon be outdated and should not discourage residents from doing their own investigations.

3. What should I do if I'm generating excess electricity?

The best way to deal with excess electricity is to increase the storage capacity of your system, and use the stored energy after sunlight has faded. Not only does this give you further independence from the grid, it also lightens the load on the grid during peak hours if you're not drawing from the grid at those times.

## COWRA

Who we are

Central Outer West  
Ratepayers Association.

Serving Kloof, Gillitts, St. Helier, Everton, Forest Hills, Stockville, Winston Park, and other areas.

Our principal aim is to curb the encroachment of commerce and industry into Kloof, Stockville, Everton, Gillitts and Winston Park.

We tackle issues such as municipal rates, crime, roads and developments head-on with the local councils, speaking as the voice of the residents. For those who subscribe to the association, we e-mail crime

information for the Outer West on a weekly basis.

Please join our Association.  
With numbers our voice grows stronger.

Email [admin@cowra.co.za](mailto:admin@cowra.co.za) for enquiries.

## Membership

COWRA membership is only a small annual fee. These fees are applied mostly to administration costs, and as contribution to NTU (National Taxpayer's Union). Please support us by becoming a member. Email [admin@cowra.co.za](mailto:admin@cowra.co.za) for information.

## Website and Facebook

The COWRA website is:  
<http://www.cowra.co.za>

and our Facebook page is at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/CentralOuterWest>

We provide regular crime reports on the Facebook page, and on the website you may find such information as past AGM reports, reports of speakers and other useful information. We also provide a link to the area councilor's website, where lots of further useful information can be found.

## RECENT ISSUES

Some of the issues that Alan regularly brings to the attention of the council include:

Missing street signs, faded or missing road markings, reports of squatter invasions, investigating possible illegal building activities in the area, condition of bridges and watercourses, street lights and many other issues related to service delivery by our local council.

Issues addressed during October, in no particular order:

Bush clearing – Stockville Valley.

Charles Way - Kloof

Azaleas – Old Main Road

Stockville Road street signs and missing drain cover

Street lights – Old Main Road Hillcrest

Illegal electricity connections

Vacant land issues in various areas, including vacant council properties

Road repairs

Illegal posters

Traffic lights

Sub-divisions

Road markings

Dangerous intersections

Open electricity supply boxes

Blocked stream crossings

Road signage

Unattended Telkom trench

Potholes

Squatters

Community Police Forum

Electricity outages

These are but summaries of a few of the incidents addressed during the last month.

Here's how we can all assist: Please send information of issues you think may need attention to [admin@cowra.co.za](mailto:admin@cowra.co.za). Include as much detail as you can gather: addresses or light-pole numbers nearby, pictures, dates, and any previous correspondence.