

Hydro Outage-Forest-11-07-13

Headline: Surge Blows Smart Meters, Leaves Neighbourhood Without Hydro
by Eric Nixon

Families on Eureka Street in Forest found out the Hydro One Smart Meters they have installed on their homes aren't quite as smart as they were led to believe. A power surge blew out between 60 and 70 of the meters on the street and led to hydro being shut off for more than a day, starting about 1:00 pm on Halloween.

Don Plowright, who lives with his wife in the Fairview Court Apartments, says the meters sustained a lot of damage. "Some of them blew right off and hit one of the windows," he remarks. "Ours was all blackened. The people next to us, the meter was blown right off and the wires were sticking out."

That led to Hydro One taking immediate action to prevent anyone from getting injured. "They cut all the wires leading into the apartment building, so that no one could get electrocuted," says Plowright.

Apparently, this was a totally new experience for the Hydro One crews. "They were really surprised. They said that they'd never had anything like this happen before. There's safety things that they have that if anything happens, it will short everything out. But, for some reason, it didn't. That's why all the things blew," Plowright recounts.

Hydro One employee Ron Core, one of the crew members onsite, says the surge was caused when a 16,000 volt line landed on a 2,000 volt line during the high winds last Thursday, blowing one transformer and destroying the Smart Meters.

Plowright was surprised how quickly workers managed to restore power. "One of the guys that came around first said that it wouldn't be done until Monday or Tuesday," he says. On Friday, a large number of Hydro One crews were onsite, along with electricians from private companies. "They were really working hard. They got everything done," says Plowright.

The Eureka Street resident says he's not impressed by the so-called Smart Meters – and he's not the only one. When they were installed at his former residence, Plowright says, "The guy that looked after that said they're not very good. Most of the old ones were made in Canada. These are made in China and they're not made to stand up to real rough weather. He didn't think much of them." The meters are manufactured by a company called Landis + Gyr, which is headquartered in Switzerland, but was bought by Toshiba Corporation of Japan in 2011.

One Eureka Street resident wondered how Hydro One was going to calculate hydro bills for residents, since the new meters were zeroed when they were installed. A Hydro One representative said off the record that he expected the residents' bills would be pro-rated based on their normal previous and current usage.

In addition to the Eureka Street outages, approximately 2,700 local Hydro One customers lost power on Halloween afternoon, but most had service restored by 4:00 the same day. For Plowright, he says the outage did not cause any damage in his house, other than water in the basement caused when the apartment's sump pump was shut down. "They had to have people come into each apartment to check that the wiring was okay," he says. As well, people were given papers by Hydro One representatives to report any damage that might have been caused by the outage.

In addition to the quick service by the workers, Plowright was grateful to Christ Church in Forest where he's a member of the congregation. "We had a lot of food that was in the freezer and they allowed us to put it in the freezer at the basement," he says.

Combined with the relatively mild temperatures for this time of year, the outage and the potential for danger caused by the blown Smart Meters ended up being more of an unwelcome inconvenience for the Eureka Street residents, one that was largely mitigated due to the speedy, professional efforts of the Hydro One crews involved.

1-Hydro Truck CAPTION: Dave Maxfield of Hydro One works in the bucket last Friday afternoon to restore power to customers on Eureka Street in Forest. Between 60-70 homes were affected in the immediate area when two power lines came in contact, causing a power surge that disrupted hydro for more than 24 hours.

2-Smart Meter CAPTION: Hydro One replaced upwards of 70 Smart Meters that blew out in a power surge on Eureka Street on Thursday, October 31st. Some of the meters reportedly caught fire, while others were blown off houses completely, leaving bare wires dangling.