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**From:** Jon Coppa [vcb@groundcontrol.us]  
**Sent:** Friday, September 21, 2007 10:25 AM  
**To:** Mayes-WebEmail; Mundell-Web; Gleason-WebEmail; Hatch-WebEmail; Pierce-Web  
**Cc:** Utilities Div - Mailbox  
**Subject:** Unisource service problems. Docket #E-04204A-06-0783

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Unisource service problems.

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Arizona Corporation Commission  
**DOCKETED**

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What you can do about it

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By Robert E. Kimball

This is a follow-up to the Sept. 5 Weekly Bulletin story by JB Miller, "UniSource customers are left in the dark," which detailed complaints from customers about two recent power outages in southeastern Santa Cruz County.

In addition to customers quoted in Miller's article, this writer received three complaints, one from Jon B. Coppa in the San Rafael Valley, one from Fred Roberts in the Patagonia area and one from a woman who lives on South River Road. All complained about their inability to reach someone at UniSource who could answer questions about the outages.

On Aug. 24-25 there was a 23-hour outage followed by a 22-hour outage on Sept. 1-2. Both incidents left 419 customers without power. Customers also said there had been many shorter outages and one said there were serious voltage drops and surges when he did have power.

These recent problems occurred during the monsoon season, which includes frequent lightning strikes. However Coppa said he has experienced outages in fair weather when there was no lightning.

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In the eastern part of the county, Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) supplies electricity to Elgin, Sonoita, Patagonia and surrounding areas.

UniSource supplies power to areas south of the Patagonia Town limits including Flux Canyon and Patagonia Lake. To the east of Patagonia, UniSource serves customers on Harshaw Road and in the San Rafael Valley. According to UniSource maps, the single 8-kV line that runs from Nogales is 25 miles long, but UniSource believes the actual distance might be closer to 30 miles. Anyone who has driven from Nogales to Patagonia, to the San Rafael Valley then down to Lochiel knows that this line has to be much longer-50 miles or more.

The line terminates in Santa Cruz, Mexico across from Lochiel. Less than 50 customers are served in Mexico, according to UniSource.

Although there were some brief outages during this year's monsoon season on the SSVEC 47-mile line to Patagonia, the longest was less than two hours when a failed transformer at the Mustang Corners substation had to be replaced.

### Restoring service

Here are causes of some of the Unisource outages based on information provided in phone interviews with Director of Corporate Communications for UniSource Energy Corp. in Tucson, Joe Salkowski.

"The biggest difficulty in restoring service is the remote, rugged terrain through which this power line runs," Salkowski said.

"In many cases we can't get to the source of the trouble except on foot or with all-terrain vehicles. The cause of the Aug. 24-25 outage was a downed power line in a remote area on the Circle Z Ranch south of Patagonia.

"We had to get permission from the ranch to blade a rough road in to the downed line so that a truck with a hydraulic bucket could get in to repair the line.

"Power surges and voltage drops should only be occurring just before and after power failures," Salkowski said.

Coppa would disagree. He says there are continuing power surges and brownouts occurring on a daily basis. He says one large ranch had damaged equipment due to voltage variations including: a \$3,500 deep-well pump, a \$2,500 Bose Stereo unit, a \$1,500 Motorola Analyzer and a \$500 washing machine.

Coppa says that since June 16, 2005, he has logged 189 hours on his emergency generator during power failures.

### Upgrades

Salkowski said upgrades have and are being made to the line that includes the addition of more lightning arrestors and replacing porcelain insulators with insulators made of polymer.

When asked if the line included automatic reclosers, he said there were four and UniSource feels four are enough. Automatic reclosers shut down a line when there is a fault caused by lightning or some other source.

After a few seconds the recloser will close provided no damage has been done to the line thus restoring power in seconds. Without the reclosers a crew would have to be dispatched to locate and isolate the problem.

This writer remembers covering an SSVEC power outage during a winter snowstorm about seven years ago. The outage, affecting all customers from Elgin to Patagonia lasted from about 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. The problem was a downed line in Gardiner Canyon, which SSVEC crews did not find until 3 p.m. That was prior to SSVEC installing reclosers on their line. Had they been in place then the downed line could have been isolated limiting the number of customers affected by the outage.

Salkowski said that when UniSource purchased Citizens Utilities they did talk with SSVEC about an inter-tie at Patagonia between the two power companies. Because of the length and small size of both lines the companies agreed there wouldn't be enough excess power at the end of either line to serve the other's customers.

#### Citizen intervener

Tubac resident Marshall Magruder says anyone who is a UniSource customer can be a citizen intervener at Arizona Corporation Commission hearings. He says there are 92,000 UniSource customers but he is the only citizen to become an intervener.

Perhaps that's because as Magruder says it's become a full-time job. He is a retired Hughes Aircraft engineer and knowledgeable about the technical side of the electric power business.

Magruder has been advocating for UniSource customers in Nogales, Rio Rico and Tubac for years. He found out about the problems in eastern Santa Cruz County on Sept. 14 of this year when he received Coppa's e-mail.

Magruder says power companies are required to keep records about bad circuits in their electrical distribution system and yet for 2004 UniSource could produce no records of bad circuits. He says outages on the total UniSource system since 2004 have averaged 130 per year.

#### What you can do

The most effective thing you can do if you have a complaint about power outages or other electrical service problems is to e-mail your complaint to all five Arizona Corporation Commissioners.

They are currently holding hearings for a rate increase requested by UniSource.

The commission has the power based on complaints from customers to demand that UniSource resolve the problems.

Be sure to include in your e-mail subject line, "UniSource power outage," or "UniSource service problems," and reference Docket # E-04204A-06-0783.

E-mail the commissioners at: "<http://www.cc.state.az.us/commissioners/mayes/>"

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