

Monastery Fire Challenges KPUD Staff

Emergency pole replacement, firefighter assistance makes for busy time

By Lori Froehlich-Schwab

Klickitat PUD's overhead distribution lines were threatened by the Monastery Fire near Goldendale September 7-9, 2011. While the fire was devastating to many residents in the Box Canyon area, the infrastructure to carry power there remains relatively unharmed.

"We have been extremely fortunate not to have sustained more damage," says KPUD Staking Engineer Mark Garner.

Two charred poles, a cross-arm brace, a few primary underground risers and some secondary services to homes are on the list of casualties now scheduled for repair.

There also are a number of burned trees in the KPUD right of way that pose a threat to overhead lines and poles. These trees are scheduled for removal.

As the fire expanded rapidly in the first few hours of ignition, KPUD line crews and warehousemen responded quickly to replace a pole that burned and fell over near Highway 97. This quick repair proved to be invaluable to Brooks State Park, as this pole carries power to the park's well and the pumps that keep their reservoir full of water.

Ranger Rich Davis expressed his sincere thanks to KPUD and the hard, efficient work it provided in a desperate time of need.

Rural 7 Fire Chief Tony Browning visited the KPUD office after the fire to thank PUD employees for all of their efforts.

The safety of employees, and keeping the power on for customers, are both consistently top priorities for KPUD. Reliability of power to customers in fire situations is essential. Most consumers do not own generators to operate the water pumps in their wells and available water is priceless in these situations.

As firefighters from across Washington poured into the Klickitat County Fairgrounds to set up a fire camp, along with the evacuees, requests for additional lodging and food were not far behind. The community joined together and contributions came in every shape and size. The American Red Cross was flooded with the outpouring spirit of the community.

As the fairgrounds filled up, KPUD and local churches offered their extra space to any firefighters who needed a place to rest during the day. Food, water and Gatorade were provided for these workers as they worked in shifts getting the blaze under control.

KPUD's IT department set up a computer with access to email so firefighters could contact their families. It was a humble gesture of appreciation to the people working so hard to contain the fire.

KPUD employees also worked together making 81 lunches to aid American Red Cross relief efforts to feed evacuees and firefighters.

Thank you to the community and all of the KPUD employees who went the extra mile during this difficult and trying time. In times of disaster, it is reassuring to know everyone will pull together to take care of those in need. ■



Above, KPUD Employees and Donna VanTuyt prepare lunches for evacuees and firefighters battling the Monastery Fire. Left, a helicopter flies through the haze to deliver a bucket of water to dump on the fire. Below, a skycrane helitanker uses a vacuum hose to fill up with water at Frog Hollow pond off U.S. Highway 97.

Photos by Bryan Campbell and KPUD staff

