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Safety Paper: An Incident Arising from an Illegal Electricity Connection

1. INTRODUCTION

Eskom and Municipalities distributing electricity are all experiencing electricity theft. An incident arising from an illegal electricity connection promoted me to submit a safety paper.

2. PAPER

On Tuesday, 12 May 2009 at 05h30 the standby electrician was called out to a house in Sithembile Township.

The electrician noticed two cattle were lying next to the house boundary fence. Small blue sparks were visible at each joint in the fence wire, indicating that the fence had been electrically energized. The electrician immediately isolated the main 200A L.V. circuit breaker in the mini-substation supplying the surrounding houses.

During the investigation by the municipal electrical department, it was found that the neighbour was illegally switched on as the meter had previously been removed and the supply switched off by the municipality for tampering. This cable had developed a fault at the base of the metal kicker pipe housing it on the service pole. The illegal connection was done in such a way that the house service circuit breaker was unable to trip. Both property fences were also mechanically bonded to the metal kicker pipes on the supply pole, thus energizing the property fences and electrocuting the cattle when they came into contact with the fence.

I shudder when I think of the outcome if it was later in the morning when the parents and children were on their way to work and school.

I hereby urge all municipalities to find and remove all illegal connections, not only to reduce the percentage losses but also to eradicate these “***Death Traps***”.

3. CONCLUSION

From 2006 to date, Endumeni Municipality awarded a BID to a company to perform a meter audit to outsource tampered meters. This project has proved to be very viable although tampered meters are still reported on a daily basis.

Generally, free electricity is abused, so a project of this nature assists with the following:

1. Reduces electricity losses.
2. Reduces the risk of electrocution due to unsafe electrical connections.
3. Reduces the load on the network.

I urge all municipalities that have not yet embarked on a project of this nature, to consider doing so as the recently approved increase by NERSA in electricity tariff will surely encourage the theft of electricity.

Lastly I would like to thank the AMEU for allowing the affiliates the opportunity to submit safety papers so that other Municipalities can prevent similar incidents occurring in their area.

Thank you

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