

The REGULATOR

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An Engineer's Perspective


by: Duane Rowe – Engineer


Modern Society has become very dependent on electricity and it can be quite irritating when the power goes out. While one of the main focuses of every electric utility is to provide a continuous supply of electricity to its customers, it is often necessary for them to disconnect supply to some customers. This strategy of deliberately disconnecting supply to customers is termed "Load Shedding". The main reason for performing load shedding is that a deficiency of generating capacity exists. That is, the total system demand (load) exceeds the available generating capacity. Other constraints on the power network can also result in load shedding but this is very rare. It is important to differentiate between load shedding and the unintentional interruption of power supply due to faults on the power network which could be caused by a number of reasons, such as, lightning strikes, vegetation making contact with power lines, traffic accidents which often result in damage to utility poles and the breakdown of the insulation of electrical equipment due to the combined effects of dust contamination and rain, among other factors.


An attempt to avoid load shedding by operating the power system with the system demand exceeding the generating capacity, would be futile.

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As, operating the power system with the demand/generation imbalance would result in abnormal power quality and would promptly lead to a cascading shutdown of the entire system (a blackout). It is therefore evident that load shedding has the advantage of disconnecting selected loads for relatively short periods, rather than interrupting all consumers for extended periods when a shortfall in generation occurs.

Load shedding can be executed either manually or automatically depending on the circumstances under which the generation shortfall arises. When one or more generator(s) suddenly fails (trips offline) it is often impossible for the human operators to shed load quickly enough to prevent the cascading shutdown of the entire system (blackout) and so there are equipment in the power system that automatically senses shortfall in generation and sheds load to restore the load/generation balance.

It is important to point out that a power system is usually designed with an installed generating capacity which exceeds the maximum system demand (peak load). The difference between the installed generating capacity and the peak load is called the reserve margin. From time to time it is essential to take generating plants out of operation to carry out planned maintenance activities. Also, every generating plant like all other machines has a possibility of failing at any instance.

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OUR
OFFICE OF UTILITIES
REGULATION

Working for better utility services

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Load Shedding in Perspective

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The Jamaican power system is designed with the expectation that 48 hours for the year the generation will not be adequate to meet the system demand and there will be need for load shedding. Designing the power system for a lesser expected outage time would have the effect of increasing the cost of the investment requirement for generating units and would ultimately lead to higher price of electricity. It is therefore important that a proper balance be arrived at.

The overall standards set by the Office of Utilities Regulation stipulates that the Jamaica Public Service Company Limited should give a minimum of 48 hours notice prior to planned outages.

OUR's Objectives

- To ensure that consumers of utility services enjoy an acceptable quality of service at reasonable cost.
- To establish and maintain transparent, consistent and objective rules for the regulation of utility service providers.
- To promote the long-term efficient provision of utility services for national development consistent with Government policy.
- To provide an avenue of appeal for consumers who have grievances with the utility service providers.
- To work with other related agencies in the promotion of a sustainable environment.
- To act independently and impartially.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The Economic Development Wastewater Tariff (EDWT) was established by the National Water Commission (NWC) to assist companies in the manufacturing sector where water is a significant input in the manufacturing process. The minimum criterion requires that water is at least 50% of the company's raw material. Companies involved in bottled water and ice-making are however not eligible for EDWT.

Companies who qualify under this tariff receive a fifty percent (50%) reduction on sewerage charges. The objective of the EDWT is geared at encouraging productivity and economic development by fostering efficiency which will result in greater competitiveness for the manufacturing sector.

The NWC on an ongoing basis reviews the activities of companies under the EDWT scheme to ensure that they continue to operate within the criteria of the tariff. If the minimum criterion is not met, the EDWT is removed (with adequate notice to the manufacturer) and the full sewerage charges become applicable.

Tax on Your Phone Bill

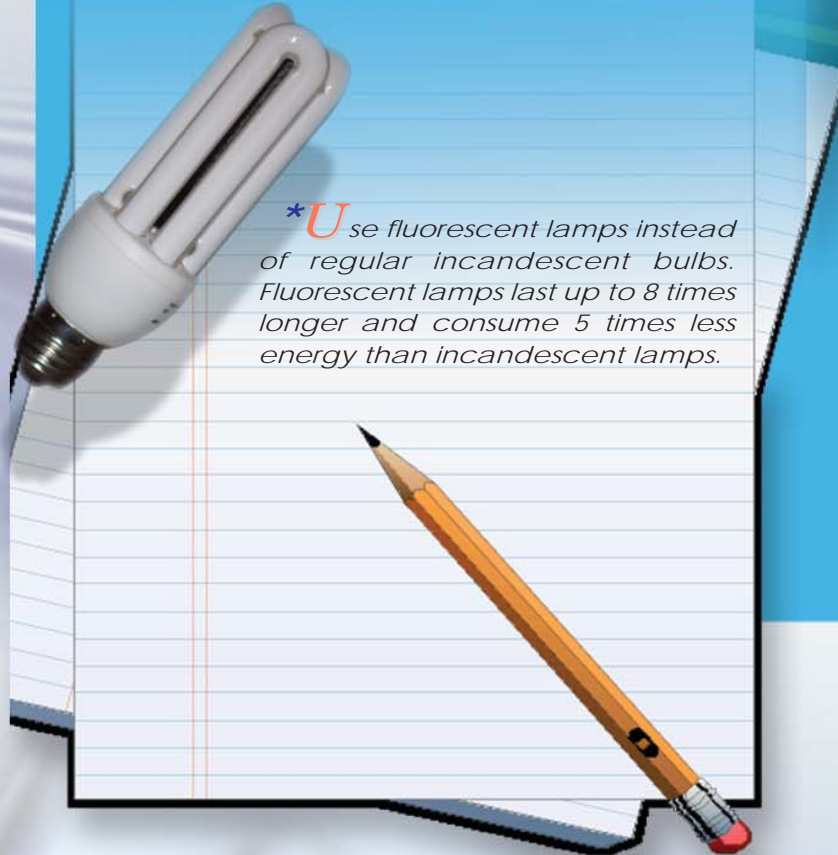
By David Sullivan - Economist

One of the functions of the Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR), as set out in Section 4(1)(e) of the Telecommunications Act 2000, is to "make available to the public, information concerning matters relating to the telecommunications industry." One such piece of information is the tax customers pay when they consume telecommunication services. Currently, there are two different levels of tax that are imposed on customers by the government.

There is a 20% tax that is levied on call charges. Customers who purchase prepaid calling cards to use on either mobile or fixed line phones are charged 20% tax on these cards. The same principle applies to postpaid customers; a 20% tax is added to the calling charges portion of their bills.

A General Consumption Tax (GCT) of 16.5% is applied to all other services that the customer might request.

Energy Saving Tip



For example, customers would pay GCT on monthly line rental charges, voice mail, calling features such as call waiting and three way dialing.

Customers are being reminded to verify their bills each month to ensure that the correct tax rate is being applied to the relevant component(s). Further, it is the duty of the OUR to ensure that customers' bills reflect the correct charges therefore customers are encouraged to refer any discrepancy to the respective utility company. Providing the issue cannot be resolved at that level, a complaint should be made to the OUR for the matter to be thoroughly investigated.

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FAQS

Q. Why is my water consumption so high?

A. You may have a leak. To determine if you have a leak, close off the main valve to your house and look at your water meter. If the indicator on the meter is turning, this is an indication that you have a leak in the pipe between your water meter and the main valve (though it could also mean that the main valve is not shutting off the water completely).

OUR's Role

The Office of Utilities Regulation Act of 1995 established the Office of Utilities Regulation (the Office/OUR) as a body corporate. Under the Act, the OUR is charged with the responsibility of regulating the provision of utility services in the following sectors:

- Electricity
- Telecommunications
- Water
- Sewerage
- Public transportation by road, rail and ferry.

Consumer Relations Unit (CRU)

The Consumer Relations Unit (CRU) is a part of the Consumer and Public Affairs Department of the OUR. The CRU interfaces with the public on a daily basis. The unit advises consumers about the Guaranteed Standards, reviews, investigates and resolves consumer issues that have been brought to the OUR's attention via letters, telephone calls and visits by affected consumers.

We live by our creed:

Together We Educate & Protect Consumers

Garfield Bryan
Manager

If you have received unsatisfactory service from a utility company (electricity, water, telephone), you may be entitled to a compensatory payment from the respective company. Contact the Consumer and Public Affairs Department of the OUR or fill out a complaint form available at post offices islandwide.

If you have questions about the role of The OUR or would like us to speak at any Community, Church or Citizens Association meetings, Contact: **David Geddes**-Director, Consumer and Public Affairs. 3rd Floor, PCJ Resource Centre, 36 Trafalgar Road, Kingston 10. **Toll free:** 1888-Call OUR. **Email:** dgeddes@our.org.jm

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OUR + Utility Providers + Informed Consumers = Quality Service