



## Brush fire

Firemen watched helplessly as an inaccessible brush fire burnt a stretch of land between the railroad tracks and the Perquimans River near Harris Shopping Center on Saturday afternoon. The fire merged, then extinguished itself.

# Social services is demanding moratorium on utility cut-offs

County social services departments are certifying eligible low-income households for a five-month moratorium on having their utilities cut off by electric and natural gas companies for failure to pay their bills.

On Nov. 4, 1979, the North Carolina Utilities Commission issued an order which requires these utilities to give written notice to their customers and contact them personally when possible before terminating their service. The order also states

that customers must be provided an opportunity to make installment payments over six months for past and current bills.

"In addition to these requirements in the commission's order, it states that services cannot be discontinued for certain households from Nov. 1, 1980 through March 31, 1981. This is referred to as a limited moratorium on termination of services," said Robert H. Ward, director of the Division of Social Services.

Ward said that households eligible for the moratorium must have at least one elderly member (age 65 or over) or a handicapped member. They also must not be able to pay their utility bill and meet eligibility requirements for the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP).

They must be certified by the county social services departments that they are eligible for LIEAP. The household does not actually have to receive assistance through LIEAP to

qualify, though. "The number certified for the moratorium this past winter was very small. We have asked county social services departments, since they are administering the LIEAP, to make sure that their financial assistance recipients and other low-income people seeking help with this winter's heating bills know about the temporary moratorium," Ward said. County social services departments have been supplied with application forms for the moratorium.

## Ice plant breakdown to cost

Although Hertford's town ice plant has recently suffered a major mechanical breakdown, Town Manager and Mayor Bill Cox said there is enough ice on hand to last through the holidays.

The plant's compressor, which broke down about two weeks ago, will evidently need extensive repairs before operation can continue on a normal basis.

But repairs pend on the availability of town funds, according to Cox, who said an Elizabeth City company estimated the cost of fixing the compressor at some \$7,000.

The town council recently adopted budget amendments which trimmed monies for capital outlay within the ice plant department to \$1,000. There was no change on the \$3,000 allotted that department for maintenance and

repair of the building, grounds, and equipment.

"There is really no money budgeted for this type of expenditure," said Cox of the needed repairs. "And the money will have to be available before it's spent."

He said further budget

amendments may have to be made in order to accommodate the cost of repairs. Should the money become available, the ice plant "could be back in normal operation by early spring," said Cox.

The ice plant will operate under its regular schedule until after Friday of this week,

Dec. 19. Those hours are from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m., 7 days a week.

After Dec. 19, the plant will be open from 7 a.m. until 5 p.m., 7 days a week, until ice runs out. Cox estimated that some 125 cakes of ice were available before the breakdown occurred.

## Electricities battles Vepco hike

Electricities of North Carolina has asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to suspend a 10 percent wholesale rate increase sought by Virginia Electric and Power Company for the full five months permitted by law.

Vepco had filed a FERC on Nov. 14 for an \$18.5 million annual increase in the rates it charges the municipalities and rural electric cooperatives that purchase power at wholesale and resell it at retail to their own residents and customers.

Electricities members include all of Vepco's wholesale municipal customers in North Carolina and Virginia.

Vepco asked to have the higher rate put into effect on Jan. 13, 1981, at the end of the required 60-day notification period at FERC.

Noting that Vepco has not had an increase in its retail rates in North Carolina for two years, Electricities' petition said that imposition of another wholesale rate hike on top of the 1978 wholesale increase put into effect but not yet approved by FERC would put its North Carolina member cities in a "price squeeze".

The effect of a price squeeze would be to make it impossible for those North Carolina cities to charge retail rates that are

competitive with Vepco's retail rates.

Vepco has said that its filing for the wholesale rate increase is designed exclusively to recover the capital costs of its North Anna 2 nuclear unit, the company's fourth nuclear unit, which was scheduled to come on line sometime in December.

In announcing its filing at FERC, Vepco said its proposed increase in wholesale base rates would be offset by a higher projected savings in nuclear fuel costs, prompting the company to attempt to claim an overall rate reduction.

"Vepco's attempt to make a 10 percent rate hike seem to be a rate reduction is totally absurd," said Ralph W. Shaw, executive director of Electricities.

In its complaint to FERC seeking a five-month suspension of the proposed higher rate, Electricities said Vepco's claim of projected higher fuel savings "ignores the inequities which Vepco's customers have experienced in recent years when they have been paying in rates for higher costs of nuclear units but have received either zero or relatively little low-cost nuclear energy because of

Vepco's sorry record of keeping its nuclear units in service."

Electricities detailed the company's record of nuclear generation availability. Vepco had available only 77 percent of its net dependable nuclear capacity in 1978 and only 32 percent in 1979, the complaint noted.

"Had Vepco's nuclear units performed in 1979 at even the not very satisfactory levels experienced in 1978, Vepco's municipal wholesale customers would have paid Vepco about \$7,325,000 less than they were required to pay because of the unavailability of much of Vepco's nuclear plants for most of 1979," the complaint said.

Electricities also cited the findings of FERC Administrative law Judge Isaac D. Benkin in June 1980 recommending that FERC initiate a "full, formal and public investigation" into Vepco's management practices.


Among the reasons the judge listed in support of his recommendation was "the utility's persistent inability to bring its nuclear units under construction into commercial service on a realistic and reliable timetable."

The North Carolina municipalities involved in Electricities' filing are: Belhaven, Edenton, Elizabeth City, Enfield, Greenville, Hamilton, Hertford, Hobgood, Oak City, Robersonville, Scotland Neck, Tarboro, Washington, Windsor and Winterville.

The Virginia municipalities are: Blackstone, Culpeper, Elkton, Franklin, Harrison-

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## Jaycees seek nominations

The Perquimans County Jaycees are sponsoring their annual awards banquet on Jan. 21 at 8 p.m. at Angler's Cove Restaurant.

Nominees are being sought for awards in each of five categories. Chairmen are assigned to each category, and are responsible for receiving nominations.

Categories, chairmen, and their phone numbers are as follows:

Outstanding Young Educator-Tommy Riddick, 426-5040; Outstanding Young Farmer-Archie Miller, 297-2427; Outstanding Young Firefighter-David Trueblood, 426-7242; Outstanding Young Rescuer-Gregg Biggs, 426-

5864, and; Distinguished Service Award-Wayne Ashley 426-5116.

The Jaycees invite anyone wishing to do so to make nominations.

The banquet is open to the public and tickets are available from Jaycees or at the door.

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