

EL98-020

EL 98-020  
8673

3624

EL 98-020

DOCKET NO.

In the Matter of \_\_\_\_\_

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPLAINT  
FILED BY LORI BULT, CROOKS,  
SOUTH DAKOTA, AGAINST  
NORTHERN STATES POWER  
COMPANY REGARDING POOR  
CUSTOMER SERVICE

Public Utilities Commission of the State of South Dakota

DATE	MEMORANDA
10/1/98	Received;
10/2/98	Accepted;
10/8/98	Weekly Filings;
10/13/98	Response from N.S.P.;
10/26/98	Order finding no Probable Cause and Closing Docket;
10/30/98	Docket Closed.

EL 98-020

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA  
500 E Capitol, State Capitol Building, Pierre SD 57501

RECEIVED

OCT 01 1998

SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC  
UTILITIES COMMISSION

COMPLAINT

Complainant(s): (Persons filing the complaint)		Respondent(s): (Persons or Company complained against)	
Name	Lori Built	Contact Person	Customer Service Dept.
Address	105 S. West Ave.	Company	Northern States Power
City, State, Zip	Crooks SD 57020	Address	PO Box 5106
Home Phone	605-543-5222	City, State, Zip	Sioux Falls, SD 57117-5106
Work Phone		Work Phone	800-895-4999
Cellular Phone		Cellular Phone	
Fax #		Fax #	

If the Complainant is represented by an attorney, please list the attorney's name, address, telephone number and fax number below: (If Complainant is not represented by an attorney, please leave blank.)

These are the facts giving rise to my complaint:

The husband has been off work due to a medical necessity since 2/26/98. I have been off work due to a motor vehicle accident since 5/16/98. Neither of us has received any pay during these dates and have turned to various agencies for help in paying our heat and utilities. In August 6<sup>th</sup> @ 10:00 a.m. my husband Wayne met with Carol at the Sioux Falls Salvation Army. Carol approved \$250<sup>00</sup> in Heat Share Payment to NSP on our behalf and called NSP while Wayne was meeting with her to tell them of the guaranteed payment which would be sent. On September 19<sup>th</sup> @ 11:00 both Wayne and I met with Sue at Interlakes Community Center to request help with our NSP bill. Sue approved \$200<sup>00</sup> of our behalf and called NSP to guarantee those funds. She stated and was assured that the payment from HeatShare and the payment from Interlakes would take care of our NSP bill and we would no longer be in a disconnect situation nor would we have the rear disconn. On 9/21/98 we arrived home to find some of the children extremely upset. A representative from NSP had disconnected the service at approximately 11:58 a.m. I immediately contacted the Customer Service number we are to use to discuss this disconnect. The person I talked to was very rude, accused us of deservng to have our service shut off because of our payment history was not willing to listen to my explanation, the guaranteed funds being sent, and wasn't the least bit interested in the fact we had arrangements made. She acknowledged that a guaranteed funds being sent however she accused me of having talked to her of the kids and not keeping the promises which were made. In the time I was to have spoken to someone at NSP I did not speak to anyone nor did I, at any previous time since the guaranteed

NOTE: Please attach additional pages, if necessary, to explain your situation. Also enclose copies of any bills or other documents which may pertain to your complaint.

**RESOLUTION REQUEST**

I ask that the Public Utilities Commission grant the following relief. (What do you think the Commission should do to solve this problem?)

Examine how NSP handles their accounts, notes their PC systems and communicates with other NSP employees. It should also force NSP to move the Sioux Falls office to handle the customers from South Dakota. (Even the service rep who assisted with our disconnection provided 3 different answers from NSP.) NSP also needs to train their reps to

NOTE: Please attach any additional pages, if necessary.

treat the customers with respect and dignity; we don't need to be humiliated and scolded by someone on the other end of the phone.

**VERIFICATION**

Complainant's signature must be witnessed by a notary public.

Lori Bult

9-25-98

Complainant's Signature

Date

State of South Dakota )  
 ) :SS  
County of Minnehaha )

On this 25<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1998

before me personally came and appeared Lori Bult, known to me to be the individual described herein and who executed the foregoing instrument, and who duly acknowledged to me that he/she executed same for the purpose therein contained.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand and official seal.

Janet Wolff  
Signature of Notary Public

(SEAL)  
My commission expires: February 6, 2005

funds had been called in. She refused to discuss any possibility of us getting our service reconnected unless we would pay \$200 by 2:00 that day. When I told her we had no funds to make such a payment, she told us to "have fun in the dark." I tried several times to reach the contact person listed on the disconnect notice and finally was able to speak to her 2 hours later. She stated there were no notes stating that there would be sending funds when she checked the screen that morning, but now suddenly they had appeared. She said she would check into why it took so long to get them (the notes) on the system, and that our electricity would be restored immediately and we would not need to pay anything. Our electricity was reinstated on Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup> at 2:15 p.m. I called the Salvation Army the following day and was told NSP called them to verify the guaranteed funds. She <sup>(Carol)</sup> also confirmed that she called NSP immediately on August 6<sup>th</sup> to guarantee the funds and had had no further contact with them until NSP called her on Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup>.

NSP closed their Sioux Falls office and all calls are now handled by reps in

Minnesota and/or North Dakota. It is very evident by our situation that no one seems to have control of the local accounts and that notes are not getting included on the Computers. Also, the reps from Minnesota and North Dakota act very disgruntled to have to answer South Dakota calls. They are not familiar with the clients and don't take the time needed to plan or prepare for an answer which could benefit the clients. Should you ask a question, be prepared to receive a very rude, short-tempered individual who makes you feel as if you have bothered them by calling.

I called NSP and requested a copy of the notes on our account screen. After hanging up from talking on the phone to NSP, I received a call telling me they couldn't send me copies of their notes without a court order.

I look forward to your response.

Thank you.

Lois Bult

# FAX TRANSMISSION from Consumer Affairs

To : Jim Wilcox

Company : NSP

Fax Number : 6-605-339-8204

Date : 10/2/98

Time : 9:40:30

From : Leni Healy

Company : South Dakota PUC

Fax Number : 605.773.3809

Pages including cover page : 11

## Message:

We have received the following formal complaints from Ellen Medicine Horn and Lori Bult. Commission policy allows a brief period in which the parties may attempt an informal resolution before the issues become docketed matters.

Please review this information and inform us if a resolution is reached before noon on Oct. 6, 1998. If a resolution is not reached, the issues will become docketed and scheduled for a Commission meeting.

Thank you.

THIS COMMUNICATION IS INTENDED ONLY FOR THE USE OF THE INDIVIDUAL OR ENTITY TO WHICH IT IS ADDRESSED AND MAY CONTAIN INFORMATION THAT IS PRIVILEGED, CONFIDENTIAL AND EXEMPT FROM DISCLOSURE UNDER APPLICABLE LAW. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient or the employee or agent responsible for delivering this communication to the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any distribution, use or copying of this communication is prohibited.

**South Dakota Public Utilities Commission**

State Capitol Building; Pierre SD 57501  
Telephone: (605) 773-3201 Fax: (605) 773-3809

South Dakota Public Utilities Commission

WEEKLY FILINGS

For the Period of October 2, 1998 through October 8, 1998

If you need a complete copy of a filing faxed, overnight expressed, or mailed to you, please contact Delaine Kolbo within five business days of this filing.

Phone: 605-773-3705. Fax: 605-773-3809.

ELECTRIC

EL 98-020

In the Matter of the Complaint filed by Lori Bult, Crooks, South Dakota, against Northern States Power Company Regarding Poor Customer Service.

Complaint by Lori Bult vs. Northern States Power Company. The Complainant outlines rude treatment and inconsistent information from the NSP call center on several occasions. Although the Sioux Falls Salvation Army, Heat Share and Interlakes Community Action representatives contacted the NSP call center on behalf of the Bult family, these contacts were not noted on the computer account notes. The Complainant requests the Public Utilities Commission to "examine how NSP handles their accounts, notes their PC system, and communicates with other NSP employees. It should also force NSP to reopen the Sioux Falls office to handle the customers from South Dakota. (Even the service representative who assisted with our disconnect received 3 different answers from NSP.) NSP also needs to train their reps to treat the customers with respect and dignity; we don't need to be humiliated and scolded by someone on the other end of the phone."

Staff Attorney: Camron Hoseck

Consumer Representative: Leni Healy

Date Filed: 10/01/98

Intervention Deadline: N/A

EL 98-021

In the Matter of the Complaint filed by Ellen Medicine Horn, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, against Northern States Power Company Regarding a Cross Wired Meter.

Complaint by Ellen Medicine Horn vs. Northern States Power Company. The Complainant was billed \$712.91 for charges resulting from a cross wired meter. The Complainant seeks the following relief: "I don't think I should pay all of this because it wasn't my fault about the mixed up meters. I have been paying my light bill. I should be charged from the time this got noticed."

Staff Attorney: Camron Hoseck

Consumer Representative: Leni Healy

Date Filed: 10/02/98

Intervention Deadline: N/A



## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

TC98-178 In the Matter of the Complaint filed by Earl Waterland, Marcus, South Dakota, against Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative, Inc., Regarding Discriminatory Installation Fees.

Complaint by Earl Waterland vs. Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative, Inc. The Complainant supports the complaint filed by Barry and Dawn Austin (TC98-179). The Complainant seeks the following relief: "I believe the coop should either make (an) exception in hardship case or do away with the policy on trailer houses entirely."

Staff Attorney: Karen Cremer  
Consumer Representative: Leni Healy  
Date Filed: 09/23/98  
Intervention Deadline: N/A

TC98-179 In the Matter of the Complaint filed by Barry and Dawn Austin, White Owl, South Dakota, against Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative, Inc., Regarding Discriminatory Installation Fees.

Complaint by Barry and Dawn Austin vs. Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative, Inc. The Complainants allege that Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative, Inc. discriminates against mobile home owners in their line extension policy. The Complainants seek relief from such a policy.

Staff Attorney: Karen Cremer  
Consumer Representative: Leni Healy  
Date Filed: 09/23/98  
Intervention Deadline: N/A

TC98-180 In the Matter of the Complaint filed by Mitzi and Steve Moore, Watertown, South Dakota, against U S West Communications, Inc., Regarding Delay in Service.

Complaint by Mitzi and Steve Moore vs. U S West Communications, Inc. The Complainants state that on August 1, 1998, they contacted U S West to transfer service to their new home on September 21, 1998. Service was not installed on that date. As a result, the Complainants have incurred expenses and do not have a land line. The Complainants are requesting compensation and installation of their line.

Staff Attorney: Karen Cremer  
Consumer Representative: Leni Healy  
Date filed: 09/30/98  
Intervention Deadline: NA

1998-107

In the Matter of the Complaint filed by Michael F. Meyer, Watertown, South Dakota, against U S West Communications, Inc., Regarding Delay in Service.

Complaint by Michael F. Meyer vs. U S West Communications, Inc. The Complainant states that on July 15, 1998, he contacted U S West to transfer service to his new home on July 30, 1998. Service was not installed on that date. As a result, the Complainant has incurred expenses and does not have a land line. The Complainant is requesting compensation and installation of his line.

Staff Attorney: Camron Hoseck  
Consumer Representative: Leni Healy  
Date filed: 09/30/98  
Intervention Deadline: NA

### PROPOSED TELECOMMUNICATIONS RULES

The Proposed Telecommunications Rules can be found on the internet at:

<http://www.state.sd.us/state/executive/puc/rulessgl.html>.

The hearing will be held at 8:30 a.m., on November 2, 1998, in Room 412, State Capitol, Pierre, South Dakota. The complete Notice of Public Hearing to Adopt Rules can be found on the internet at:

<http://www.state.sd.us/state/executive/puc/rulesnot.htm>.

If you do not have access to the internet, you may call 1-800-332-1782 or write to the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, 500 East Capitol, Pierre, South Dakota 57501 to request a copy of the rules or notice.

\* \* \* \* \*

You may receive this listing and other PUC publications via our website or via internet e-mail.

You may subscribe to the PUC mailing list at  
<http://www.state.sd.us/state/executive/puc/puc.htm>



Northern States Power Company  
South Dakota

Jim Wilcox, Manager,  
Community & Government Relations  
500 West Russell Street  
P.O. Box 688  
Sioux Falls, SD 57101-0988  
Telephone (605) 339-8350 fax 339-8204  
email wjcj01@nspco.com

October 13, 1998

Mr. William Bullard, Executive Director  
South Dakota Public Utilities Commission  
State Capitol Building  
600 East Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, South Dakota 57501-5070

Dear Mr. Bullard:

Re: EL98-020 In the Matter of the Complaint filed by Lori Bult, Crooks, South Dakota, against Northern States Power Company Regarding Poor Customer Service.

Enclosed please find a report of Mr. and Mrs. Bult's usage, billing and payment history from late 1997 to the present.

On July 29, 1998 a disconnect notice was sent to Mr. and Mrs. Bult at 105 S. West Av. Crooks, SD.

On August 6, 1998 a NSP telephone agent took a phone call from the Salvation Army on behalf of the Bults. The NSP phone agent visited about a payment schedule with the Salvation Army, but was not certain that the Salvation Army was making a promise to pay for the Bults and no record of any promise to pay was entered into the NSP accounting system.

On August 13, 1998 Ms. Bult contacted NSP about the pending disconnect. The record of that conversation indicates that Ms. Bult was working to obtain assistance from Interlakes Community Action. NSP encouraged Ms. Bult to make arrangements for the balance, however no arrangements were made.

On September 2, 1998 NSP disconnected 105 S. West Av in Crooks. Later in the day, the Salvation Army called NSP and guaranteed a payment of \$250 on behalf of the Bults. As a result, NSP then reconnected 105 S. West Av. in Crooks. The Salvation Army payment has not yet been received.

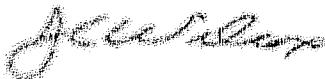
NSP continues to make improvements to our customer service processes. NSP began providing 24 hour telephone customer service to customers in South Dakota in 1995 as a marked improvement to the previous service hours of Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In 1998 further process improvements have led the NSP customer service staff in South Dakota to focus on billing for North Dakota, South Dakota and Western Minnesota customers. The result is that phone agents in Fargo now routinely take NSP South Dakota customer phone calls. These phone agents do have access to the SD Administrative Rules and are trained to treat South Dakota customers as if the phone agents themselves were located in Sioux Falls. NSP's intent is that the location of the phone agent is "transparent" to the customer.

Further, NSP believes that our phone agents do work to treat customers fairly and with respect. NSP has processes in place to randomly monitor telephone calls in an effort to ensure that phone agents are providing consistent customer service.

If anyone has any questions, please call me at 339-8350

Sincerely,



Jim Wilcox

c. Kent Larson  
Ms. Lori Dult



Customer Information

Showing the Billing and Payment History for  
 12345 Main St, Apt 101, St. Louis, MO 63101  
 for the time period ending January 1, 1998 to this present

DATE	Payor	Usage kWh	Billing	Payment	Payment Date	Balance
December 31, 1997	to December 30, 1997	2,500	\$ 185.41			\$ 136.94
	Payment			\$ 158.86	Jan 2, 1998	\$ 322.35
January 3, 1998	HSE Check		\$ 154.60			\$ 163.49
January 3, 1998	HSE Check Charge		\$ 15.00			\$ 318.15
	Payment			\$ 313.52	Jan 8, 1998	\$ 19.63
January 8, 1998	HSE Check		\$ 156.88			\$ 175.40
January 8, 1998	HSE Check Charge		\$ 15.00			\$ 193.48
January 24, 1998	Late Payment Charge		\$ 1.77			\$ 195.21
January 24, 1998	to January 23, 1998	2,040	\$ 144.61			\$ 340.12
	Payment			\$ 163.49	Feb 13, 1998	\$ 176.63
February 21, 1998	to February 20, 1998	2,320	\$ 157.51			\$ 334.17
	Payment			\$ 176.63	Mar 17, 1998	\$ 157.54
March 20, 1998	Late Payment Charge		\$ 1.65			\$ 159.19
March 27, 1998	to March 26, 1998	2,400	\$ 180.24			\$ 315.43
	Payment			\$ 157.54	April 20, 1998	\$ 157.81
April 20, 1998	to April 19, 1998	2,800	\$ 186.44			\$ 324.31
	Payment			\$ 157.80	May 20, 1998	\$ 166.44
April 24, 1998	Late Payment Charge		\$ 1.75			\$ 168.19
April 25, 1998	to May 24, 1998	2,600	\$ 181.14			\$ 349.33
	Payment			\$ 166.44	Jun 23, 1998	\$ 182.83
June 24, 1998	Late Payment Charge		\$ 1.90			\$ 184.79
June 25, 1998	to June 24, 1998	2,720	\$ 228.60			\$ 411.45
June 25, 1998	Late Payment Charge		\$ 4.27			\$ 415.72
June 29, 1998	to July 29, 1998	3,400	\$ 260.62			\$ 696.34
July 27, 1998	Late Payment Charge		\$ 7.23			\$ 703.57
July 28, 1998	to August 27, 1998	3,600	\$ 312.96			\$ 1,016.53
	Payment			\$ 200.00	Sep 21, 1998	\$ 818.63
September 15, 1998	Late Payment Charge		\$ 8.40			\$ 824.18
September 27, 1998	to September 26, 1998	3,500	\$ 274.41			\$ 1,099.15

Page 1 of 1

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA**

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPLAINT FILED	)	ORDER FINDING NO
BY LORI HOLT, CROOKS, SOUTH DAKOTA,	)	PROBABLE CAUSE AND
AGAINST NORTHERN STATES POWER	)	CLOSING DOCKET
COMPANY REGARDING POOR CUSTOMER	)	
SERVICE	)	EL98-020

On October 1, 1998, the Public Utilities Commission (Commission) received a complaint filed by Lori Holt, Crooks, South Dakota (Complainant), against Northern States Power Company (NSP), regarding payment arrangements on a past due bill and the method in which the matter was handled by NSP. Complainant alleges that although assurances had been made to NSP by two assistance operators, power was turned off. Complainant alleges a lack of communications within NSP and discourteous treatment by NSP personnel. Complainant asks that NSP's handling of accounts be examined, that a review of Crooks Falls office and that NSP personnel be better trained in human relations.

Pursuant to ARSD 20:10:01:08.01 and 20:10:01:09, if a complaint cannot be settled without formal action, the Commission shall determine if the complaint shows probable cause of an unlawful or unreasonable act, rate, practice or omission to go forward with the complaint.

On October 15, 1998, at its regularly scheduled meeting, the Commission considered this complaint along with presentations by the Complainant, Jim Wilcox, a representative of Northern States Power Company, and the recommendation of Commission Staff.

The Commission has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to SDCL 49-34A-2, 49-34A-4, 49-34A-27, 49-34A-42, 49-34A-55, and ARSD 20:10:01:08.01, and 20:10:01:09. The Commission found no probable cause, Commissioner Nelson dissenting. It is therefore:

**ORDERED**, that no probable cause has been found in this matter. It is further

**ORDERED**, that the docket shall be closed.

Done at Pierre, South Dakota, this 21<sup>st</sup> day of October, 1998.

<p><b>CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE</b></p> <p>The undersigned hereby certifies that this document has been served today upon all parties of record to this matter, as listed on the docket service list, by hand-delivery or by first class mail, in properly addressed envelopes, with charges prepaid thereon.</p> <p><i>Melanie Kade</i></p> <p>10/22/98</p> <p>(OFFICIAL USE)</p>
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BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION:

*James A. Burg*  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 JAMES A. BURG, Chairman

PAM NELSON, Commissioner, dissenting

*Laska Schoenfelder*  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 LASKA SCHOENFELDER, Commissioner

Descent of Commissioner Nelson  
Docket EL98-020

I respectfully dissent from the decision reached in this matter that there is no probable cause that Northern States Power Company committed an unlawful or unreasonable act, rule, practice or omission.

From the presentation made to the Commission by the consumer, Lori Bult, it appears that several matters should have been looked into much closer and should have been the subject of a hearing where we could have considered sworn testimony and more detail. This all boils down to what we as a Commission can consider and that is the adequacy of service which Northern States Power Company provides its South Dakota customers.

For instance, there seems to be a large gap in the handling of information within the utility. When two assistance agencies provide assurances that money is forthcoming and a disconnection occurs anyway, something is wrong. To me we should have examined the internal controls within Northern States Power Company and found out exactly why this information was mishandled. Not only is this a disservice to the consumer, it is to be costly for the utility to disconnect service and then reconnect it again in a short time. Somewhat of simply not paying attention to business and we have a duty to see why. It is obvious from staff's presentation that Northern States Power Company has changed its methods of operation even from the time that our consumer representative visited their call centers. This company should account to this Commission for this apparent instability.

Another major concern to me, and another reason I would vote to find probable cause is the issue of the manner in which Northern States Power Company responds to its customers. While I realize the realities of the business world, I have serious questions about the level of training given to those who must respond on the telephone to those customers who have reason to deal with the company. That means that I would be interested to see how these employees are instructed to deal with facts such as those in this case. Also, it is incredible to me that, from the facts as we know them, the utility would fail to respond to requests to it to investigate the possible tapping into a customer's service by unknown parties or the fact that no "live" person was available to meet with a customer and deal with that customer's problems in Sioux Falls--the largest single service territory of this utility. It has been represented that this latter matter has been remedied now. However, that did not help Ms. Bult in this case. To me, this raises just another question of the management of this company in South Dakota.

When these types of charges are made they raise serious questions of adequacy of service and I feel strongly that we should hold a hearing to get to the bottom of these problems. Unless and until we do, these problems will not go away.

  
Pam Nelson, Commissioner



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NOV 13 1998

SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Northern States Power Company  
South Dakota

Jim Wilcox, Manager  
Community & Government Relations  
500 West Russell Street  
P.O. Box 988  
Sioux Falls, SD 57101-0988  
Telephone (605) 339-8350 fax 339-8231  
email wlcj01@nspco.com

Nov 2, 1998

Mr. William Bullard, Executive Director  
South Dakota Public Utilities Commission  
State Capitol Building  
500 East Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, South Dakota 57501-5070

Re: EUSB-020 Follow-up to the resolved complaint by Mr. & Ms. Wayne & Lori Bult of Crooks, SD.

Dear Mr. Bullard:

Following the conclusion of this matter, I went out and visited with Ms. Bult on Friday October 16, 1998. We had a good visit and the Bults have agreed to a repayment plan that will provide \$247 per month which includes an amount for their monthly billing and an amount for the balance owed. We estimate that this payment arrangement plan will repay NSP within about a 10 month period. I believe this to be a generous arrangement and is acceptable to both parties.

Also enclosed is a copy of a meter test report from a meter test performed on the Bult's meter on October 22, 1998. The meter test showed that the meter was running about 0.5% slow on the "full-load" test and about 0.2% slow on the "light-load" test. The acceptable range for these tests is +/- 2.0%. The results show that the meter accuracy is within the normal acceptable range and if anything is reading less than what is actually being used.

Finally, enclosed is a page depicting two photographs that I took at the Bult's home. The second photograph shows that there is an electric fencer plugged into the outlet.

If anyone has any questions, please call me at 339-8350

Sincerely,

Jim Wilcox

c. Kent Larson



**NEXT**

**DOCUMENT (S)**

**BEST IMAGE**

**POSSIBLE**

0521  
2147  
61

Mtr started OK, talked with owner (not Wayne)  
FL. 16% slow  
LT. 22 slow

97 ML/day/2614 mm. 205-

13 20 <sup>90</sup> 10 22  
13 50

COPY



Mr & Ms Wayne & Lori Bult, 105 S. West Av. Crooks, SD 57020



The NSP meter is near the base of the pole.



A wire apparently extends from the meter underground to a post about 100 Feet South of the meter. A switch and outlet are mounted on this post.