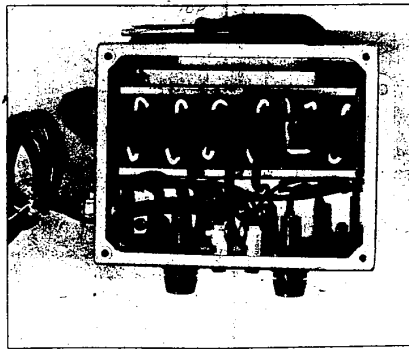


This is a varistor-type gadget that the Better Business Bureau says can be reproduced for less than \$10.



This is the interior of the K.W. Powermaster product which Harold Kraus claims cannot be reproduced for less than \$10.

Energy conservers spark controversy

By CHERYL CHODUN

K.W. Power Masters, a Southfield-based company that sells controversial electric energy-saving devices, has been hit by what the firm considers a negative charge.

Harold Kraus, president of the company, claims the firm has taken the brunt of unfair warning and criticisms from the Better Business Bureau (BBB). As a result, he maintains, sales have dropped significantly in the past few weeks.

The BBB says that there is no scientific evidence that such devices do what is claimed.

Kraus also claims a recent newspaper article misinformed the public, misquoting his sales manager, David Dietz, and probably causing "irreparable damage" to his "young and ethical" company.

Power Masters distributes a small device called a transient voltage suppressor, more commonly known as a surge suppressor.

"As electrical current travels," Kraus explained, "there are minute, intermittent surges of energy, referred to as spikes. The product, attached to the main circuit or fuse box inside a building can work as a sponge."

The "sponge" absorbs or chokes off spikes, causing a more even flow of electricity to run through the building, saving energy and money, Kraus claims.

SOUTHFIELD electrical inspector Jim Tabling agreed that the suppressors, with the correct technical composition, do choke off spike voltage.

"The spikes, however, are so infinitesimal that electrical meters can't even read them, so you're not paying for them," Tabling contended.

Kraus contends that the money saved doesn't come directly from what the meter initially reads, but rather from the effect the absence of electrical surges have on operation of electrical equipment.

Kraus said his company guarantees a refund if energy consumption isn't lowered by at least 10 per cent. Without the presence of spikes interrupting the smooth flow of power, equipment requires less energy to work and appliances run smoother and last longer, he maintained.

"Electric equipment can be compared to an automobile," Kraus said. "A car that needs a tune-up runs poorly and uses more gasoline. But if you get that car in the best possible operating condition, gas mileage improves. By creating the best electrical

environment, equipment performs better and lowers energy consumption and costs.

IN A RECENT statement, the BBB said, "Eleven reputable research agencies agree that there is no scientific basis for claims being made that these devices will reduce consumption of electricity or lower electric bills."

The Institute of Electronic Engineers also warned of misleading claims about surge suppressing "energy saving devices." Detroit Edison spokesman said the utility company has tested surge suppressors and found no scientific evidence that they will make a difference in energy consumption.

Kraus pointed out that all claims about surge suppressors weren't directed at his particular product, BBB, he maintained, never complained about K.W. Power Masters and has never tested the firm's product.

The subject of the BBB report is the varistor oriented gadgets, also referred to as surge suppressors," Dietz said. "The only similarity between our product and these is the generic name."

The company, Dietz added, has been cautioning prospective customers about varistor gadgets for months, long before the BBB warning.

The BBB report stated suppressors, which cost between \$150 and \$900 at Power Masters, could be reproduced for less than \$10. Kraus said his product couldn't be built for that amount.

Kraus said that Dow Chemical, Howard Johnson and Pacific Cold Storage Co. are among companies using Power Masters energy conservation systems.

According to a May, 1977, report from Pacific Cold Storage Co., "the Power Master transient voltage suppression equipment is the most sophisticated of its type available today." The report continued, "the dramatic impact of the Powermaster equipment on actual consumption of electricity is a 13 per cent reduction in kilowatt hours during the approximate five months to date."

A letter from Dow Chemical stated, "we installed Powermaster equipment in our central service building in November, 1976, and between November and February, our consumption was between 12-19 per cent below average."

Kraus says the letters were unsolicited.

Kraus and Dietz concur that their product is a "definite plus in energy conservation," and will be a help to the nation's energy problems.

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