

How to keep current flowing even if the payments aren't

By Craig Pieschura
staff writer

There's an alternative to the dark prospect of losing all electrical power for failing to promptly pay an electric bill.

A device called a current limiter built by a Farmington Hills firm is being tested in 50 different areas of the United States and Canada. Three utility companies are already making wide use of the instrument.

The current limiter — which attaches to an outdoor electrical meter box — is called a "harmless invention" by its manufacturer and an insidious form of "harrassment" by its detractors in consumer groups.

In places where the device is used, utility customers who make too much money to qualify for public assistance yet fail to make arrangements to pay their electric bill may find their use of

power severely restricted with the temporary installation of a current limiter.

The device cuts the amount of available power to a home from its normal level of 240 volts by 90 percent to only 10, 15, or 16 amperes for essential services.

Detroit Edison owns 110 of the units built by Ekstrom Industries, Inc. of Farmington Hills, and began using them during the winter months in the counties of Wayne and Oakland County on a limited basis, says Earl Floyd, general manager of customer business activities for the utility.

The idea behind the device is to make things uncomfortable for the user but not catastrophic. Limiting a customer to 10 amps should give them enough electricity to run the motor of a gas furnace, the refrigerator and at least a couple of light bulbs but not television, stereos or other appliances.

"We get called Big Brother by some people," says John C. Bell, of Livonia, executive vice-president of Ekstrom Industries, Inc. of Farmington Hills. "I'm not harrassing people. In most cases companies like Long Island Light Co. (Lilco) could shut customers off completely — even in the winter."

"Pacific Power & Light — another one of our customers — which runs the utility from Portland all the way to Montana — they could shut them off completely. No law says they can't. But they find this works better."

IN EDISON'S three-month trial run, current limiters were installed 103 times in Oakland County homes (where current was restricted to 15 amps) and 85 times in western Wayne County homes (where current was limited to 10 amps), Floyd said.

While the number of installations isn't large enough to draw any firm

conclusions, Floyd said, preliminary findings show customers who had service limited were slower to pay over-due bills.

In the Oakland County area Edison compared the 103 customers who had power limited to a control group of 103 persons who had their electricity turned off, to compare the customer response.

"Of the 103 homes in Oakland County, 31 homes had power restored the same day the limiter was installed," Floyd said.

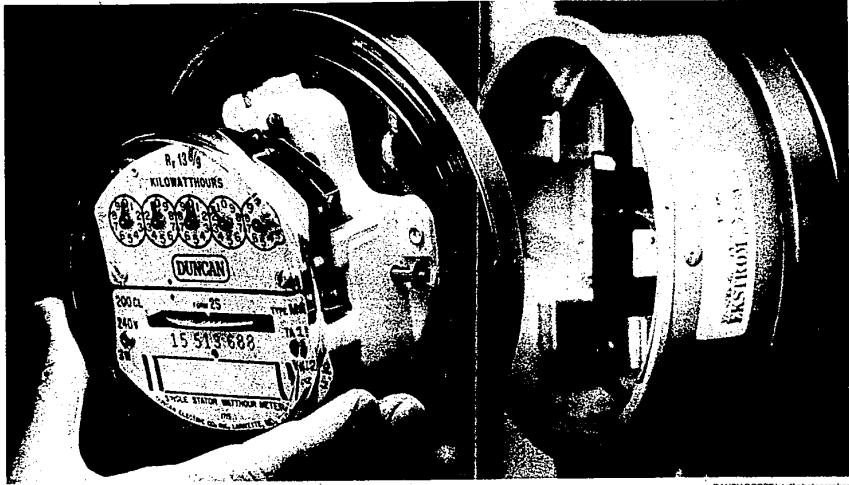
"Seven had power restored within 24 hours and 29 customers had the limiters on a maximum 10 days and subsequently had their (electrical) service disconnected."

"In the control group, which didn't get the limiters and were left in the dark without heat, Floyd said, 54 persons paid their over-due bill the same day the power was shut off."



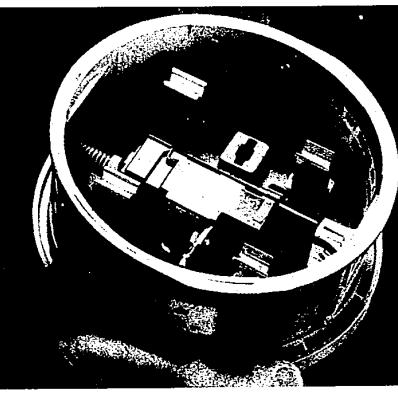
RANDY BORST/staff photographer

John C. Bell, executive vice-president of Ekstrom Industries.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The metering unit is plugged into the adapter during the final electrical installation.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The limiter is located in the meter adapter.

INSIDE ANGLES

SOME YOUNG HISTORIANS from the Farmington area demonstrated their acumen at the recent sixth annual history day at Eastern Michigan University. During the day-long event, sponsored by the EMU history faculty, students were given the opportunity to participate in a competitive exam in United States or world history. Senior winners in the competition received \$750 scholarships. Junior winners and their runners-up received book awards. Mike Bogart, Harrison High, received a book award for being a junior winner in the world history exam. Ed McGline of Harrison High walked away with a \$750 scholarship in his efforts in the U.S. history exam. Ted Rudel, also of Harrison, received a book award for being a junior winner in the U.S. history exam.

SOME OTHER YOUNG FOLKS, Farmington area Boy Scouts, are out looking for work. They want to pay their expenses for this year's summer trip to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. Each Scout's expenses will amount to about \$450. If you could use any of these young men to work around your home or business, contact Scoutmaster John Richardson at 476-4320 or 978-3662.

SPEAKING OF SUMMER CAMP, you can learn more about Y camp by attending the YMCA Our Camp Night from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on May 2. The Y facility is at 28100 Farmington Road, north of 12 Mile.

EVER WONDER what happened to Kevin Collins, the 1981 North Farmington grad? Angles recently learned he is playing varsity baseball for Lake Forest College in Illinois.

HARRISON STUDENT Elizabeth Fitzpatrick brought even more honor to the community by recently being awarded a National Merit Scholarship from Gulf and Western Industries. For Fitzpatrick, this prestigious award is another in a long line of accomplishments. A Phi Beta Kappa, she also is a Notre Dame Scholar as well as a recipient of the University of Michigan Regents Alumni scholarship. In high school she is the president of the French club, a yearbook manager and a member of the forensic team. She also is the National Honor Society treasurer.

A BIT OF CULTURE will be coming to Mercy High School when the Farmington Hills-based Michigan Ballet Theater performs its Collage of Dance at 3 p.m. April 25. Tickets are \$4 for adults, \$2 for students and senior citizens. Tickets are on sale through Evelyn Kresan of Dance, 626-1693, or by writing Michigan Ballet Theater, P.O. Box 2022, Farmington Hills 48081. Four performances will be presented. The first will be Jazz Rhapsody II, choreographed by Marcus Alford.

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS of Adat Shalom Synagogue will soon be paying tribute to Farmington Hills resident Norman Leemon who is being honored as Man of the Year at the Adat Shalom Israel Bond tribute. The event is scheduled for May 20. The native Detroit is president of the Michigan Mortgage Corp., a company he established in 1949. He also is director of the Farmers and Merchants State Bank of Schewang. Leemon's wife, Frieda, is the immediate past national president of the Jewish Women of America and is a member of its National Board. For further information and early reservations call Adat Shalom Synagogue 651-5100 or the Israel Bond office, 557-2900.

O&E

Patterns in Sound and Les Petits Rien are two ballets choreographed for the Michigan Ballet Theater by Evelyn Kresan. The company will also perform three additional original ballets.

WARM WEATHER brings out the naturalist in almost everyone. If you've got that urge and a camera to go along with it, come on over to the photo nature walk from 9:11 a.m. on May 1 at Independence Oak County Park. Photographers Bill Leonard and Hartley Aglin will talk about photo composition and answer questions during the walk. Outdoor dress is required. Participants will meet at the bathhouse. The park entrance fee is \$2.50 for Oakland County residents and \$4 for non-residents. Call Kaitleen Dougherty at 659-0903 to register and for more information. Independence Oaks is at Sashabaw Road near I-75 in Clarkston.

WEIGHT WATCHER MEMBERS of Southeastern Michigan will be joining thousands of persons walking to raise money for the March of Dimes Teamwalk America. April 25, 1982, will be walking up to 20 miles from these locations: Bellaire, Clarkston, Creek and the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College. Money pledged for each mile walked will aid the March of Dimes efforts in the counties walked and national research.

BOOK LOVERS will be having one heck of a time from April 24 to May 2 during the Lawrence Institute of Technology library moving sale. There is to be clear out as many excess books as possible before relocating to the college's new Wayne Buell building. A large selection of books will be available for a low price. All kinds of books including technical texts will be available. The library will be open from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on April 24 and noon to 5 p.m. on April 25. The following week the hours will be 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Monday through Friday; from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, and 12:30-4:30 p.m. the Sunday. The LIT library is west of Northwestern Service Drive on Civic Center, Southfield.

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