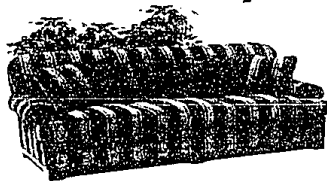
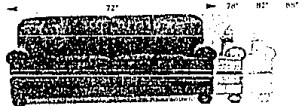


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## Utilities

### Folks are wired with concern

BY TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

Utility representatives sat in silence in the back of the room as consumers from suburban Oakland and Wayne counties unleashed a barrage of complaints about Ameritech and Detroit Edison to the state Public Service Commission.

"Nothing ever gets resolved," said Debra Bzovi, a 37-year Farmington Hills resident whose home suffered three power outages totaling 20 hours in the last year and a half.

"Ameritech says, 'Tough,' Ameritech says, 'You lose,'" said Michael Wayne, a Rochester Hills resident and president of a Troy Internet service provider called Misen.

The Oct. 6 hearing in Farmington Hills was conducted by John Strand, chair of the three-member PSC, which regulates utilities. Often Strand referred complaints to individual utility representatives. It was the fifth in the PSC's 1998 series of six

regional hearings.

#### Look in the woods

Bzovi, who lives near 12 Mile and Middlebelt, complained that Edison told her to "look in the woods" for a downed power line. "No way was I going to look," she said. When an Edison crew finally arrived, "they had it fixed in five minutes."

Wayne said Ameritech is constantly telling people to "put in another phone line - for modems, for faxes - and it doesn't work. They're cramming more service onto existing (inadequate) facilities."

Technically, Wayne said, the problem is a SLIC, a piece of equipment in the neighborhood that delivers more services on

existing facilities. Result: "Modern speeds are drastically reduced overnight."

The public wasn't 100 percent down on utilities.

Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said that since major storm damage three and a half years ago to power lines, "the service has improved. But there is still a concern about tree trimming. They should talk to homeowners (about tree trimming plans). And there is still a concern about unexpected outages."

"My pet issue is that when there's a long delay - days or weeks - there should be some reimbursement, say, for food losses."

"Edison has improved," added City Manager Steve Brock. "But we're never sure about emergency response." He cited a home in Old Homestead subdivision where Edison continually told the owner "three or four hours" to restore power. "It was three days," said Brock, adding if that Edison could give a more realistic time estimate for repairs, "people can make plans."

#### Getting crammed

Chris Cesulski of Rochester Hills got "excellent cooperation from Ameritech" when his elderly father was "crammed." Cramming refers to a phone company's practice of billing a consumer for services never ordered.

"My father was crammed by a company called Integretel for an incoming 800 number. He certainly didn't order this service but was billed \$4.95 for a service activation fee," Cesulski said.

The 800 number at Integretel produced no satisfaction. Finally Cesulski got the firm's number from the Florida PSC. Months later, he learned Integretel is merely a billing company for a third company called Telecom. "I have no idea who they are or where they are," he said. He told his father not to pay the Integretel part of the bill.

"I'd like to solve this on my own. I don't want the state's help," Cesulski told Strand. "Shouldn't there be a name and address on the bill?"

#### Tree slaughter

David Baughman, Sy Kernicky and Al Seoud, all Farmington Hills residents, complained that tree trimming companies hired by Edison did excessive damage.

"There's no shortage of people (at Edison) who will listen. They just don't have a solution," said Baughman, who called the trimmers' cutting "inhumane."

"Overaggressive. They did a horrible job on my neighborhood," said Kernicky, who lives in the oldest settled area of Farmington Hills on Power Road. He asked PSC for guidelines as to how far on private property Edison's contractors could cut and who is responsible for removing cuttings.

Kernicky said the wires are old and deliver "blips" and warned that a new development will make the electric service worse unless Edison replaces lines.

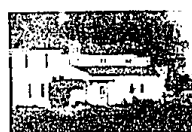
"Butchering and slaughtering of trees without notice," complained Seoud, representing the Bridge Hills Association west of Inkster Road. "It's obscene. They've taken 'public' out of 'public utility'."

State Rep. Nancy Cassis, R-Now, a member of the House Public Utilities Committee, said she would explore a bill to give utilities a tax incentive to bury power lines. "In the short run, it costs. In the long run, it will save millions of dollars," she said.

Lois Hitchcock, a Southfield resident, asked Strand the status of state deregulation of electricity. The PSC chair said 2.5 percent of customers will become eligible to choose electricity suppliers a few weeks after the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approves the state plan, but "that has not begun yet." It will be phased in over several years. Gas deregulation has been in effect 10 years and has lowered rates 20-22 percent, he said.

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