Durban is currently experiencing blazing summer conditions, which hiked up the demand for electricity to keep our fans and air conditioners on. eThekwini Municipality’s Electricity Unit is responsible for this. Romita Hanuman profiles the Unit, outlines their challenges, successes and what to look out for if you suspect cable theft.

What we do and how we do it

The Head of Electricity, Sandlele Maphumulo explained the work done by his team. eThekwini Electricity supplies more than 460,000 customers in an area covering nearly 2,000 square kilometres. This encompasses the area of the eThekwini Metropolitan Region and some adjacent areas. The eThekwini Municipality is proud of all its service units, and Electricity is no exception.

**Here are a few achievements of the Unit:**
- The Unit is a leader in compliance to the National Energy Regulation of South Africa (NERSA) and the National Rationalisation Standards (NRS) which are essentially national guidelines based on international best practice.
- Electricity Supply Industry Excellence Award 2000 – Best Municipal Electricity Distributor obtained from ESI Africa
- KZN Centre of Excellence Award – Durban’s Land & Gas to Electricity GOM Project obtained by South African Institute of Electrical Engineering (SAIEE)
- Successful project in partnership with Durban Solid Waste at Breamers Landfill about “Engagements” worth over R1 million of electricity per month is generated through the project.
- 33 330 (79%) households have been connected to electricity.
- 72,000 eThekwini residents receive free 60kWh of electricity.
- 28 650 solar water heaters have been installed in homes of previously disadvantaged households.

DID YOU KNOW?

Where electricity comes from

Electricity for the main supply to the Metro Region is purchased at 375 000 Volts from Eskom at three in-feed points.

eThekwini Electricity also purchases electricity from Eskom for Winkelspruit, Mphamukwa and Mqelebank. From these points electricity is transmitted and distributed for use by the full spectrum of customers ranging from the large industrial and commercial sector to the residential communities.

eThekwini Electricity Unit purchases just over 5% of the total energy generated by Eskom. eThekwini Electricity Unit operates under the Electricity Regulation Act, 2006. Its policies are determined by the Metropolitan Council of Durban and the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA).

Zero tolerance on cable theft

South Africa is facing a major problem with copper theft and has a negative impact on all citizens. The estimated loss due to copper theft is approximately R5 billion per year with eThekwini Electricity contributing R80 million to that loss. It has an impact on the City’s communication network, electricity supply and railway and traffic services.

What is cable theft?

This is when people steal copper cable and sell it to scrap dealers for money. Copper cable holds a high monetary value and can be sold for R65-R78 per kilogram. The scrap metals business has become very lucrative with unsuspecting dealers simply buying copper with no questions asked. The stolen copper is then exported to other countries like China and India and the same copper is then procured by the country it has been stolen from. Last year a joint operation was conducted in conjunction with National and Provincial SAPS. Three dealers were found for being in possession of large amounts of copper cable and another person was found with 127kg of copper cable andBusy Bars.

Cable Theft Task Team

The Electricity unit recognised the need to establish a task team that is dedicated to fighting the scourge of cable theft. The task team was established in 2009 and has since been conducting investigations into cable theft, apprehending suspects and confiscating stolen copper cable. The SAPS arrest suspects and are then taken to court where the case is heard and suspects are either sentenced or released, depending on the merit of the case.

In the last year the task team has discovered an astounding 2006 kilograms of stolen cable.

TIPS
- Do not approach suspects
- Monitor the movement and details of people and vehicles, example they are wearing, registration and description of vehicles etc
- Report suspicious activity to Electricity’s call centre or the South African Police Services.

Here’s what to look out for:
- Criminals posing as contractors working for eThekwini Electricity, removing cables illegally
- A substantial amount of theft takes place late at night or very early in the morning so if you see construction workers removing cable at these odd times, regard it as suspicious
- Individuals walking around with cutting tools
- People removing overhead cables without a job card from eThekwini Municipality
- Suspicious vehicles like bread, trucks and minibuses with occupants pretending to conduct electrical work
- No signage on the vehicle
- Warning boards: make sure you query by calling the Electricity Call Centre.

Celebrating 20 years of freedom and democracy