

Still burning...



Tim Moog/THE BATTALION

(from left) Juniors Leach Schneler, Schwinn Mesecke and Brian Tully climb atop Bonfire Monday afternoon. The fire, which was lit Wednesday night, is still burning.

TU Electric fights to recover losses

Rebound expected despite back-to-back major accidents

The Associated Press

DALLAS — Reeling from back-to-back major accidents involving its facilities, TU Electric still expects to recoup its losses without passing on costs to the ratepayers, a spokesman said Monday.

"As far as accidents go, it certainly has not been a good year," TU spokesman Jim Lawrence said.

On Oct. 28, a ruptured gas line in Arlington sparked an explosion and raging fire, toppling 17 of the company's electric transmission towers and temporarily cutting off power to more than 40,000 homes and businesses.

Authorities said the blaze apparently was triggered when a construction vehicle hit a line that carries natural gas to a TU Electric plant in Grand Prairie. TU Electric's equipment sustained \$2.5 million to \$3 million in damages, officials said.

Two and a half weeks later, a 600-foot concrete emissions stack collapsed onto a TU Electric power plant at Mount Pleasant, about 120

miles east of Dallas. One person was trapped and killed in the Nov. 14 accident; four others were injured.

Dave Fiorelli, a spokesman at the Monticello Plant in Mount Pleasant, had estimated the damages at several million dollars.

"As far as accidents go, it certainly has not been a good year."

—Jim Lawrence, TU spokesman

Lawrence said: "We regret that there was a fatality and there were injuries at the Mount Pleasant site. In addition to that, of course, there is some expense involved. There is a matter of operating without one of our major lignite-fueled units until it can be restored.

"All those things combined have not made it an especially good

year," he said.

Lawrence said the company insured for damages at the Mount Pleasant plant. It still was collecting bills associated with the Arlington fire, but expected to turn them over to Pate Brothers Construction Co. of Kennedale, the contractor TU said was responsible for the accident.

"We're operating on the basis that we're going to recoup our losses," Lawrence said.

Kevin Pate, president of Pate Brothers, did not immediately return a telephone call to The Associated Press.

Because TU Electric expects to be repaid, it does not anticipate that electric rates will rise as a result of the two incidents, he said.

Guillermo Garcia, spokesman for the state Public Utility Commission, said TU Electric could decide to pass losses from the accidents as a reason for seeking a rate hike. The commission staff would then decide whether the expenses are reasonable and make a recommendation to a judge.

Fishing trip leads to wild raccoon rescue mission

The Associated Press

CORPUS CHRISTI — David Neal and his son Jason set out to catch a fish or two not far from home on Padre Island.

But the sight of a raccoon, clinging tenaciously to a barge, led them on a 31/2-hour rescue mission all the way to Aransas Pass.

And despite catching no fish, Jason declared the Saturday trip a success.

"We caught a raccoon instead," the 14-year-old said.

Jason said he first noticed the raccoon, on the back of a barge near a support strut for the rudder, as he and his father steered their 18-foot motorboat on the jetties at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi.

"I had to think about it for a minute, to figure out what I saw, then I told my dad we had to go

back," Jason said.

The Neals followed the barge from underneath the John F. Kennedy Causeway to Aransas Pass, nearly 20 miles away.

On the way, they watched as the half-drowned raccoon clung to the struts, fighting for its life.

When the barge finally stopped outside Conn Brown Harbor in Aransas Pass, the Neals fished the ring-tailed mammal from the water with a net and a canvas bag.

It recovered Saturday at their home in the pen that normally holds the family Doberman.

They released the raccoon Sunday into an undeveloped canal. "That leads to the National Seashore," David Neal said. "There are plenty of things for him to eat and I know there are some other raccoons there, so that might be a good

place for him."

Neal, a lieutenant commander with the Coast Guard and a helicopter pilot, said the raccoon's determination and stamina surprised him.

"The guy on the barge said he had been there for the last 50 miles, since sunset," Neal said. "A couple of times he just disappeared under the water, but he managed to hang on."

To no avail, the man aboard the barge had tried to toss first a rope, then a pole in hopes the animal would climb up onto the deck.

The raccoon, nicknamed "Cal," didn't put up much of a fight when the Neals rescued him.

"He tried to submerge himself and get away, but we still fished him out," Neal said. "He growled a little bit, but he was pretty docile. He's been real quiet. I think he's a pretty tough day."

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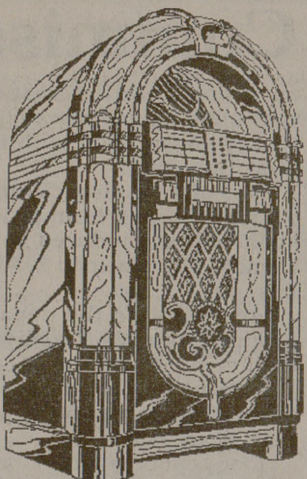
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