



Squirrel blamed for power outage

By Alton Mitchell
Correspondent

A massive power outage on Sunday at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport has been on the topic of discussion across the world on Monday. However, slightly a week before the city of LaFayette suffered a similar disaster and according to local officials the remnants of what led to citywide blackout are still evident a week later.

The power outage at the world busiest airport was triggered by a fire, but the culprit behind LaFayette's troubles was a bit more on the furry side. Randy Norred, Superintendent for LaFayette's electric was on hand at Monday evenings city council meeting and explained to council members how the squirrel triggered a series of events that led to the outage.

According to Norred the troubles began around 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday morning. At that time Norred told council members there was a squirrel on a powerline behind City Hall in LaFayette. The squirrel on the pole shorted a switch out according to Norred. A bucket truck was dispatched to the scene to investigate the situation. Norred states officials did not know the extent of the outage at that point. It would later be revealed that the switch was burnt completely up.

As the truck was heading back to substation one Norred states they started getting calls that power was still out. This led them to know that the transmission line was out. As crews arrived back to substation one they discovered that breakers 102 and 202 have failed. Norred also told council members that nearly all the switches above the breakers had burned up.

The problems did not end there. As Norred continued through the substation it was discovered that three of the fuses that connect to Alabama Power had blown. Norred states that they should not go to that point. The damage was evident as Norred explains that parts of the fuses were all over the substation and parts of the structure itself had melted.

After discovering the extent of the damage, Norred called Aaron Pruitt, LaFayette's substation guy. He also got in touch with Tallapoosa River Electric Cooperative to have them on standby for assistance. Power was also beginning to be diverted to the alternate substation in LaFayette. Norred acknowledges that there is still some damage at the substation including parts of blown fuses.

Councilwoman Tammie B. Williams asked was there any type of preventative maintenance that could have been done to prevent this type of occurrence. Norred noted that maintenance is

performed on a weekly basis. The breaker failed to trip and two of the breakers are tied together which led to the problems. Norred stated, "I'm not making excuses, but we are working with equipment that was installed in the 1970's. Mechanical relays failed to trip."

In the end Norred acknowledges that the squirrel was the culprit that triggered the power outage, but additional problems were found at substation two when being changed over. The power outage last most of the day on Tuesday and closed local offices and businesses in LaFayette for the day. There was no impact on voting in the city as a result of the outage.