



## *Electrical Issues in La Cholla*

July 22, 2021

Dear members:

We have experienced several power outages in Colonia La Cholla over the last few months. Some outages have affected the entire community; other outages have affected only isolated areas. CFE has responded quickly to restore power to our homes, but they have not been good at proactive maintenance. The design and installation of our power system dates back to the mid 1990s. At the time, many options were considered. One of these options was an underground system. At that time, Cholla homeowners were new into the regularization process and were buying their land and entering into bank trust contracts with Bancomer. Most agreed the underground installation would be far superior, but it would double to triple the price. The consensus was to keep costs down by going overhead.

Another option at the time was installing concrete poles rather than traditional wooden poles. This again was a idea that resulted in a lower cost of the system. The concrete pole idea has turned out to be a problem particularly in the rust-prone water front areas. The metal rebar forming the structural skeleton inside of the concrete poles has rusted and expanded causing the concrete to deteriorate. We have noticed that when replacement poles are installed, they are now wooden. If you ever been in Cholla during the hot and humid summers, you have probably observed what electrical linemen call "fuzz". Fuzz looks like fire balls running up and down the power lines and around the transformers. Due to budget issues, CFE waits until the concrete pole completely disintegrates before doing a replacement.

Thanks to our Cholla-based alarm company, Casa Linda, outages are reported to CFE to soon as they are detected. However, at times the power outage many affect only one home or a small group of homes on a single transformer. In this case, there is often no one to discover and report the outage; the homeowner then returns to Cholla encountering a very unwelcome, and often smelly problem. Some issues that can affect a small group of homes are "dropping a leg" and blown fuses at the transformer. At every transformer, there are two "legs" (wires) of power entering and leaving the transformer. If a fuse blows or a leg physically falls off the transformer, you will have major electric issues in your home. Another common problem occurs at house electric meters. The highly corrosive salt air will cause the base of the meter to fail and cause similar low voltage and surges. A failure of the meter base is not easily detected visually; CFE requires that an approved electrician remove your meter and replace the base at your expense. Problems at the pole and transformer are the financial responsibility of CFE. The main issue with any of these problems is damage to electronic devices, such as televisions and computers, as well as appliances. These devices are often ruined with the resulting power surge or low voltage. Many Cholla residents follow the Cholla Residents and Visitors Facebook page and get information on outages from other members. CFE will not accept any financial liability for damaged equipment in your home, even if the damage occurs as a result of a problem in their system. Local house insurance companies are well aware of these power problems and specifically exclude electronics and appliances from loss coverage as a result of power supply issues.

Many Vecinos have protected their homes with a whole house surge protector. These protectors cost less than \$100 and can save thousands of dollars on replacing your electronic devices and appliances. Many local electricians can provide and install them and the "do it yourselfers" can find the surge protection equipment at Lowe's or Home Depot.

Often we get a warning of a coming electrical event by flickering lights and slow moving fans. If you are at your Cholla home when a brown-out, surge or black-out happens, turn off your main breaker at the electric meter to prevent major damage when the power comes back on.