

Media Release

Kerikeri – Wednesday 17 March 2010



Scrub fire disrupts Kerikeri/Waipapa power supply

Some businesses and homes in the Kerikeri, Waipapa and surrounding areas struggled with intermittent power supply this afternoon, as fire fighters battled to get control of a scrub fire threatening overhead power lines.

Responding to the emergency, Top Energy wrestled to balance the electricity load between its two lines feeding Kerikeri, in the area adjacent to Kerikeri Airport where the fire had taken hold. As the fire spread during the afternoon, one circuit was shut down to make the area safe for fire fighters to deal with the emergency. Unfortunately, at several points during the afternoon, the fire threatened to leap across Waimate North Road and threaten Top Energy's second circuit. The company assisted fire services on several occasions during the afternoon by switching the second line out which unfortunately interrupted power supplies in Kerikeri, Waipapa and surrounding areas.

As at 6:30pm this evening fire fighters were working to get the blaze under control. Top Energy CEO, Russell Shaw said, "This is a major fire which is affecting both of our lines. We are doing all we can to make sure the area is safe for fire fighters and at the same time, minimise the supply disruption to households and businesses".

Power supplies have now been restored however there will only be a single line supplying the Kerikeri and Waipapa areas until damage can be assessed and repairs made on the line immediately above the fire. Top Energy linesmen will work through the night to complete repairs once they are granted access to the area from the Fire Service. END.

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At around 6:30pm last evening, Top Energy line crews were allowed back into the fire area to check, clean and repair damaged lines. The system was returned to normal operation by 11:30pm.

The cause of the blaze is currently under investigation. However, Top Energy has confirmed the fire was started during routine switching on its network. An experienced Top Energy operator was switching a 33,000 Volt overhead line switch when arcing occurred and spots of molten copper

dropped to the ground igniting scrub. According to Top Energy CEO, Russell Shaw, their staff member, who is an experienced linesman and also a volunteer fire brigade member, attempted to put out the flames with the aid of several motorists who were passing at the time. Despite their efforts, the fire quickly flared out of control in the tinder dry conditions and spread into nearby bush. The Fire Service was then notified and managed the incident.

“From initial reports it does appear that correct maintenance procedures were followed, however a full internal investigation is underway this morning. Switching of this type is an everyday occurrence across New Zealand, however there’s always some risk that flashes like this can occur. Unfortunately in this instance, the very dry conditions we’re experiencing this year have added to that risk. We apologise to all those who were inconvenienced yesterday and thank the Fire Service and DOC for their professionalism in dealing with the fire”, Shaw said. END.

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