



Blackout victims told to be patient

Until investigation complete, hydro officials have few answers for west-end residents

January 23, 2009

NICK AVELING
STAFF REPORTER

About 70 west-enders crammed themselves, their notebooks and their misgivings into the Parkdale Library basement last night, to find out why their neighbourhood spent almost 24 hours in the dark during last week's blackout.

Be patient, they were told by a panel of city and hydro officials. Answers are on the way.

The panel, led by Hydro One director of asset management Mike Penstone, was able to explain why the city rushed to shut down the transformer station at Bloor St. W. and Dufferin St. last Thursday night.

A valve in the fire protection system, essentially a sprinkler, said Penstone, mistakenly opened.

But what he couldn't say, at least until Hydro One's investigation is complete, is how or why that valve opened. "We regret the inconvenience," he told the crowd.

The crowd, as became evident during the meeting's question and answer period, regretted it, too.

But there was some news that everyone could agree was good: Penstone announced that Hydro One would entirely replace the station's fire protection system.

What Hydro One intends to replace it with, however, is still undecided.

The investigation, explained Hydro One spokesperson Laura Cooke earlier in the day, "is going to inform a decision about a replacement system."

That investigation will also inform decisions about what they'll do at other stations, she said.

The next step will be to submit a proposal to Toronto Hydro for its "full review and acceptance," said Cooke.

But last night, west-end residents had other concerns, too. Complaints about the city's communication efforts – including contradictory advice from Mayor David Miller and Hydro One about how to keep your pipes from freezing – were a recurring theme.

Concerns were also raised about the station's holding tanks, which are designed to

collect water in the event of a leak, keeping it away from transformers.

Why, residents asked, isn't there an automatic system to alert Toronto Hydro when the tank is half-full, giving crews enough time to reach the station and assess the leak?

They received no straightforward answer.

Arne Nes, who lives near Bloor St. W. and Dufferin St. and used to be a high-voltage technician in Norway, received the night's biggest round of applause when he used his time at the microphone to raise what he said was the real issue.

He described the hydro station that was the cause of last week's blackout, which is similar to 32 others in Toronto, as a complete disaster.