

**Response from the Special Committee on Utilities
to the letter from NOVEC CEO Stan Feuerberg dated June 7, 2011.**

After the Town Hall, the Special Committee on Utilities believed there was some sort of "meeting of the minds" with NOVEC executives. They delineated several actions they are taking to correct our unreliability problem, and we looked forward to seeing how those many initiatives work to bring our outages in line with industry and NOVEC standards.

Many executives and engineers at NOVEC including Greg Williamson, Allen Barbee, and Larry Shaffer, to name just a few, have been very responsive to questions from the Committee. They have been courteous, informative and very willing to answer as many questions as we have thrown at them. We appreciate their expertise, willingness to share their time, and team spirit in working with the Committee and the HOA to find solutions.

Unfortunately, the letter sent to NOVEC customers in our subdivision from CEO Feuerberg does not contain the same spirit of cooperation. It is combative and negative in tone and is included on this website for those who did not read it when it arrived in the mail.

A letter outlining the steps being taken to correct and improve the situation would have been most welcome. However, Mr. Feuerberg also made unfortunate assertions and cast aspersions on the integrity and intelligence of the Committee as well as those who expressed concerns at the Town Hall meeting.

First, Mr. Feuerberg's cover letter suggests we no longer need to contact Delegate Hugo, Supervisor Herrity or Senator Marsden if we have problems with electric power, but should contact him directly with concerns. If you have particular concerns, we think that contacting Mr. Feuerberg directly is an excellent idea. However, there is no reason that we cannot also talk with our elected representatives any time we wish. We encourage all homeowners to continue to contact Del. Hugo and Supervisor Herrity if they choose to do so.

Mr. Feuerberg starts by saying that our claims of NOVEC unresponsiveness are "simply untrue" and that they have responded to every email, letter and phone call received since the January snowstorm.

That is certainly true. NOVEC has responded to our concerns since the January storm. However, it was specifically pointed out by members of our committee at a NOVEC meeting in Manassas the week before our Town Hall that our unreliability problem began long before the winter of 2011. We made this clear several times when talking with various NOVEC officers and engineers over the past several months. NOVEC unreliability in providing our electric power did not begin with the winter of 2011.

Andy Novotny made many calls to NOVEC in 2009 about random power outages and even more than that after the severe storms of 2010 (at least 10 calls) but her concerns were ignored in 2010. The storms of 2010 found us in the dark and cold for a longer period of time than the storm of 2011. There was little or no response to any of her concerns from anyone at NOVEC until 2011 when Del. Hugo and Supervisor Herrity became involved. Other homeowners also reported to the Committee that they have been calling and making their complaints known for several years.

The situation we find ourselves in today is the result of NOVEC's unresponsiveness before the storm of 2011 occurred. This is a statement of fact whether Mr. Feuerberg chooses to acknowledge it or not. We would not be where we are now if NOVEC had adequately addressed the unreliability of our electric power in 2007, 2008, 2009, or 2010. They have had years to provide reliable service to our subdivision.

Until the last 5 months their response was insufficient. They may have been trying to "fix" our problems during those years as Mr. Feuerberg asserts in his letter, but the success of those attempts is questionable. The outage chart on our powerpoint presentation speaks for itself. The number of outages and the periods of time that power was off are FACTS; they are not an opinion and they are not a fabrication of the Committee.

Mr. Feuerberg knows this is what we meant when we said at the Town Hall meeting that their service was "unreliable." The outage chart we presented showed data beginning in 2006 – not just from the winter of 2011 onward.

We have been told repeatedly by Mr. Feuerberg that "NOVEC has been consistently rated as a regional and national top performer in the annual J.D. Power and Associates Electric Utility Residential Customer Satisfaction Study." This is an achievement that is worth bragging about, to be sure. Such high ratings are not easily attained. However, that makes it even more difficult for homeowners in Fairfax Station to understand the problems they are experiencing with their electric power. If NOVEC consistently receives such high accolades from their customers, then why isn't that same reliable service a part of our own experience? It is tiresome and exasperating for us to hear that statement repeated again and again when it does not apply to service reliability in Fairfax Station.

Yes, Mr. Feuerberg, we ARE "frustrated with the high number of brief interruptions and/ blinks," as you state in your letter. More than that, we are angry about the days and days of outages!

Our concern is not just the blinks, but random unreliability in general (even in good weather) and the days of power loss in the winter when our neighbors next door were warm and cozy. To say that we are frustrated with brief interruptions is an understatement.

Mr. Feuerberg then explains that contrary to what we said in our Town Hall presentation, we are NOT rural customers, but urban customers and "NOVEC's electric delivery system is designed and built to exceed industry standards which make no distinction between urban and rural."

The committee never asserted that we were rural customers and were getting less reliable "rural service" from NOVEC as opposed to "urban service." We are simply comparing the reliability of the Dominion Virginia Power (DVP) commercial power grid that services part of our subdivision and Burke Centre Parkway vs. the NOVEC feeds that run through a rural area that is densely forested.

Mr. Feuerberg goes on to explain that no construction differences exist between the NOVEC and DVP delivery lines. He implies in the statement that there is no reason we would want to change to DVP since they deliver power with exactly the same types of hardware. But we ask the question – if you had a business on Burke Centre Parkway, would you want your electric service to be provided by DVP or NOVEC?

We do not care whether the materials that make up the NOVEC and DVP lines are the same or different. No matter what kinds of lines are installed by either company, the issue is the reliability of power through those lines and the physical stability of the lines when they are hit by falling trees and tree limbs.

Most offensive, CEO Feuerberg then says that the "photos included in the HOA presentation that supposedly depicted the NOVEC feed to Fairfax Station were highly suspect, as no three-phase circuits, such as the ones serving Fairfax Station, were depicted."

We took those photos after a meeting in Clifton with Del. Hugo's Legislative Aide. What does "highly suspect" mean? That we doctored or photo-shopped the photos? That the photos came from some other part of Fairfax County or the United States?

The point of including the tree photos at the Town Hall presentation was to show the height of the trees in relation to and in proximity with the power lines. One look at the heavily forested area through which our power lines run and the question arises: How can NOVEC provide system integrity guarantees during future severe weather events? The tree problem, which NOVEC admits causes the majority of outages and blinks, is a serious one and our photos highlighted exactly why trees are the cause of our outages.

All of the photos were taken by starting at the Moore and Pope's Head substations, and then following the lines from those stations back to our subdivision. The issue of "three-phase circuits" is irrelevant to the photos that we took. We were not interested in taking photos of circuits – our goal was to show how the trees dwarfed the power lines in height, and how close the trees are to the power lines.

It is unfortunate that CEO Stan Feuerberg would send a letter to all residents served by NOVEC alleging that the members of the Special Committee on Utilities are making "untrue" statements and have photo-shopped or somehow altered our photos. What purpose would that serve? Anyone can drive through Clifton and see the same power wires and trees as in the photos we presented.

Finally, in another paragraph, he makes disparaging comments concerning our request for a "border line transaction" with DVP should ALL ELSE FAIL and the fixes they have established still not bring us up to the industry standard for reliability. He states that "there appears to be a presumption among some members of the Fairfax Station community that transferring the NOVEC customers to DVP is a simple matter of using 'jumper cables' to connect the two systems."

What is he talking about? The words "jumper cables" have never been mentioned in any discussion with NOVEC. There has never been a "presumption" by anyone in Fairfax Station that a border line transaction is a simple solution.

We KNOW that this is a last-ditch solution and that it is extremely expensive and precedent-setting. We know that it is NOT a matter of using "jumper cables." We know that a transformer substation would have to be built in our subdivision. We know that the SCC would have to approve this border line transaction. We know that DVP would have to be an integral part of this decision. We know this is a complex solution. This was explained during the Town Hall meeting. The real issue is whether the residents of this subdivision should be forced to

endure two separate degrees of electrical service: one for the NOVEC customers, and the other for the DVP customers.

Unfortunately, Mr. Feuerberg seems to think that members of our HOA cannot possibly understand the complexities of the issue.

This is also apparent when comparing the update letter from Mr. Feuerberg and the letter from Del. Tim Hugo dated May 19 (reprinted on this website if you have not read it) regarding the SCC's position on the "border line transaction." Mr. Feuerberg says that a border line transaction has never happened when there is a reliability concern but typically only when facilities cannot be provided to customers within their territory. Conversely, Mr. Hugo quotes the SCC as saying that the border line transaction is a viable option "if the customers are still receiving inadequate levels of service and the Cooperative has exhausted all other options."

As far as the Special Committee on Utilities is concerned and as stated by the SCC, the border line transaction option is still on the table if our electric service reliability does not dramatically improve within a reasonable period of time. It needs to be comparable to the level experienced by our neighbors served by DVP.

We want our unreliability situation fixed because it has been unacceptable for YEARS, not just since the snowstorm of 2011. As customers of NOVEC, CEO Feuerberg should show respect for our concerns and work with us to find solutions rather than taking an adversarial position that attacks the character and intelligence of the Committee and the homeowners in Fairfax Station.