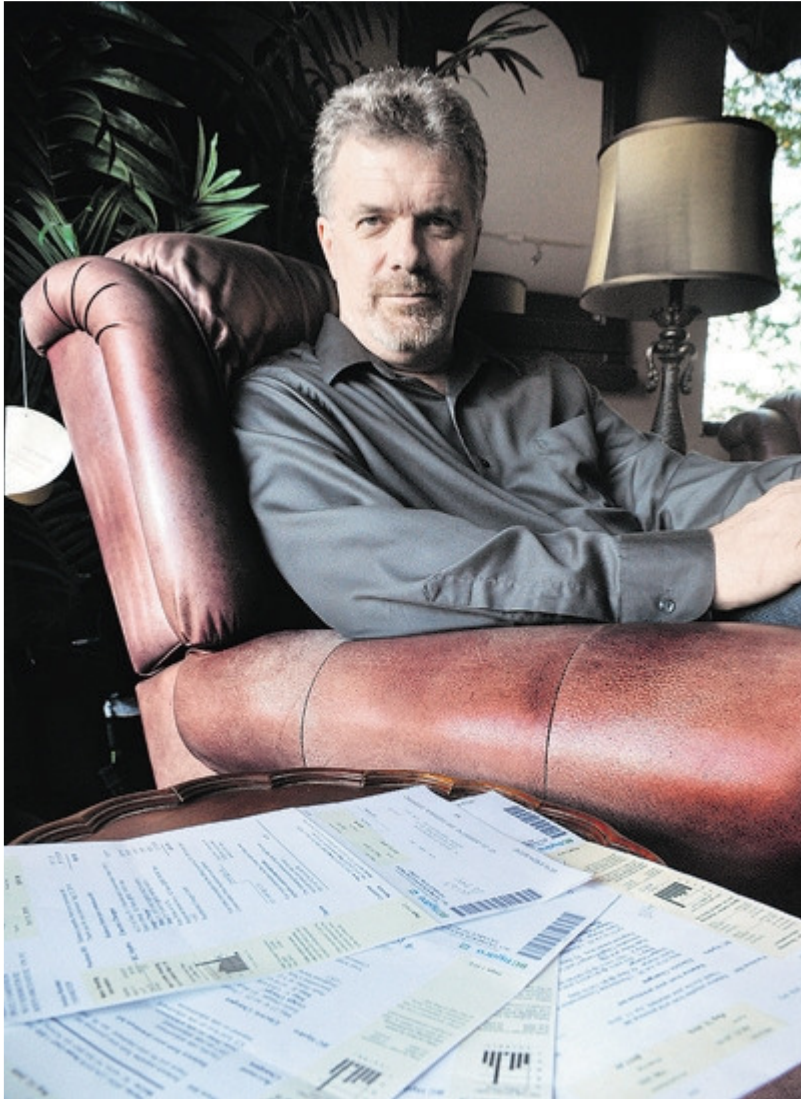


Hydro bill shocking

Higher-rate error missed twice on 'correction'

BY DAMIAN INWOOD, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 4, 2010



Bruce Sanderson of North Vancouver says he's owed about \$70 to \$80 on each of two bills in which B.C. Hydro overestimated his usage and wrongly bumped him into a rate that was 40 per cent higher.

Photograph by: Jon Murray, PNG, The Province

Bruce Sanderson got a shock when he opened his B.C. Hydro bill.

Instead of the usual \$80 to \$100, his June-July bill was a whopping \$371.

Now Sanderson, a spokesman for B.C. Citizens for Green Energy, is warning Hydro customers to check their bills carefully to make sure they aren't being charged a higher, "Step 2" rate for electricity they haven't used.

B.C. Hydro admitted Friday that on "rare occasions," its billing system "doesn't automatically adjust for the Step 2 rate."

Sanderson, who lives in North Vancouver, said that after Hydro missed a meter reading, he got a "catch up" bill which "grossly overestimated" his power consumption.

That bumped him to a rate that was 40 per cent higher per unit, he said.

"The bill came in at \$371 and the majority of that was charged at the higher rate," he said.

His next bill came in at about \$36, he said, allowing for the overpayment.

But Sanderson said that while much of the overestimated power was originally billed at the higher rate, when it was included as part of the next bill, it was tallied at the standard rate.

"Now I'm out the difference," he added. "I should have been charged at the lower rate for all my usage."

Sanderson says when he complained to Hydro, a customer services representative agreed there'd been a mistake.

"The fellow at Hydro was quite clear," added Sanderson. "He said, 'You're absolutely right. You're entitled to a rebate.' "

Sanderson said he then remembered that a similar situation had happened last year.

After checking Sanderson's previous bills, the Hydro rep agreed the same mistake had occurred then.

"I haven't got the rebate yet," Sanderson said. "My estimation is it's probably around \$70 or \$80, and the same for the previous year. I'm surprised Hydro is allowing this to go on and I can't imagine I'm the first person to catch this."

B.C. Hydro spokeswoman Simi Heer said Hydro is trying to figure out what went wrong.

"Bill accuracy is important to us and we are continuing to look at this particular case and will take the necessary steps to correct this error, which is unfortunate," she said. "If a customer's bill has been adjusted and they feel they have not been credited appropriately, they should contact B.C. Hydro's customer service."

Heer said Hydro rates its meter reading as 99.4-per-cent accurate but when errors occur, the billing would catch up after the next reading.

"B. C. Hydro makes every effort to read meters bimonthly to record actual consumption, but there are times when meter readers are unable to get to the meters to read them," she added. "In those cases, we issue an estimated invoice and catch up at the next scheduled meter reading."

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