

Whidbey
Inter

Survival Guide

Everything you need to get through
wind, rain, power outages, long
nights, freezing temperatures and
a bad case of cabin fever.



The Whidbey
Examiner

December 14, 2007



Are you ready for another Whidbey winter?

The Whidbey Winter Survival Guide is a special publication of The Whidbey Examiner, Whidbey Island's only locally owned, independent community newspaper. Visit the Examiner online at www.whidbeyexaminer.com.

The Klickitat – the ferry that normally serves the Keystone-Port Townsend route across Admiralty Inlet – takes a big wave during a windstorm in early 2007. The smaller passenger ferry Snohomish, which has temporarily replaced the Klickitat, isn't expected to be able to handle the rough weather as well as the larger Steel Electric ferries.

Welcome to the first-ever “Whidbey Winter Survival Guide,” a helpful guide to getting through the wind, rain, snow, ice, power outage and cabin fever season on Whidbey Island.

During the especially stormy winter of 2006-2007, Islanders who were living away from the main power lines found that

storm-caused power outages could sometimes stretch into weeks. By the time the electricity came back on, those folks had become all too familiar with chopping wood for their woodstoves, standing in long lines at the gas pumps as they waited to buy fuel for their home generators, and getting by with flashlights and candles at home.

But on the positive side, many

people became reacquainted with their neighbors. People with driveways blocked by fallen trees got help with transportation or chopping a pile of firewood; seniors with no heat were invited over to stay in the spare bedroom until the power was restored; and everywhere you went – the gas station, the grocery store, the post office – people told their storm survival

stories and found those tales of woe became a shared history of life on Whidbey.

Here's to a mild winter, with snow mostly in the mountains (where it belongs!), light winds and ice-free roads. And if we can't have that, well then, let's hear it for neighbors! ■

– Publisher Kasia Pierzga

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Country living requires planning ahead

When it comes to getting your small farm ready for winter, Dave Ridle has plenty of good suggestions.

Ridle, who grew up on a grain and livestock farm in Nebraska and studied agriculture in college, serves as the small-farm consultant for The Country Store/Skagit Farmers Supply. For many people who are more accustomed to taking care of a lawn than a pasture, Ridle offers suggestions based on years of experience. He's a bit like an old-time extension agent who visits farms and offers recommendations on how to take care of everything from soil to chickens.

The best advice, Ridle said, is "be prepared!"

If you've got stock on your spread, make sure you have the supplies you need before bad weather hits.

"It's important to keep horses hydrated," Ridle said, noting that they might not drink enough if their water tank has even a thin crust of ice. Horses don't like to work for their water, so you have to make it easy for them to get what they need.

"People never think about getting tank de-icers, but then they wake up one morning and everything is frozen," Ridle said. "Then they all rush down to the store and find we've run out."

Along with water, Ridle also recommends laying in some extra hay, which helps keep

horses and cattle warm when the temperature drops.

"The fermentation of the hay is what generates the body heat they need," he said.

Horses that are kept outdoors should probably wear a blanket to keep their hair dry, which prevents them from losing heat.

Winter rains are also something a small-farm owner can prepare for. If you've got a pile of manure outdoors that you're planning to use for fertilizer, toss a tarp over it and anchor it well. Covering the manure will prevent all the nutrients from washing away.

Small farms with large animals should keep them off the pasture to avoid soil compaction. Every farm with horses or cattle should have a "sacrifice area" to keep the pasture from being damaged when the soil is wet from winter rains.

"You put a 1,000-pound animal on your land, and they compact the soil and tear up the sod," Ridle said.

When you're confident you've got your home, your animals and your land ready for winter, it's time to snuggle up with a cup of hot cocoa and a pile of seed catalogs and start planning what you'll grow come spring and summer.

And of course, Dave Ridle can help you plan for an abundant garden, too! ■



Dave Ridle of The Country Store shows off a heated bucket and a tank de-icer, items that come in handy when caring for livestock in winter.

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Soothe your cabin fever

Video fanatic David Svien of Coupeville recommends stockpiling a giant stack of films to help get you through those long Northwest nights

Cabin fever comes in several stages, and there's a movie for every symptom.

First, the walls begin to close in around you, as the prison-like surroundings threaten to choke off your life. It's a feeling documented in films like "The Hole," where Kiera Knightley and friends are locked into an old bomb shelter and turn on each other, or "The Descent," where a group of British women explore underground caves and find something big and bad with a lot of sharp teeth hiding out in the bowels of the Earth.

Then, you really start to believe someone has thrown away the key, and you scratch for survival like the crooks trapped in a warehouse in "Unknown," the reluctant Russian Roulette players in "13 Tzameti," or, far worse, the hooded torture victims who haunt the real-life documentary "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib." Or, you plan your spare time around cutting your way out to freedom in the style of the anti-heroes who made "Prison Break: Season 1" such an electric rush.

After a while, anyone in your immediate eye range becomes the enemy. Loved family members remind you of the deformed and seriously in-need-of-a-facial Lon Chaney, Jr. in "The Alligator People."



David Svien, video columnist for The Whidbey Examiner – and owner of David's DVD Den – says marathon film-watching sessions can make winter hibernation enjoyable

You fantasize about snagging the Jack Nicholson role, axe in hand, in a remake of "The Shining," while contemplating the wisdom behind eating your friends and neighbors as depicted between the songs in "Cannibal: The Musical," an

early effort from the demented minds behind "South Park."

But there's a brighter day ahead, with the possibility of changing your leading-man fantasy to Steve McQueen roaring over a fence on a motorcycle in "The Great Escape" or learning how to play soccer (after a fashion...) like Sylvester Stallone in "Victory." All the better to hide your hibernating ways.

Once out, you're overcome with joy, skipping along merrily like the star of "Pee Wee's Big Adventure." Heading for the video store, you realize you could have avoided the whole ugly side of the cabin-fever epidemic if you had merely stocked up on these mood-enhancers in the first place.

Here are ten to chase the winter blues:

10) "Girls Just Want to

Have Fun." Sarah Jessica Parker and Helen Hunt in full '80s glory. 9) "Hammerhead." Half man, half shark, all cheesy goodness. In a really bad, stinky cheese sort of way. 8) "The Monkey Hustle." Yaphet Kotto lays down the jimmy and the jam, down the scam and the sham in this forgotten slice of '70s soul cinema. Expect "The Man" to be all peeved, as usual. 7) "She." Randolph Scott staring down curvaceous Amazons. How you doing?!? 6) "Strictly Ballroom." Saucy Aussie romp featuring all the backstabbing, back-stage drinking, back-room dealing and sequin-popping rumbas we've come to expect from the world of ballroom dancers. 5) "Unconscious." Saucy Spanish farce with Sigmund Freud and his band of merry psychoanalysts standing in for the ballroom dancers. 4) "Chuck Berry: Hail! Hail! Rock 'n Roll" and 3) "Queen: Live at Wembley Stadium." Toe-tapping, tush-movin' tunes to lift the spirits of anyone with two working ears and a sense of rhythm. 2) "Safe Men." Bumbling crooks (Paul Giamatti, Sam Rockwell, Steve Zahn) trying to steal the Stanley Cup. Take that, Canada! With your now-so-impressive loonie!

And numero uno on our cabin fever-buster chart is "Black Sheep." No, not the Chris Farley sort-of comedy. We're talking the New Zealand-based killer sheep-on-a-rampage flick that has a zombie sheep chomping on an unhappy farmer's head on its DVD box art. Funny and gross (often at the same time), irreverent and one-of-a-kind, it's everything you want in a mood-improver.

Unless, that is, you live in sheep territory, in which case you'll probably never venture outside again. And then we'll have to begin the whole cabin-fever cycle again... ■

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Help protect the water beneath and around Whidbey Island by keeping an eye on what happens to household and farm waste

Heavy rains in the wintertime can mean extra effort for residents, to protect their home's well and septic system and keep non-point pollution out of their watershed.

When the ground becomes saturated from abundant rain or snowfall, Whidbey Island residents should cut back on the amount of water they use to ease the impact on their home septic system's drainfield, said Jan Smith of Island County Planning and Community Development.

"Try to do full loads when using your dish or clothes washers, and never run both at the same time," she said. "And rather than washing clothes on laundry day, spread the task over the week."

Residents can also ease the load on their septic systems by taking shorter showers, she said.

Households that rely on an electrical pump to power their wells can run into trouble when there's a power outage, Smith said.

Keep on hand a sufficient supply of potable water for cooking, hand washing and bathing. Remember to include water for pets and livestock.

And to avoid draining a home's water tank during a power outage, residents on private wells should withhold flushing their toilets or running water from faucets. Instead, manually flush using a five-gallon bucket of water stored for such purposes.

To reduce nitrogen runoff from paddocks and pastures, keep livestock manure piled and covered with a waterproof tarp.

"Keeping the pile dry will

ensure that pollutants are not washed away by rainfall or roof runoff in its downhill race to Puget Sound," Smith said.

See WATER, page 9

Avoid an Emergency!

Practice water-wise habits to protect your septic system & save money.

For more practical tips, ask for your **free** copy of **Our Islands, Our Water**. Great for homeowners, classrooms & clients.
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winter on Whidbey: what you need to know

ABOVE: Firefighters on Camano Island string an emergency lifeline across a flooded road at Triangle Cove in February. Waterfront neighborhoods throughout Island County suffered wind and water damage in the winter of 2006-2007. In all, taxpayers spent more than \$400,000 for repairs to county roads and overtime hours for Public Works employees. Photo: Island County Public Works

By Justin Burnett
Examiner Staff Writer

During the winter of 2006-2007, wind, ice and snowy weather forced Whidbey Islanders to suffer through 11 major power outages that left many in the dark – and in many cases without heat – for more than a week.

The storms were so destructive, taxpayers spent more than \$400,000 for extra county staff time to clean up and make repairs, Island County Public Works Director Bill Oakes said.

That's more than twice the department's usual budget for taking care of winter storm damage.

And whether you're ready or not, the 70-mile-per-hour winds that blasted Whidbey Island during the windstorm Nov. 12 are a sure sign that winter on its way – and it could shape up to be another memorable season.

So if you don't want to be left in the dark again this winter, there are some essential tips every Island resident should know.

Start planning now

The first thing Islanders should do is start their winter preparations early. According to Dave Hollett, deputy director of Island County Emergency



Freeland resident Tom Hintz stands before the tree that fell on his house during a fierce windstorm in March 2007.

Management, shoreline property owners know that better than most. They learned the lesson the hard way this past winter.

Between November 2006 and March of 2007, Hollett's department received calls from some 100 shoreline homeowners on Whidbey and Camano islands begging for county assistance. Each time a windstorm would strike during a high tide, their homes would be deluged with huge waves and pounding driftwood.

But because public money can't be used to buy sandbags for

private homes, residents were left scrambling to find and fill their own sandbags, all while their homes were being threatened by wind-driven waves.

About 10 homes on Sunset Beach, off West Beach Road, were struck particularly hard. One particularly harsh winter storm in November 2006 washed out the bulkhead protecting the homes, smashing decks, throwing huge logs through living-room windows and depositing so much driftwood on the road that Public Works employees spent two days clearing away the mess.

That was a powerful lesson for those people, Hollett said: "The day of the storm is not the day to get sandbags."

Flashlights and fuel

In any type of emergency, plan to be on your own for at least three days, Hollett said. That means you need enough food and water for the entire family – including your animals.

A battery-powered radio also is essential for staying up-to-date on the latest information. A working flashlight is another indispensable item that should never be taken for granted.

"When the power is out, it's dark and you need a flashlight!" said Hollett, adding that stubbed

toes are a common injury during outages.

It's also important to store plenty of extra batteries, but make sure they fit the device you need them for, or they won't do much good. People can avoid the problem altogether, however, by simply replacing battery-powered devices with hand-powered ones.

Flashlights that work for 15 minutes after being shaken for 30 seconds can be purchased at local hardware stores for about \$20.

If your home is heated with propane, the tank should be topped off before a storm strikes. For a small fee, your propane company will make a special trip, Hollett said.

"Every propane company on Whidbey will do this," he said.

Hollett also encourages people not to forget to take care of their cars when the mercury drops. Vehicles should be in good enough condition to operate in temperatures of 20 degrees below zero, and always have enough fuel in your vehicles to get around in case a power outage prevents gas stations from pumping fuel.

"I don't care whether it's summer or winter," Hollett said. "Never let your car get below half a tank of gas." ■

Power out?

No problem! Taking precautions prevents headaches later

It's not unusual for a winter windstorm to knock out the power on Whidbey Island. Most power outages last only a few hours, but it can be a big hassle – and even a safety issue – when there's no electricity for an extended period.

When a big winter storm comes howling down Admiralty Inlet to blast our island, high winds can put residents and homes in danger.

Whenever there's a chance of a power outage, taking a few precautions could save some serious headaches and hassles later. Here are some tips to help you plan ahead...

What to do when the big winds blow

- Have a disaster plan and a disaster supplies kit (flashlights, battery-powered radio, extra batteries and a wind-up clock).
- Register life-sustaining equipment with your utility.
- Anchor outdoor objects that can blow away.
- Fill vehicles with fuel in case the gas stations lose power.
- Make sure you have an alternate heat source and supply of fuel.
- When installing a generator, follow the manufacturer's instructions and have it inspected by the utility company and an electrical inspector.
- Have a corded telephone available. Cordless phones do not work when the power is out.
- Learn how to open your electric garage door using the manual override.
- Do not drive or go outside in high winds. Avoid windows.
- Stay far away from downed power lines.
- Report a power outage to your local utility. Otherwise, use the phone for emergencies only.
- If you are the only one without power, check your fuse box or circuit breaker panel. Turn off large appliances before replacing fuses or resetting circuits.
- If power is out in the neighborhood, disconnect electrical heaters, appliances and computers to reduce initial demand on the system and protect motors from possible low-voltage damage.
- Connect lights and appliances directly to a generator, not to an existing electrical system.
- Conserve water, especially if you are on a well with an electric pump.
- Keep doors, windows and draperies closed to retain heat.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. A fully loaded freezer can keep foods frozen for two days.
- Be extremely careful of fire hazards caused by candles or other flammable sources.
- When using kerosene heaters, gas lanterns or camp stoves indoors, maintain ventilation to avoid a buildup of toxic fumes.
- To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning – which can be fatal – do not use generators or charcoal indoors, or even in an open garage.
- Leave a light switch on to alert you when the power is restored.

A buyer's guide to household generators

Last winter, when some Whidbey Island residents went without power for weeks following a destructive windstorm, local stores sold out of their stock of generators pretty quick.

If you're thinking you'd rather stay warm at home rather than head to a hotel or camp out in front of a friend's woodstove, the time to shop for a generator is before the next storm hits.

Here's some basic information that will help you choose the right one:

Size means power

6500 watt: \$1,000-\$3,800 – Can generally power everything in a home or small business at the same time: lights, the

refrigerator, propane furnaces, cooking appliances, televisions, cash registers, four to five desktop computers, printers, even small power tools.

5000 watt, \$850 to \$3,600 – For a home or small business, a generator of this size will do almost as much as a 6500-watt generator. The main difference is how the smaller version handles power spikes. The sudden start of a refrigerator's compressor, while everything else is running, may cause a 5000-watt generator to shut down.

3000 watt: \$500-\$2,000 – More affordable, but provides limited power. In general, it can power lights, a refrigerator and possibly a home's heater. If used

for a small business, it can run lights, a few computers and a heater.

2000 watt: \$400-\$1,080 – Generally can run only one thing at a time, such as lights, a refrigerator or a desktop computer.

1000 watt: \$800 – The smallest of generators, it can power lights or maybe a laptop computer.

Where to buy

Check with local stores to compare brands and capacity. Generators are available on Whidbey at ACE Hardware in Freeland and Oak Harbor, Perkins Mower & Saw and Home Depot in Oak Harbor and Sebo's Do-It-Center in Bayview. ■



Rick Gauger of Freeland ACE Hardware, left, said his store sold \$30,000 worth of generators in one day during a power outage last year, with a total of 98 sold over the entire season.



Winter winds whip up wild waves

Winds reaching speeds of up to 70 miles per hour pummeled Whidbey Island during a windstorm on Dec. 3, 2007, blasting waterfront homes and pushing logs and beach debris into yards and roadways.

Homes such as these along Whidbey's West Beach Drive are particularly susceptible to storm damage, especially during high tides.

Create your own 72-hour emergency kit

What would you need to have on hand if you had to evacuate your house for a few days and stay in an emergency shelter?

The 72-hour emergency kit will help you stay comfortable while you wait for life to get back to normal. Here's what you should have on hand in the event of an extended emergency:

- **One gallon of water per person per day. This means at least three gallons of water per person.**
- **Sufficient non-perishable food, ideally foods that are lightweight and high in energy. Don't forget a can opener!**
- **Battery-powered portable radio. This may be your best source of information during an emergency.**
- **A working flashing light with extra batteries, or one that's**



During an extended power outage last winter, the Coupeville Recreation Hall was well equipped with emergency supplies such as cots, blankets, hot food and beverages, first-aid supplies – and even a teddy bear.



- **hand-powered.**
- **First-aid kit.**
- **A spare pair of eyeglasses if you need them.**
- **Personal hygiene items.**
- **One complete change of clothes, spare pairs of socks, sturdy shoes, a hat and gloves.**

- **Heavy blankets or sleeping bags.**
- **Baby needs such as diaper and baby food.**
- **Games, books or something to keep busy with, especially if you have children.**
- **Contact lenses and solution, prescription medication,**

- **denture adhesive, etc.**
- **Copies of insurance policies, bank account numbers and family records.**
- **Phone numbers of family and other important contacts.**
- **An extra set of car keys and at least a half-tank of fuel.**



When blasted by winter rains, waste from livestock can pollute Whidbey's waters with excessive nitrogen. To reduce pollution risk, keep manure piles covered.

Water: Managing pet poop; from page 5

Over winter, keep livestock in a paddock or field on higher ground, and remove manure frequently, Smith said. Cover the ground with wood chips or other products to keep your animals from standing in mud.

Smith also said it's a bad idea to spread fertilizers, whether organic or chemical, on lawns, pastures or gardens during winter months or when rainfall is heavy. The nutrients cannot be properly absorbed in these conditions, and are washed away into the watershed. And pet owners should be sure to use bags to "scoop the poop," and dispose of pet waste in the garbage rather than burying or flushing it.

Non-point pollution can hurt wetlands, Whidbey Island's marine habitat and the groundwater on which we depend, Smith said.

"Runoff from paved areas and rooftops on garden sheds, homes, garages or other buildings can carry debris and pollutants directly into our watersheds,"

she said. To divert and slow runoff, it's wise to use low-impact development techniques such as landscaping with native plants and ground covers, grasses, trees and shrubs that require little watering. By using pervious or recycled concrete pavers for walkways and washing cars on grassy areas, the soil can do its job of filtering runoff before it makes it into your drinking water supply.

Partnering with the state Department of Ecology, Island County Planning and Community Development recently published "Our Waters, Our Island, Our Future," a free guide with tips on taking care of private septic systems and reducing pollution. "Newcomers to Whidbey Island will find the practical tips helpful in adjusting to country living," Smith said.

To get a copy, call 360-678-5111, ext. 6069 or e-mail neighborhoods@co.island.wa.us. ■

Where to turn in the event of an emergency

Local radio stations provide information updates every 30 minutes, including details about school closings and delays:

- KWDB-1110 AM, Oak Harbor
- KRKO-1360 AM, Everett
- KAPS-660 AM, Mount Vernon

Helpful phone numbers

- Island County Emergency Management hotline: 360-678-5111 or 360-321-5111, ext. 6000
- Puget Sound Energy: 1-888-225-5773; select menu option 1
- AmeriGas Propane: 360-675-5939
- Verizon: 1-800-483-4000
- Highway and ferry hotline: 511

Emergency shelters

- **Coupeville Recreation Hall:** Offers limited lodging, hot beverages, Internet access and emergency medical aid. Corner of Alexander and Coveland streets in Coupeville.
- **Trinity Lutheran Church, Freeland:** Offers limited lodging, hot beverages, Internet access and emergency medical aid. 18341 Hwy. 525, just behind Gay 90s Pizza.
- **Oak Harbor Senior Center, Oak Harbor:** Offers very limited services; a place to hang out and warm up with a hot beverage. 51 S.E. Jerome Street.



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Tree-trimming project aims to prevent outages

By Justin Burnett
Examiner Staff Writer

There is probably not a single Whidbey Island resident that wasn't affected in some way by the 11 major power outages that plagued the island during the winter of 2006-2007.

Whether it was just a few hours of inconvenience at work – or weeks without electricity at home – everyone was touched by those punishing storms. While snow, ice and high winds were the catalysts for the outages, downed branches and trees were ultimately to blame for most of the problems that left so many in the dark.

"It doesn't take a tree snapping for power to go out," said Gretchen Aliabadi, spokesperson for Puget Sound Energy. "All it takes is for a tree to bend and touch the line to trip the breaker."

Power outages became so

frequent and prolonged that many Whidbey residents demanded the utility bury its power lines underground. Besides the \$3.5 million spent by Puget Sound Energy on repairing downed lines, the company held a series of community workshops that explained why such a project is too expensive and unrealistic.

According to PSE Senior Advisor Jerry Henry, putting transmission lines underground would cost about \$3 million per mile. Transmission lines are Whidbey Island's main source of power, running across the Deception Pass Bridge all the way to the south end. They feed distribution lines, which supply power to individual homes and neighborhoods.

And underground lines are not always the best solution, Aliabadi said. When buried lines malfunction, fixing the problem can require the expensive

excavation of an entire section.

"You may not have as many outages, but when you do it won't be for days but for months at a time," Aliabadi said.

Instead, Puget Sound Energy launched the Whidbey Island Reliability Project, an aggressive vegetation management program expected to take about two years to complete. During 2007, PSE spent about \$300,000 identifying and removing trees along the two transmission lines that service Whidbey Island.

Making sure the transmission lines are clear should help decrease the chance of one tree knocking out power to everyone south of the break, which was a common problem last year, Aliabadi said.

So far, trees have been removed along Coles Road near Langley and on Squire Road south of Coupeville. And beginning next year, PSE will outfit many of the distribution lines near Langley

– the area that saw the most power outages last winter – with tree wire. The special lines are coated with rubber to prevent them from tripping a breaker when touched by branches.

However, the new lines haven't prevented South Whidbey from experiencing three power outages as a result of the three significant windstorms that have occurred so far this season. While the outages were relatively brief, Aliabadi said that success is probably due more to weather conditions than PSE's reliability project.

"The devastation of the storms (last winter) was incredible," she said. "I was told one of them lasted 18 hours."

By comparison, the storms that have hit Whidbey in the past two months have been much shorter, which Aliabadi said made a big difference how long neighborhoods were without power. ■

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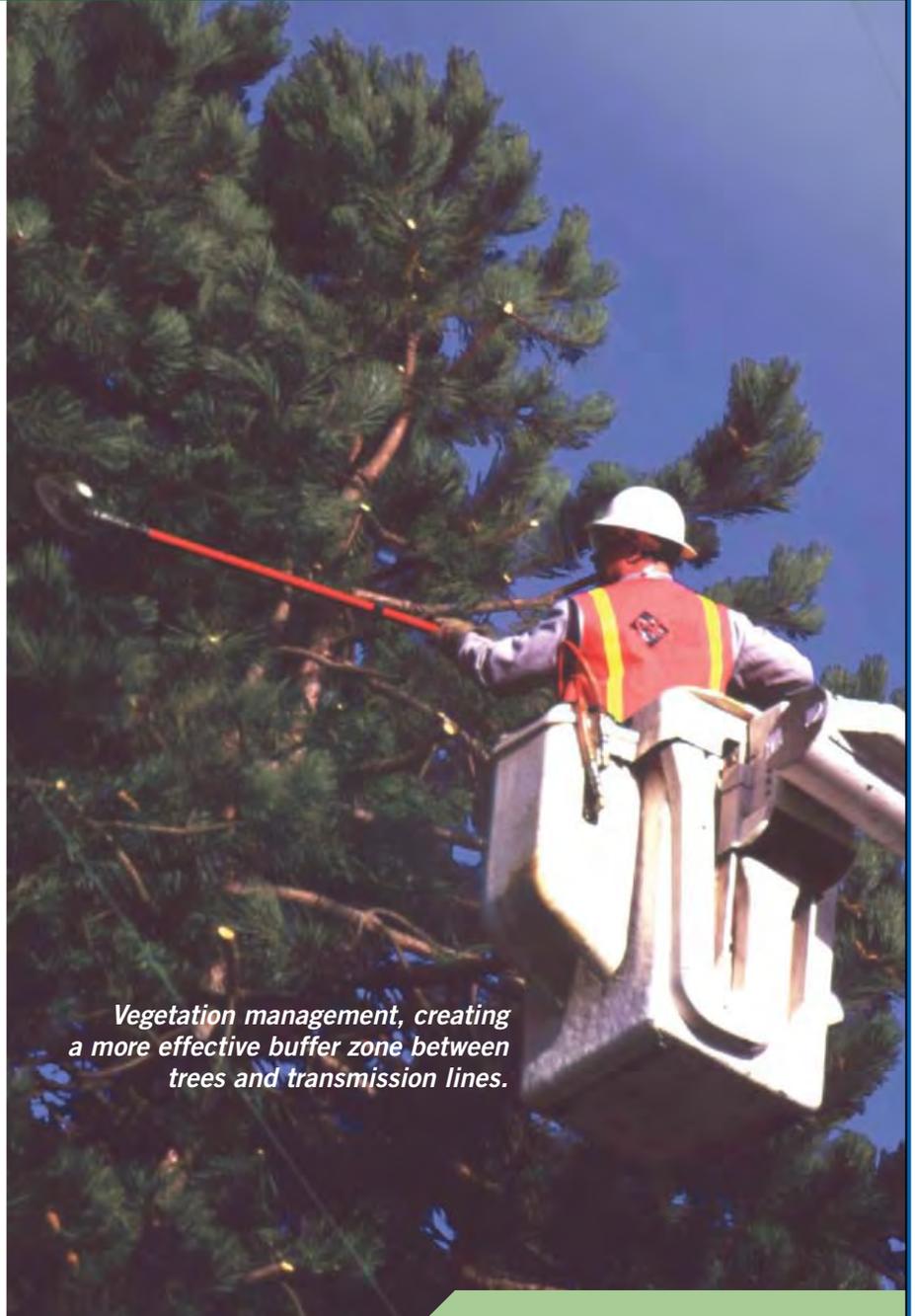
We are ready for whatever Mother Nature sends our way this winter and throughout the year.

While you celebrate the holidays and the New Year, rest assured that Puget Sound Energy employees and crews work all year long to keep the power on.

If a significant winter storm or other uncontrollable event interrupts your electric service, our crews stand ready to respond from our Oak Harbor storm base.

Our vegetation management reliability effort is addressing the most common cause of outages—trees and branches falling into lines. We are creating a more effective buffer zone between trees and transmission lines along 70 miles from Deception Pass to Langley.

For more information on PSE's vegetation management reliability project, please visit PSE.com



*Vegetation management, creating
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In the spirit of the season, we want to thank you, our readers. Our continued growth and success is due to your support, and we want to express our sincere appreciation.

Have a wonderful holiday and a happy winter season, and we look forward to another exciting year.

The Whidbey Examiner family



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