

Joburg's tamper-proof boxes 'beeping' crazy

Joburg City Power is rolling out tamper-proof boxes to protect the new smart meters it is installing from theft.



City

Power technicians did not have the means to gain access to their new, tamper-proof electrical boxes.

There is one problem however - they do not have, or cannot successfully implement, a process that allows their own technicians access to the boxes when called out to resolve problems reported by residents.

Jace Mudali of Honeydew said she had a power failure which was isolated to her home. When the City Power technicians eventually arrived at her home, they had no means of gaining access to the new boxes.

She said there were two methods for gaining access: by swiping an access card on the box - this did not work as the technicians' cards were not authorised for this – or using a key, but they did not have any such keys and had to request them from a central -depot in Booyens. This was successful on one occasion and failed on the other two occasions.

"Due to the above ineffective controls, the resolution of my problem took more than 12 hours longer than it should have. There is no added benefit that the above two controls provide. It merely results in unproductive man hours and significantly extended mean time to repair, which is a wasteful expense using taxpayers money," said Mudali.

Power was eventually restored to her home by a private electrician "as City Power deduced that the break in the line was within my yard, occurring after the council meter".

She had to break open the meter box after being days without electricity, and it has still not been repaired or replaced - it remains open and can be abused by anyone, she said.

"The meter beeps every few minutes because the box and meter were interfered with and have not been reset by City Power. This sound is very annoying. There are a few meters in my complex which beep in similar fashion. I have not received the controller interface to allow me to monitor usage and take readings. Once the box is repaired I will not be able to gain access to the meter," she said.

The boxes are not tamper-proof, she added.

"It took us about 10 minutes to work out how to physically break into the box using a pick. Once the technique is used a few times, anyone wishing to forcibly gain access to these boxes will be able to do so in two minutes.

"City Power has wasted millions of rand of taxpayers' money on something that has no significant benefit to anyone other than the suppliers of these boxes and the contractors hired to install them. One has to wonder whether there are any other connected parties with a vested interest in this," she said.

City Power did not respond to a request for comment.

This will be the last Metrowatch of the year. It will be back on January 16.

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