

Should'a Had A GESPER...

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FPL investigates, but answers will take time

•POWER OUTAGE, FROM 1C

Schilpp.

By late Wednesday afternoon, the huge Turkey Point units were still not generating power, but Villafañá said the utility had plenty of reserve power to meet a cold wave coming in Wednesday night, when temperatures were expected to drop to 40 degrees.

In West Dade, journalists watched FPL workers examine the large substation, including a cluster of metal coils near the center — about four feet tall and a foot wide — that were singed a light brown and surrounded by yellow caution tape.

NEIGHBORHOOD FEAR

Residents of the nearby Century Parc condo complex said the substation failure resembled a high-pitched explosion.

"It sounded like a bomb, like you see in the movies," said Maribel Rodriguez, a mail carrier. "People were scared. People thought of terrorism."

Gorge Rios, a resident whose apartment is separated from the substation by only a thin line of trees and a chain-link fence, said, "I was here feeding my fish and then boom. I looked. There was a big light and everything went dark," Rios said.

Jacinto Acebal, the former

'It sounded like a bomb, like you see in the movies. People were scared. People thought of terrorism.'

— MARIBEL RODRIGUEZ,

resident of the Century Parc condo complex

homeowner's association president for Century Parc, has lived near the substation for seven years. While he said exploding transformers aren't a regular occurrence, they do happen "every now and then."

Acebal said from his experience, FPL doesn't do a good job maintaining its power systems.

"When we had downed power poles, FPL didn't even answer," Acebal said.

On Wednesday afternoon, an Associated Press story quoted experts who disputed FPL's version of events. Vijay Vittal, an electrical engineering professor at Arizona State University, said, "Just the fire and the switch alone were probably not the cause of such a large outage."

George Gross, a professor at the University of Illinois, was quoted by the Associated Press as saying, "We know there was a fire, but a fire by itself should not have provoked this kind of action. I think there are some other factors that we're just not hearing about yet."

Jay Apt, director of the

Carnegie Mellon Electrical Industry Center, told The Herald that it would be a mistake to rush to judgment. "All power generators [and most of the rest of the grid] are designed to go offline in the event of problems, to protect the [very expensive] equipment. . . . Hard as it may be, give the specialists time to sort things out."

FPL President Armando Olivera said in a conference call Tuesday that the failure of a switch at the substation triggered voltage spikes along transmission lines, causing outages in other substations and then the shutdown of Turkey Point.

BLACKBIRD DELAYED

One additional casualty of the outage was the scheduled Saturday opening of the play *Blackbird* at GableStage.

The outage affected sound and lighting equipment.

"It fried some stuff," said artistic director Joseph Adler. The play is now set to open March 6.

Miami Herald theater critic Cristine Dolen contributed to this report.