

# LES approves rate hike, monthly rate adjustments

By Steve Miller

Lincoln Electric System board members Friday approved and sent to the City Council a proposal for 17.6 percent overall rate increase for 1981.

According to Harold Simmons, LES public information director, there is wide variance in rate increases for different groups because of the difference in demand for services.

While residential customers could face a 20.8 percent increase, commercial users would have only a 6.9 percent increase.

Simmons also said that rates would be based on consumption within the residential division. The increase would only be 15.2 percent for those who use less than 250 kilowatt-hours of electricity per month, but would be 26.9 percent for those using more than 5,000 kilowatt-hours per month.

Simmons said it is rare for anyone to use less than 250 kilowatts or more than 5,000.

The board also approved a production cost adjustment plan for future rate adjustments.

"Our problem is that we adjust the budget once a year," Simmons said. "Then the problem is how close the budget comes to our estimates. If our costs were not as expensive or more expensive than our estimates, we've got a bad budget problem."

"Now, if prices rise more than we estimated, we either bite the bullet and have problems at the end of the year or ask for a midyear increase."

The production cost adjustment is to adjust rates monthly, Simmons said.

Surplus money supplies could have been refunded to customers at the end of 1978 and 1979, Simmons said, but in 1980 rates would have risen.

Simmons said public comments at Friday's meeting provided no constructive suggestions.

"Other than saying they didn't want the increase and asking that we not increase rates they didn't suggest anything for us to do," Simmons said.

"The rate is set only to meet budget requirements and we already have a bare-bone budget."

Inflation was the main cause for the increases, Simmons said, explaining that some LES supplies may go up in price as much as 30 percent.

LES also must pay \$3 million to \$4 million for repairs on a turbine at the Cooper Nuclear Station near Brownville, Nebraska.

"For the last four years we have been below the rate of inflation," Simmons said. "This is a bad year and the rates will go up for 1981, but we expect them to go back down in 1982."

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