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ENERGY | 9/26/2013 @ 10:01PM | 84,683 views

# Vandals Attack Electric Grid In Arkansas

In the early morning hours of August 21st, the electric power grid was targeted in what appears to have been a deliberate, decidedly low-tech act of vandalism—with more dangerous implications for grid safety.

The incident was initially described in [media reports](#) as something akin to thoughtless vandalism involving a severed transmission line. There was nothing random about it.

On August 23, 2013, the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI) offered a \$20,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the person responsible for a downed high-tension power transmission line in central Arkansas near the city of Cabot.

As the Cabot community is aware, on Wednesday, August 21, 2013, a high-voltage transmission line in the Holland Bottoms area, on Arkansas Highway 321 near a Union Pacific railroad track, was intentionally downed. The FBI . . . investigation has determined that the person(s) responsible attached a cable to the framework of the 100-foot tower and



placed the cable across the railroad track in an apparent attempt to utilize a moving train to bring down the tower . . . We believe that someone may have seen a person(s) or vehicle(s) in the area during the early morning hours of August 21, 2013, or may have heard someone removing bolts from the base of the tower, as this act would have created substantial noise.

The FBI goes on to describe the likely culprit as “familiar with the Holland Bottoms area” and possessing “above-average knowledge or skill in electrical matters.”

The attack was almost certainly calculated to cause power outages in the surrounding area.

In 2010, Entergy explained why the attack – had it been successful – would likely have resulted in power outages in testimony before the [Arkansas Public Service Commission](#), stating:

The central region north of Little Rock is served from the Morrilton and Conway areas through two 500 kV lines. A single contingency loss of a transmission line in this region could cause overloading on the other lines serving the area and jeopardizing the reliability of service and potentially causing power outages in the area.

The testimony was provided by Entergy when it proposed to construct the transmission line targeted in the August attack, which it claimed was needed to mitigate the risk of power outages during periods of high demand.

Given the need for the transmission line during periods of high power demand, the timing of the attack seems anything but coincidental.

The attack took place on the first day of the longest warm spell in central Arkansas over the past 12 months, which began on August 21, 2013 and ended on September 14, 2013, according to historical data [Weather Spark](#).

In other words, the person or people who tried to bring down a massive transmission tower in central Arkansas knew where and when the grid was vulnerable.

Fortunately, they failed. We may not be so lucky next time.

While many if not most people appreciate the consequences of losing electric power, far fewer people appreciate a far more worrisome scenario—how easily terrorists could bring down the power grid.

James Woolsey, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency and venture capitalist at Lux Capital, is one of those people.

In 2010, [Woolsey](#) described the U.S. electric power grid as “the security equivalent of a house left with the door unlocked, the windows open, and millions of dollars of jewelry and home entertainment equipment strewn about for the taking.”

Two years later, the National Academy of Science belatedly recognized the gravity of the risks Woolsey had been talking about for years, acknowledging in a major report that terrorists could cripple the national economy by damaging or destroying hard-to-replace electric grid components.

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