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The Little Red Truck That Could!

A long-standing icon for Klickitat County is coming to an end. Klickitat PUD (KPUD) has been known for our red trucks. I am not sure if the first KPUD truck was red, but for nearly 70 years, most all utility vehicles were shiny red trucks.

When I first arrived at the PUD more than 30 years ago, we had just switched from red trucks with black fenders to an all-red fleet. Back when trucks had fenders, black fenders came standard. For awhile after the manufacturers quit providing black fenders, KPUD paid extra to keep the color scheme consistent.

Another major facelift occurred when old Willie Wirehand was retired as KPUD's logo for a newer look that incorporated KPUD's focus; not only on our electric service, but also our water and wastewater services.

A couple of memorable moments in the PUD's colorful (red) history:

When I first came to work, Emmet Clouse—KPUD's original manager—was still at the helm. He retired at the end of 1976. The board hired a new manager named George Letellier from Wyoming. George did not like red trucks.

"Utility trucks are yellow" where he came from, he said. We needed a new bucket truck, which he mandated be yellow. Well, George's stay here was very short. He had health problems and passed away suddenly after only a couple of months on the job.

The board put the touch on Emmet to return as manager until it could fill the position. When that nice shiny yellow bucket truck showed up, Emmet went ballistic. Old-time managers had a way of doing that, and Emmet was a master. He sent the truck back to the paint shop and lobbied the PUD board for a motion that all PUD vehicles be red.

Another time, an on-call lineman received an outage call from a customer who was at the very end of the line. It was a new location, and the lineman asked, "How do I get there?"

Her response was, "Can't you use that little red truck like you normally do?"

The board's motion requiring red trucks was finally laid to rest by the commissioners in February, with a mandate that the PUD fleet be white from now on.

Why change vehicle colors after all these years? Cost. Utility trucks automatically come in white from the manufacturers. When the bids came in for the new dump truck, the commissioners looked at the additional cost of \$6,500 just to paint the truck red and decided to throw in the towel. Not sure if it was the red or white towel.

When Operations Manager Ron Ihrig tallied up the total cost of getting all of the 2007 budgeted vehicles with the red color option, the cost was nearly \$10,000. This was too big of a number for the commissioners not to take a hard look and ultimately decide to make the switch.

Red vehicles will be phased out over time. We are not going to go out and paint over all that red; we are just going to start ordering white trucks.

Eventually, the PUD's linemen will not be able to use the little red truck. Look for new shiny white trucks coming to your neighborhood soon.

Tom D. Svendsen, General Manager

WA-18