

This morning around ten o'clock, I had just finished a batch of e-mail when outside...BOOM!!! I knew that sound well. The computer got dark and quiet and over my head the ceiling fan was decelerating. It was the FPL fuse blowing on the pole 100 feet away. This is what protects circuits from a severe overload. Usually such an overrload results from a bad car accident somewhere nearby as a car hits a power pole, or when a careless tree trimmer lets a big branch fall on lines.

OK...I called the cumbersome automated FPL number for reporting power outage. After spending five minutes negotiating the robotic labyrinth I finally just punched '0' and a live person received my report (the trick is to know when to press '0'). I walked over to the neighbor on the corner, who was just getting into her car, and she mentioned the same thing had happened last week.

Half an hour later a familiar white truck pulled up under the visibly dangling dead fuse. The technician did his thing with the 30 ft. pole and a new fuse, but, BOOM!!! It blew again.

I sauntered over, not wanting to interfere, and asked for a brief appraisal. He pointed to a nearby pole totally covered with vines and told me that vegetation overgrowth is his most frequent problem. And this time of day was typical as the sun warms the vines, increasing moisture coming out of them, causing a short circuit to ground.

I watched as the guy slowly drove up and down the street, carefully surveying every pole, more than half of them located in the rear of properties. Eventually he returned to the fuse and, miraculously, restored our power after a couple hours.

What message can we take away from this little crisis?

We, as residents, have an opportunity and even responsibility to keep poles on our property from getting overgrown. You might say, "It's FPL's responsibility to keep the poles clean." Perhaps, but there are tens of thousands of poles in this town, and nobody can keep an eye on them all.

So, unless we enjoy two-hour power outages every several weeks, we should take a proactive stance, and spend 3 minutes every so often to check and clear out the area around poles that sit in our back yards. If you find an overgrown pole, don't panic. All you have to do is cut or rip out the roots at the base, and the vines will quickly wither and dry out.

Simple!

Your neighbor, John Kessler