

2

LOCAL NEWS

Local generators help keep lights on since blackout

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The temporary, natural gas-powered generators north of Grafton have been putting power into Ontario's electrical grid since Friday at 3 a.m., says the TransCanada pipeline station operation's manager, Dale O'Dwyer.

"We've been online continuously since then," with the exception of about two hours on Saturday, he said during an interview yesterday.

"It's been a really long weekend."

The facility is one of a handful contracted by the Ontario government to bring additional, but temporary, power on to the system should there be a shortfall of power as opposed to increased demand during this summer's hot weather.

"It was to be a peaking plant," Mr. O'Dwyer said.

Instead, with the blackout that hit much of Ontario and many northern U.S. states last Thursday afternoon, the five units that turn natural gas into electrical power have been pressed into constant service.

"We expect to run through until (at least) Wednesday," Mr. O'Dwyer added.

That means bringing in more staff from other parts of the province to be on duty around the clock to work with the General Electric crew from which TransCanada is leasing the generators and turbines transforming the natural gas into power.

From there electrical lines are hooked

into a new transformer that has been built on the Pipeline Road site to feed into the electrical grid.

Mr. O'Dwyer said it's amazing that the facility was built in 56 days and that there have only been a few glitches since it was turned on. When it first came on-line only four of the five units worked but by the end of Friday they were all up and running, he said.

The facility was designed to add 110,000 megawatts to Ontario's electrical supply and it has topped out at 114,000 so far.

That is enough to power about 110,000 homes.

The Ontario government contracted TransCanada to supply emergency power until the end of December, but should there be a need, the contract can be extended until April, 2004, building project manager Dave DeJong said during last week's open house.

The amount of money spent on just this one installation — and the cost of the power to taxpayers when it is in use — is not being made public.

Ironically, Mr. DeJong and other TransCanada employees were in the midst of holding a public open house last Thursday, showcasing their new emergency power facilities — and how they were hooked into Ontario's power grid — when electricity began to go out.

The open house was to show residents what the many transport trucks had been hauling to the site and to answer questions they might still have. About 30 neighbours

were invited along with area fire chiefs, local politicians and the media.

Mr. DeJong assured those present that the loud gas line "purging" sound which neighbours complained about a few weeks ago would not be heard again until the site is decommissioned.

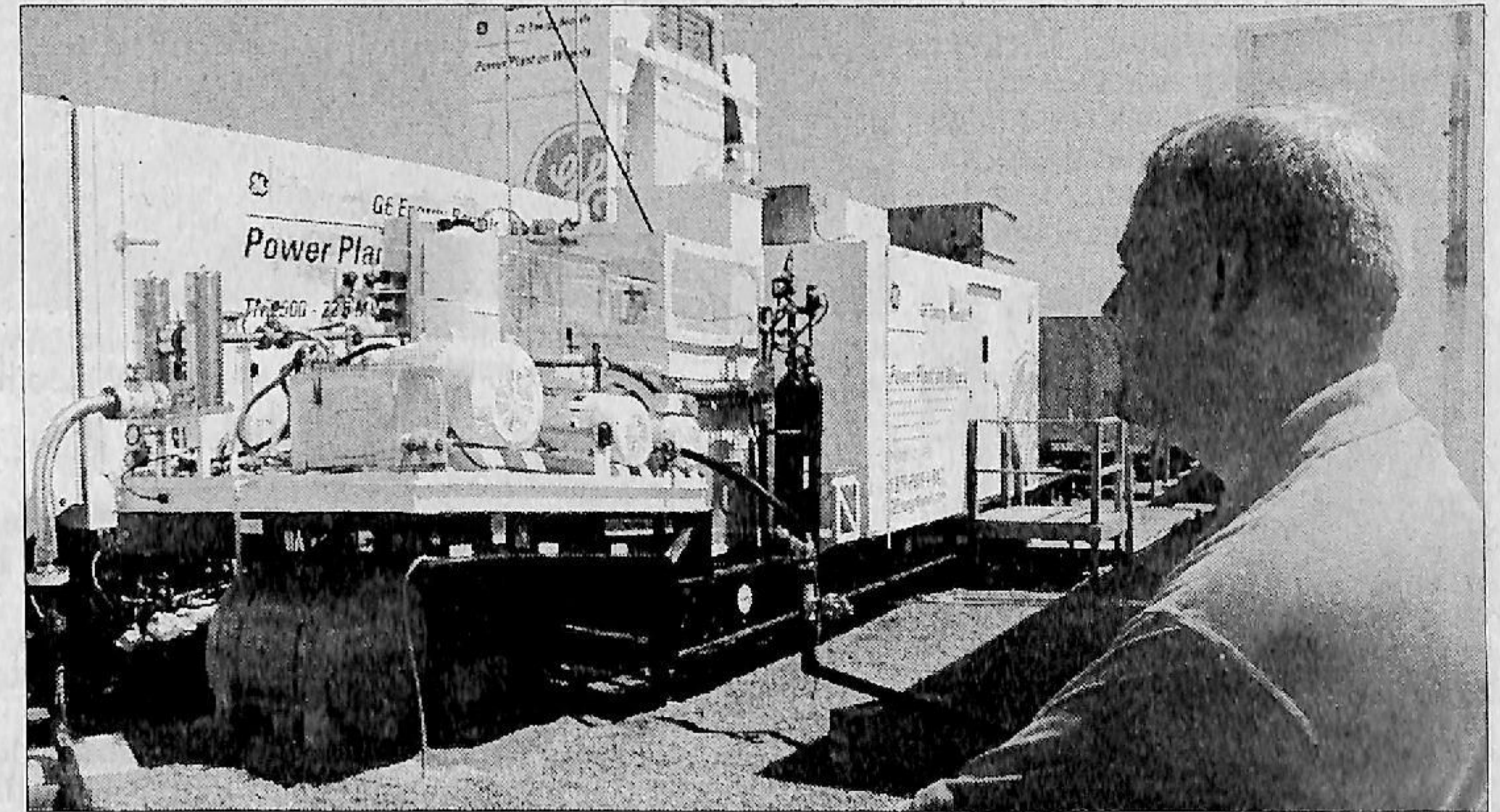
With the system running, it emits a sound equivalent to that made by night insects.

The huge gravel bed upon which the generators and turbines sit is "part of the electrical safety system" because it pro-

vides less conductivity, Mr. DeJong explained.

That's because the whole system, including the electrical lines, is all above ground. A series of water tanks from a brewery provides demineralized water which is fed into the power-making process to reduce emissions.

The only work outstanding on the site is to winterize the units. This involves installing a boiler to heat the air which goes into the equipment.



FIVE GENERATORS LOCATED NORTH OF GRAFTON

PHOTO BY TED AMSDEN

TransCanada project manager Dave DeJong looks at one of five GE gas turbine generators that are part of the 110-megawatt Cobourg temporary power plant located on the grounds of TransCanada Pipelines stations north of Grafton.