

Everyone at Eskom should be switching to gas

 By [Paddy Hartdegen](#)

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I would hope that everyone at Eskom - not only its chief executive, Brian Dames - would be using gas rather than electricity to make something tasty for supper. We wouldn't want our chief executives, or anyone else at Eskom, going hungry at night when they have to keep the power feeding into the homes of millions of South Africans.

And if they are depending on a stable supply of electricity over winter then best they use gas, judging by the dire warnings and predictions that have been coming from Eskom over the past few weeks.

South Africa needs to reduce its power and everyone - from major industries and mines to the opulent suburban homes or the shack-dwellers stealing electricity via illegal connections - needs to save a least 10% of the power they normally use to keep the lights burning in winter when things are cold.

This poses some interesting questions:

- Do the shack dwellers who are using illegal connections try to save on their consumption. Or do they just add more and more appliances until the system crashes?
- Do Eskom staff get incentives not to use the company's product and, if so, then Eskom must be the only company in the world that is encouraging its people not to use the stuff that it produces?
- Do the staff of Eskom qualify for special rebates - like using gas, solar and any other type of energy source - in order not to use the products made by Eskom. A sort of reverse incentive: "We'll help you not to use what we produce. Here's a rebate for your gas bill, your solar energy installation and your heat exchangers".

I'm sure there are hundreds of other questions that must be asked when the Eskom truck's going tearing down the road, presumably hurrying to another power outage caused either by a lack of maintenance or by a simple overload from illegal connections.

Of course we don't know the true answers at all - we get told the bare minimum when it comes to electricity supplies. At least we are getting some information, unlike 2008 when everybody was guessing and Eskom was fudging questions about rolling blackouts and power cuts.

Eskom's communications have certainly improved by leaps and bounds. But how would you like to be one of the residents on the West Rand in the second week of May?

West Rand left powerless

A huge power cut has left large parts of the West Rand powerless and the fault is not maintenance or sub-station failures. It's because some cable thieves wrecked parts of the Florida sub-station by removing a cable or cables, leaving large parts of the West Rand without power.

How considerate of them. Particularly as a City Power official in the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council says that it will be impossible to restore power to all affected areas before the weekend.

The recommendation from the city official quoted on radio was that affected families should talk to friends and relatives and ask them to store any frozen foods until power was restored. He stopped short of suggesting they buy a gas stove, but that's also a partial solution - at least when it comes to eating. A little gas stove is probably the cost of a meal for a family of five, cooked and served in a restaurant.

He went on to say that the affected area was so vast that even diesel generators would not be able to solve the problem. Nothing could be done but to wait until the work was completed.

Well that means individual homeowners might have to go and buy their own generators - or move to KwaZulu-Natal for an early winter holiday.

Of course the West Rand happens to also be a major industrial region with hundreds of factories dependent - to a greater or lesser degree - on Eskom's power that is supplied via City Power. Well they've just been 'tripped' for the rest of the week.

I wonder how many consequential loss claims will come rolling in this week and what the eventual cost may be to the economy, to manufacturing production and to the manufacturers themselves.

Disruptive state of affairs

It's such a disruptive state of affairs brought on, primarily, by a lack of effective policing (that cannot prevent cable theft) and secondarily cannot stop the stolen cables from being recycled at a fraction of the true price in copper or scrap metal.

Day by day, week by week and month by month, cable thefts continue unabated and hundreds of thousands of people are affected by these events.

Calls for government and police intervention seem to fall on the very deaf ears of officials who say they are "doing everything" but actually are achieving very little.

And a greater tragedy, perhaps, is that the people who are closest to the cable thieves are probably fully aware of what the daily, weekly or monthly theft plans are. They do nothing about it either - except to enjoy the money that eventually arrives, unexplained in notes from some corrupt buyer.

Whistle-blowers should speak out but do they? These occurrences seem to be rare when it comes to cable thieves and, worse still, never stamp out cable theft entirely.

A sad state of affairs for a country that Britain says is sufficiently well developed not to need the millions of pounds in aid money that was channelled into the country until May this year.

It sounds to me that South Africa - and its officials - are much more 'well-endowed' than 'well-developed' if we judge the ability of the authorities to deal with something like electricity supplies and policing.

ABOUT PADDY HARTDEGEN

Paddy Hartdegen has been working as a journalist and writer for the past 40 years since his first article was published in the *Sunday Tribune* when he was just 16-years-old. He has written 13 books, edited a plethora of business-to-business publications and written for most of the major newspapers in South Africa.
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