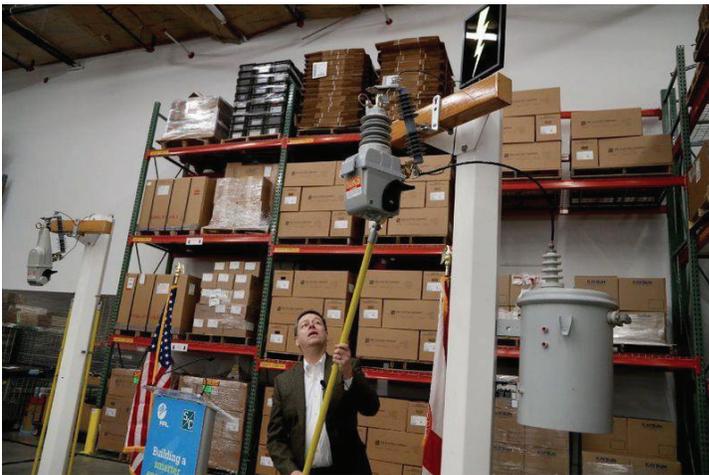


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You may see fewer power outages thanks to FPL using new device

By MARCIA HEROUX POUNDS | SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL | FEB 26, 2019



Marshall Mauney of S&C Electric in West Palm Beach unveils the Automated Transformer Switch, a new smart grid device, that prevents and reduces power outages. Florida Power and Light has begun installing the new outage prevention tool. (Susan Stocker / Sun Sentinel)

Florida Power & Light Co. has a new device to reduce power outages that could be coming to your neighborhood in the near future.

FPL calls it the “auto transformer switch” because it automatically resets a transformer. A palm frond falling on the transformer, for example, wouldn’t knock out power until a lineman could fix it. Once installed on existing transformer poles around Florida, FPL customers could experience fewer short power outages, the utility said.

The Juno Beach-based electric utility said it conducted a pilot of 1,000 auto transformer switches in South Florida last year and saw a “significant” reduction in power outages. The switches helped clear temporary faults on the power line, meaning that customers experienced a flicker, rather than an extended outage, according to FPL.

FPL said it would continue tests of the product, with installation of the first batch of devices in May, according to Manny Miranda, senior vice president of power delivery for FPL.

Miranda said he couldn't yet say exactly how many auto transformer switches the utility would order from Chicago-based manufacturer S&C Electric Co. — but it will be somewhere in the “thousands.”

FPL declined to say how much the devices cost, but spokesman Bill Orlove said they won't have an impact on customers' bills. The switch was demonstrated at an event Tuesday at S&C Electric's West Palm Beach manufacturing plant.

Miranda noted that FPL has been upgrading its electric grid since 2005's Hurricane Wilma, when some FPL customers were without power for as long as two weeks.

The auto transformer switch replaces standard fuses in transformers with an automated resettable device to further reduce momentary outages. That also is expected to save the utility from having to send out FPL crews to reset a device that doesn't need a bigger fix.

Miranda said installation of the new device will be targeted in key areas which had power outages due to vegetation or other issues. Falling trees and palm fronds were a major problem in 2017's Hurricane Irma.

FPL's smart-device upgrade began with installation of 4,000 automatic feeder switches, which automatically restore power to a utility main line, by 2010. The utility has since installed 80,000 automated lateral switches, which restores power to neighborhood power lines, resulting in a 50 percent reduction in temporary outages, according to Miranda.

In Hurricane Irma, smart switches helped prevent 546,000 outages during Hurricane Irma, Orlove said. The latest device, the auto transformer switch, attaches to a transformer, which converts electricity to the voltage needed for a house or business.

Kyle Seymour, president and CEO of S&C Electric, said he has told FPL that S&C will handle as many manufacturing orders for the new devices as the utility wants to give them. “We hope to have quite a number of these devices in place by hurricane season,” he said.



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