

✓ Cable TV

upgrade nearly finished

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SANTA CRUZ — With the targeted completion date rapidly approaching, the local cable-system upgrade is about "96 to 98" percent done, company officials said Monday, but it's not without some glitches and complaints.

"No doubt people have been without service for part of the day as we've gone through this," said Stewart Butler, United Artist Cable's general manager.

"But all through the whole process, the great majority of people who have found themselves without service when they came home that night, if not dealt with that evening, were dealt with the next day."

Most of those who have found themselves without cable service as the company has disconnected homes hooked up to the antiquated system in favor of the rebuilt one, have had their service back in less than 24 hours, "except in extenuating circumstances," he said.

Tom Karwin, who chairs the Santa Cruz Cable TV Advisory Commission, said his citizens' advisory group has heard from citizens about some of those situations, but not enough to create a "big flap" over.

"There's always a certain amount of difficulty during a rebuild," he said.

The \$22 million dollar construction project, aimed at 46,000 homes in most areas of the county except Watsonville and Capitola, is scheduled for completion Oct. 15. The new system provides viewers with a potential for 78 channels of television programming.

Joan Lewis, of 1440 N. Branciforte Drive, said she was one of those without service for five days earlier this month.

"It's just been a stupid series of errors," she said.

Her trouble, which she termed "not the end of the world," began when she called this summer to have her cable upgraded.

The subcontractor who arrived told her she needed a larger cable because her home was too far away from the main source.

"He said they were going to have to get a (special) crew out here to fix it," she said.

"He told me you don't have to do anything about it, I'll put the order in and they'll call back."

By mid-August, she said, she had yet to hear back and called again for another appointment, which was arranged for a Saturday. In the meantime, she said, her husband, trying to watch a Monday night football game, discovered it was out.

"I could see right from my street peoples' TVs, and they were on and I wondered, why is mine out?"

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She said she was told the next morning by a customer service representative that so many people needed the larger cable, the crew was backed up in its work, and that "hundreds" of people were affected.

For Lewis, the kicker came when a second installer arrived and told her the special cable was not needed after all, because she was close enough for the regular size.

"He told me the guy that came here before was probably too lazy," she said.

Butler said according to computer logs, the old system was shut off to Lewis' neighborhood Sept. 9, but so many complaints were received, it was turned back on by the 10th or 11th.

He said part of the problem could have stemmed from a lack of communication about whether she was hooked up to the old system, or the rebuilt one.

"Having people without service is not what we're trying to achieve," Butler said. "But given the nature of what we're doing, some inconvenience is inevitable."

He added that those without service were receiving credit for days missed and could not verify Lewis' assertion that "hundreds" of people faced similar straits.

Karwin, of the citizens' advisory group, said he visited some friends in the Bonny Doon area Sunday who were still on the old system,

while those across the street had been upgraded. Their delay was because a crew had yet to burrow a hole underneath the street.

"They're not complaining," he said. "Just waiting it out. They see the neighbors are receiving their service and are eager to receive theirs."

"I understand the process involves doing the easier conversions first, then going back to those which represent more difficulties," he said. "I've seen in other communities much more serious problems than we've had here."

According to Butler, every effort is made to contact those connected to the old system and sign them up to subscribe to the new one. It's inevitable, he said, that some get missed.

Those yet to be connected include some 1,500 to 1,600 homes in the city of Santa Cruz, he said, many of them apartment complexes or other multiple-unit dwellings that will require more extensive work than normal.

"The analogy I like to use," Butler said, "is, imagine you are completely remodeling your home and tearing out everything — counters, carpet, fixtures, plumbing, lighting, all that stuff, redoing it all, painting, the whole nine yards — and still living there while it's happening."

"All in all, I think our crews have been doing a hell of a job."