

Safety Alert – White Rodgers thermostats used in peaksaver program

Overview, Background and Q & A

Overview

Safety alert issued by Newmarket-Tay Power Distribution Ltd. and six other Ontario electricity distribution companies in response to three minor product failure incidents in the United States and one in Ontario relating only to the White-Rodgers 1F88 thermostat used in the **peaksaver** program.

Subsequent testing of the 1F88 model by White-Rodgers and a third party indicates that the circuitry found in the thermostat may cause electrolytes to leak from the unit's two AA alkaline batteries under certain circumstances. The battery leakage, in turn, may contact portions of the circuitry within the thermostat and can result in damage to the unit including overheating, which could possibly damage the adjacent wall and create a potential risk of fire.

The electricity distribution companies are working with the manufacturer, as well as other key stakeholders including ESA (Electrical Safety Authority) and Health Canada, on an acceptable corrective solution to the problem. In the interim as a precautionary measure, participating customers in the **peaksaver** program with a White-Rodgers 1F88 thermostat are being asked to remove the batteries from the unit. Since the batteries are only used to provide backup for the unit's clock during power outages, this will not affect the thermostat's normal functioning except after an outage when the clock will have to be reset, similar to any other electronic clock found on a household appliance.

Participating customers are being advised only to remove the batteries and not to disconnect the thermostat, since it regulates both the heating and cooling of the home.

Key Messages

Safety is our number one concern.

- We have temporarily suspended the installation of this particular **peaksaver** thermostat
- The risk of damage resulting from battery leakage in the White-Rodgers thermostat is extremely rare.
- There has been no product recall to date in either Canada or the United States.
- The issue has been reported to the Electrical Safety Authority and Health Canada for their review
- Newmarket and Tay Hydro is being proactive to ensure safety.
- Interim solution, working with key stakeholders including manufacture on a more permanent solution.
- More than 170,000 thermostats have been installed in the United States, there have been only two known incidents of battery leakage that were associated with a flame or fire and minor property damage, and one instance of battery leakage associated with overheating and minor property damage.
- With approximately 7,500 thermostats installed in Ontario, only one customer complaint has been recorded, of leaking batteries

Q&A

How does a *peaksaver* participant know if they have one of these units?

- The thermostats in question say “White-Rodgers” on them.

What is Newmarket –Tay Hydro doing about this problem?

- We have stopped installing the White-Rodgers thermostat as part of its peaksaver program.
- As a precautionary measure, participating customers with a White-Rodgers 1F88 thermostat are being asked to remove the batteries from the unit. Since the batteries are only used to provide backup for the unit’s clock during power outages, this will not affect the thermostat’s normal functioning except after an outage when the clock will have to be reset, similar to any other electronic clock found on a household appliance.
- Newmarket Hydro is currently working with the manufacturer, as well as other key stakeholders, on an acceptable corrective solution to the problem.

What should participating customers who have the White-Rodgers thermostat do?

- If a homeowner is concerned about the unit, remove the batteries. The batteries provide backup for the clock during power outages. The only effect this will have is that the consumer will need to reset the clock on the thermostat after a power outage, as you would likely need to do on a microwave oven or alarm clock.

Is it possible for a consumer to disconnect the *peaksaver* unit during the fall and winter since they’re unlikely to use the air conditioner?

- Disconnecting the unit is not recommended, as the *peaksaver* thermostat acts as any thermostat would to regulate both the heating and cooling of the home. If removed, it would need to be replaced by another thermostat.

Was the White-Rodger thermostat certified by a Canadian safety authority? What kind of due diligence was done to ensure the thermostat was safe to be installed and would not become a potential fire hazard?

- The White-Rodger thermostat used for the *peaksaver* program was certified by either the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or by Underwriters Laboratories (UL).

What does this mean for the future of the *peaksaver* program?

- Safety is our number one concern. Even though there has been no product recall and the risk seems low, Newmarket and Tay Hydro have stopped the installation of this particular thermostat and is investigating an alternative solution
- The risk of damage resulting from battery leakage in this device is extremely rare.
- *peaksaver* continues to make an important contribution to conservation results in Ontario. In 2009, 25 MW reduction in peak demand and 100 MWh energy savings can be attributed to the *peaksaver* program (from 2009 Conservation Results report).
- *peaksaver* will continue to be available to Ontario consumers through participating LDCs in the new suite of conservation programs to be launched in January 2011.