Electricity sometimes goes where it is not wanted. There are farm situations in which this unwanted electricity can cause damage. Likely places are the dairy barn and milking parlor. When cows act nervous and do not consume all their feed or drink the normal amount of water, stray voltage could be the cause. This can mean lower milk production and reproductive problems.

If the power company does not solve the problem and the owner decides to bring legal action, evidence must be presented on the effects on the animals, supporting the amount of losses claimed, and showing that they are linked to the presence of stray voltage. Testimony from veterinarians may be crucial. Following is a digest of the more recent cases dealing with the issue.

In *Zum Berge v Northern States Power Company* (481 NW2d 1103; Minnesota Court of Appeals, 1992), a dairy farmer brought action against the power company for damage caused through stray voltage. The cattle were reluctant to eat, failed to conceive, appeared nervous, developed limb and hoof problems, and had a high prevalence of mastitis. The plaintiff’s barn was found to have a high reading of stray voltage. It was determined that the power company’s line was the source of the excess voltage. The power company installed an isolator. However, this was not properly done, and the stray voltage continued. The plaintiff sued the power company alleging strict liability, breach of warranty, and negligence. Following a jury trial, the plaintiff was awarded one million dollars. The defendant appealed. The court affirmed the award saying that it arose from a consumer transaction in which the plaintiff did not have equal bargaining power with the defendant. This is an example of the protection that may be provided by a States Consumer Protection Law.

In *Schlaber v Interstate Power Company* (591 NW2d 10; Iowa Supreme Court, 1999), summary judgment was entered against a plaintiff dairy farmer in a stray voltage case. The plaintiff then appealed, saying that the trial court had improperly failed to accept the testimony of his expert witness. On appeal, the state supreme court remanded the case saying that expert testimony was not needed.

In *Haile v Arkansas Power and Light Company* (907 SW2d 122; Arkansas Supreme Court, 1995), the plaintiff dairy farmer sought reversal of a summary judgment for the defendant power company. The plaintiff built a milking parlor in 1984 and the defendant supplied the electricity. After the milking parlor started operating, the cattle developed mastitis, milk production decreased, and there were reproductive problems. The plaintiff did not suspect the source of the problem until 5 years later when someone suggested that it could be stray voltage. He contacted the power company and was told that his problem probably stemmed from improper wiring and not from their lines. A check of his wiring revealed there was nothing wrong. In 1992, 8 years after he had built the milking parlor, the power company installed an isolator that eliminated the stray voltage. He sued the power company, claiming it had been negligent in not installing the isolator earlier. The court ruled that since the 3-year statute of limitations had run, he could no longer maintain this action.

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