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CMP to switch on radar to remedy Chops Point tower lights

CMP Spokesperson Catherine Hartnett said the radar will be turned on sometime in the next week, but the company hasn't set a specific date.



By [Kathleen O'Brien](#) Times Record

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Red flashing lights on new Central Maine Power transmission towers in Woolwich and Bath are seen from Brown's Point Road in Bowdoinham. Neighbors hope the disruptive flashing can be mitigated, perhaps by radar that will turn the lights on only when a plane is flying in the area.

Darcie Moore / The Times Record

WOOLWICH — Central Maine Power soon will turn on a radar system that will control the lights on two transmission towers on Chops Point that have irritated neighbors since they were installed over a year ago.

In an email to local residents, Jenna Muzzy, CMP marketing program manager, wrote the company “tentatively plans to ‘go live’ with the radar system that controls the operation of the transmission tower lights during the last week of September.”

CMP Spokesperson Catherine Hartnett said the radar will be turned on sometime in the next week, but the company hasn’t targeted a specific date.

CMP representatives also plan to hold an online meeting at 6 p.m. on Oct. 4 to update residents on how the radars are working and answer questions.

The radar system will keep the lights off unless an aircraft comes within 1,000 feet of a tower, according to Muzzy.

There are small regional airports in the area, including in Brunswick, Wiscasset and Augusta. Combined, the airports operate 17,000 combined landings and takeoffs annually, according to Clyde Pittman, director of engineering at Federal Airways and Airspace.

The tower lights, which flash white during the day and turn red at night, were installed near the mouth of the Kennebec River last summer. One transmission tower sits in Bath and the other on Chop Point School property, carrying lines across Chops Point in Woolwich. The point forms a peninsula in Merrymeeting Bay between Woolwich and Bowdoinham. The lights can be seen from Merrymeeting Bay, as far away as Pleasant Point in Topsham and Brown’s Point Road in Bowdoinham.

Residents in the area have complained about the constant bright lights since they were installed.

Jenny Burch and Curt Fish of Woolwich, who both can see the towers from their homes, told The Times Record earlier this summer the lights make it difficult for them to sleep.

David King Sr., chair of the Woolwich Board of Selectmen, said he understands how bothersome the lights are for those living nearby.

“For those people in and around Bowdoinham, it’s a nightmare to have those lights on all the time,” said King. “I understand CMP is between a rock and a hard place with the FAA requiring lights, but it’s a shame they didn’t put that radar in sooner.”

According to Hartnett, the two previous transmission towers on either side of the river were more than 80 years old and needed to be replaced “to ensure reliability and consistent power delivery.” Those original 195-foot towers were permitted decades ago when the Federal Aviation Administration didn’t require lights to warn passing aircraft.

However, Hartnett said the company acknowledges it “should have communicated more broadly and inclusively as the project was developed and apologized then that we did not build more community outreach into our planning that may have identified a mitigation need earlier.”

Ed Friedman, Bowdoinham resident and chair of the Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, is one of three locals [suing CMP over the tower lights and radar system](#). His suit cites concerns that radiation emitted by radar could cause health problems and that the towers' lights will harm local wildlife.

Friedman said the radar system "is horrible" because he believes "there is simply no question that electromagnetic radiation has a negative effect on humans and wildlife."

The World Health Organization found that radars, such as air traffic control radars and weather radars, that are generally located at elevated positions where the beam is inaccessible to people on the ground pose no hazard to the general public under normal conditions.

Hartnett said the radar the company will use operates at radio frequencies between 9.2 and 9.5 GHz, comparable to radar equipment found on pleasure boats.

CMP filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit on the grounds that it requested to have the determination by two federal agencies — the Federal Aviation Administration and the Federal Communications Commission — contradicted, said Hartnett.

Friedman hadn't responded to CMP's motion as of Monday.