

The Boston Globe

Boxy Look Is Called an Eyesore

By Megan Woolhouse | December 23, 2004 Globe West

VERIZON'S NEW fiber-optic utility boxes are a blight on the landscape in Holliston and Sherborn, says a GlobeWatch reader.

"For generations we've had power lines and telephone lines and later cable lines running overhead strung high by utility poles... But that ugliness seems to be creeping down the poles and entering our field of vision," Robert Lavelle of Holliston said. "Did Verizon receive permission to change our landscape and the look of our neighborhoods?" Rick Colon, a spokesman for Verizon of New England, said the company has been installing new "fiber distribution hubs" at eye level to allow technicians to make repairs and conduct routine maintenance from the ground.

"What we're trying to do is minimize, wherever possible, those occasions where we have to place those boxes high," Colon said. "We have a limited number of bucket trucks; that's at the heart of it."

The boxes are part of a fiber-optic network capable of delivering cable television, high-speed Internet access, and other services to homes and businesses across the country. The new system, made up of hair-sized strands of glass that are replacing copper phone wires, will cost as much as \$40 million to install in 28 states, Colon said.

Technicians have typically repaired old copper phone and power lines by climbing the poles or hoisting themselves in a bucket truck.

Colon said the new fiber-optic boxes are several inches bigger than the old boxes and would be difficult for a technician to access by climbing a pole. Verizon has budgeted money for repair equipment, such as additional bucket trucks, as part of the fiber-optic improvement project, but he would not disclose how many the company planned to purchase.

Verizon engineers decide where a box should be placed on a utility pole, and the process is not regulated by cities or towns, Colon said. Engineers will locate a box higher on a utility pole if the box impedes pedestrian or auto traffic or appears unsafe.

"Aesthetics is not a factor in the decision," Colon said.

Company officials will consider moving a box after receiving a complaint or if community officials request it. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, Colon said.

For example, Verizon moved several boxes to the top of utility poles in the Nobscot neighborhood in Framingham after town officials complained on behalf of residents who found them unsightly.

Town administrators for Holliston and Sherborn said they had not received complaints from residents about the boxes. Paul LeBeau, town administrator of Holliston, said public works department workers were concerned that the size and placement of about a half dozen of the

boxes made it difficult to plow snow from the sidewalks. LeBeau said he met with Verizon officials more than a month ago to ask them to consider relocating those boxes, which he hopes will occur soon.

"Our experience with Verizon has been a mixed bag," LeBeau said. "Sometimes it takes a long time to get the right person to get things done."

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

Rick Colon
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