

Willowbrook repairs set; hardships denied

By ROBERT MIRALDI

A Manhattan electrical construction company is expected to begin repair work on a faulty 35-year-old cable line that cut out electricity to four Willowbrook Developmental Center buildings last week.

A Willowbrook official said yesterday that the Arc Electrical Construction Co. put in the lowest bid for the repair work and was awarded the contract.

Willowbrook officials could not estimate the length of time that would be required to install a new cable. But, assured William Zatwarnicki, plant superintendent, there is presently no loss of services at the affected buildings.

A reconstruction of events, in fact, shows that from the time of the power loss on Wednesday afternoon up to today, there has been little, if any, loss of service to the approximately 479 residents in Buildings 27, 29, 76 and 77.

It was initially reported that a loss of heat and hot water had left residents cold and unbathed for the first days of the power failure. An investigation yesterday revealed that no such loss of service apparently occurred.

Donald E. Fleming, deputy director for administrative affairs, said that as of yesterday everything at the affected buildings was back to normal.

Emergency and temporary repair work by round-the-clock Willowbrook staffers plus the installation of an emergency civil defense power generator was supplying necessary power to the four buildings.

The lone inconvenience yesterday was that television sets were not able to be used.

When the power failure occurred Wednesday was there a

loss of service and hardship suffered by residents? Officials interviewed yesterday say no.

Mrs. Lucille Sims, team leader of Building 29, said that the most severe hardship came Wednesday night when attendants had to feed and bathe residents and disperse medicine by flashlight.

"The children weren't affected...the staff found it difficult," she said, "but none of the residents' basic needs were deprived."

Zatwarnicki said yesterday that Willowbrook officials did all possible to restore power

as quickly as possible. He reacted angrily to the tone of a Sunday Advance story that said Willowbrook officials had attempted to cover up the power failure.

When the blackout occurred Wednesday afternoon, Zatwarnicki said, it was impossible to do anything to restore power. It was too late for Consolidated Edison to respond and too late for any emergency generators to be hooked up.

Flashlights were given out to attendants at the affected buildings and an adequate supply of blankets were brought to the buildings, even though the electrical failure did not affect the building heat.

Fleming said that he personally carried about 150 blankets to one building.

Thursday morning Zatwarnicki said that Con Ed was asked to come to Willowbrook to inspect the cables and the Office of General Services, which must give permission for contracting work, was contacted in Albany.

Without Con Ed equipment, Zatwarnicki said, "we couldn't even locate the problem."

Once Con Ed did arrive, by early Thursday afternoon, the problem was found—a bad splice on a feeder cable. Buildings 27 and 29 were utilizing emergency lighting, ac-

ording to Zatwarnicki, although Mrs. Sims said that no power was available Thursday night in Building 29.

With the police emergency generator in use Thursday, Buildings 77 and 79 had near full service.

Initially, when the bad splice was found, it was thought that the job could be done for less than \$1,000. But on Friday, it was learned that the cable feeding the buildings was not usable.

Installed when Willowbrook was first built, the cables have not been replaced in over 35 years. Zatwarnicki said yesterday that is conceivable that the same type of power failure could occur today.

"No doubt," he said, "the cables have outlived their usefulness."

When it was learned Friday that the job would be an expensive, elaborate one, the Office of General Service began contacting electrical companies to get bids for the job.

months to complete, a contract with Arc Electrical Co. was approved.

Friday afternoon, in a process that normally takes

By Friday afternoon, thanks, according to Zatwarnicki, to Chief Engineer Joseph Farnitano, Electrical

Foreman Ed Van Time and John Erickson, assistant district supervisor for the Office of General Services, power was restored to the four buildings.

"Everything was covered from the word go," Zatwarnicki said.