

YOUR HEALTH

Prepaid electricity upgrade

New online token system will benefit public and improve credit control

THEMBA KHUMALO

A NEW online system, to be introduced later this month, is set to streamline the sale of prepaid electricity tokens.

And once the city's existing network of credit dispensing units has been upgraded, the new system is set to be greatly expanded, to possibly include supermarket tills, bank ATMs, and even cellphone vending.

At present, prepaid electricity is sold from 93 credit dispensing units, across the city. These are machines managed by private vending agents such as supermarkets, garages and spaza shops.

About 250 000 prepaid electricity customers in greater

eThekwinirely on the system.

The vending system, which is predominantly offline, has been in service since 1990, but it has its limitations.

These include: dependency on telephone lines to recover transaction data; the risk of keeping data on a local hard drive; and the danger of a vending unit being stolen.

The new system, which will benefit the consumer and the municipality, is to be introduced as soon as a central database is fully online and communicates in real time to a prepayment transaction server through GPRS cellphone technology.

How will the new system work?

A request for a token is

made from a point of sale device. This request is then routed to the department's computer file server, which then acknowledges the request and issues a token, which is printed at the point of sale device.

Super vendors

The device may be an existing credit dispensing unit or, in the future, a device owned by a third-party vendor, such as a supermarket till, bank ATM, or a cellphone vending service. With cellphone vending, customers will receive their tokens by SMS.

The department's prepayment vending manager, Rajesh Devparsad, said the new

system would bring services closer to the customer, especially once third-party or "super" vendors were introduced.

As soon as the existing system is online it will be extended, at first through a pilot project.

"Super vendors" are businesses with network-type computer infrastructure. They provide retailers with the equipment to sell, for example, cellphone airtime, bus coupons, and account payments to the public. Prepaid electricity tokens could be added to this service.

The department's system will soon allow customers to pay their arrears, and it will assess, and grant, free basic

electricity to qualifying customers.

Devparsad said: "We will be able to track and collect arrears through the new system from customers who do not want to pay for their services."

Another advantage of the new system is that vendors will pay upfront for their electricity "stock".

This means the council will no longer have to chase vendors who owe them money.

Once a vendor has sold his "stock" he will have to buy more to continue trading.

In the past some vendors ran up considerable debts with the city; this will no longer be possible.

Gardens growing up gorgeous

MELISSA MARTIN

THE Botanic Gardens is undergoing a R500 000 facelift, which will include the building of a 200-seater amphitheatre.

Terraces will lead down to a stage, which will be used for outdoor theatre.

Paved pathways, a fern garden and a viewing deck are among other new sights to look forward to.

Curator Chris Dalzell said: "The old worn-out paving is being replaced with modern brick paving that will ensure the safety of visitors."

This will cost about R80 000 and is being funded by the municipality.

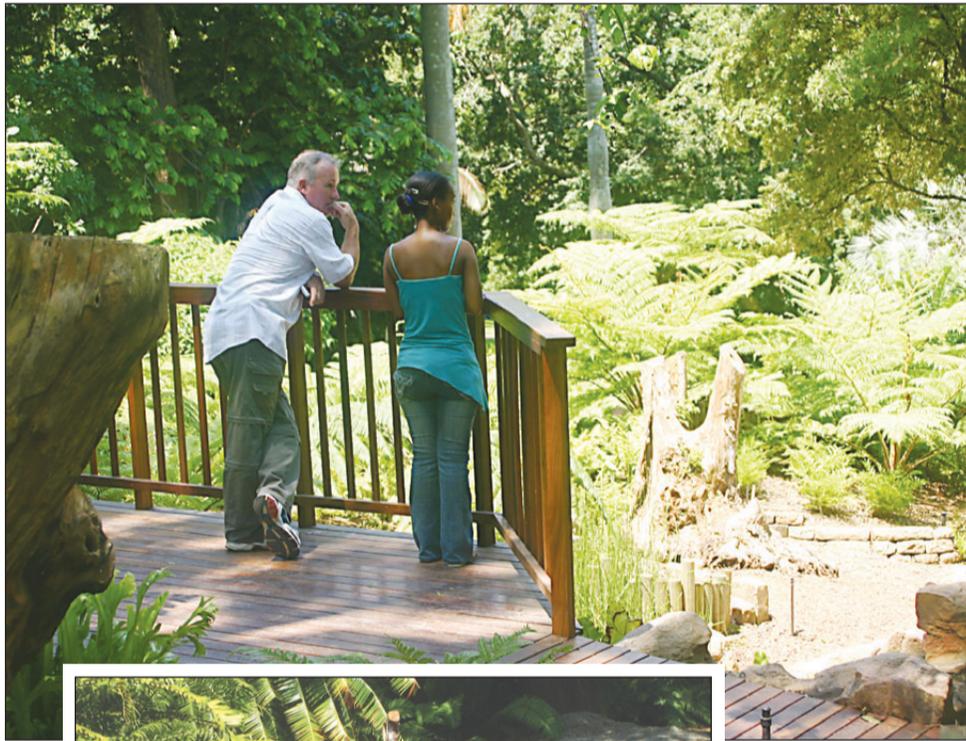
A fern garden, with a beautiful array of plants, has also been added, at a cost of R70 000.

Another new feature at the gardens will be a viewing deck and a pagoda.

The R80 000 project, which will be complete over the next few weeks, will afford visitors a spectacular bird's eye view from the top of the gardens.

The Botanic Gardens trust, with funds raised from the Mr Price Music at the Lake Concerts, is also footing the bill for the facelift.

Once all the work has been completed, a grand opening will take place.



ABOVE: Botanic Gardens Curator Chris Dalzell and reporter Melissa Martin admire the new fern garden
LEFT: New paving will improve safety

Pictures: THEMBA KHUMALO

Fleet tracker bears fruit

KIROSHA NAICKER

THE Fleet Department is taking decisive steps to safeguard city council vehicles against theft and abuse.

A vehicle tracking and monitoring system is being installed in 5 500 council vehicles.

City Fleet's Sunil Maharaj said: "The system will help ensure the fleet is managed effectively, operating costs are reduced and vehicle availability for service delivery is optimised."

The investment is already proving fruitful; it has helped the unit to track down a number of stolen vehicles.

In the event of a hijacking or theft, a facility is in place to locate and recover a vehicle throughout South Africa and in some neighbouring states.

The system also monitors negligence by council employees. It has the ability to produce exception reports including speeding, harsh braking and over-revving.

City Fleet Head Malcolm Joshua said: "By producing exception reports, corrective measures can be taken."

With so many accidents and negligent drivers on Durban's roads Joshua sees this as a way of fostering road safety awareness. "We see this as making about 5 500 better drivers in Durban," said Joshua.

The system also clamps down on the unauthorised use of council vehicles; ensures vehicles are brought in timeously for servicing; reduces speeding; and discourages dangerous driving, thereby saving on fuel consumption and maintenance.

The process of installing the system began in July last year and is expected to be complete by March.

After extensive evaluation, Digicore, was chosen to supply the system.



TALENT HUNT: Lion's Den judges sift through the entries. They are, from left, Bruce Buthelezi of the Business Support Unit (BSU); Mzwakhe Mhlongo of the Procurement Department; Winile Mntungwa of BSU; and Atul Padalkar of the Durban Investment Promotion Agency
Picture: THEMBA KHUMALO

Lion's Den – latest

ENTRIES for the Lion's Den competition are all in and a panel of small business development experts have begun sifting through the piles to pick out the winners.

Hosted by the municipality and the Leeds City Council, the competition, which offered R250 000 in business funding to established and emerging entrepreneurs for the brightest business ideas that are most likely to succeed, was held in November last year and winners will be announced in March.

The competition has three categories. Two prizes of R50 000 each will go to

emerging businesses in operation for at least a year. Ten prizes of R10 000 each are offered to micro enterprises to help their scheme get off the ground and the third category is R50 000, offered in the form of an equity shareholding in the winner's business.

The prizes were sponsored by Leeds-based companies. The sponsors are White Young Green, City Gent, Corrocoat, YFM group, and Business Link. Representatives from the Leeds City Council and the sponsors will be in Durban when the winners are announced.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) are passed from one person to another through sexual intercourse. STD's must be treated as soon as possible. If left untreated STD's can cause serious complications resulting in infertility, cancers, and increased risk of acquiring HIV or passing it onto the baby during birth.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE AN STD?

The following are symptoms:

- Discharge from the vagina or penis;
 - Blisters, sores, or warts on the penis or vagina;
 - Itching of the genitals or pubic area;
 - Burning urine;
 - Swelling near or of the genitals;
 - Pain during sexual intercourse; and
 - Lower abdominal pain
- Sometimes the symptoms are difficult to see.

WHERE CAN I GET TREATMENT?

Free treatment is available at primary health care clinics and the Communicable Disease Centre in Warwick Avenue. An examination is required to ascertain the type of infection.

WHAT TREATMENT WILL I GET?

Treatment may include an injection and tablets. Medication must be applied to warts once a week.

The STD will only be cured if:

- All the medication is taken as prescribed;
- All partners also receive treatment; and
- Abstinence during the treatment period or the use of condoms.

HOW CAN MY PARTNER BE TREATED?

A yellow contact card is given for each partner to take to his or her nearest clinic. The card indicates to the clinic what treatment the partner will need. Treatment cannot be shared as men and women are given different medication.

WHAT IF THE TREATMENT DOESN'T WORK?

After a week there should no longer be any symptoms but if the problem hasn't resolved it is important to return to clinic for a re-evaluation. Some STD's, such as herpes, are not curable by medication. The health care worker will explain how to manage these infections.

IS THERE ANY WAY TO PREVENT STD'S?

- Abstinence
- Be Faithful
- Condomise

WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Your nearest primary health care clinic or the Communicable Disease Centre. Call 031 310 1600

Compiled by the eThekwin Health Department