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Opposition

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Wednesday, October 16, 2013

Statement of Position-Docket Number 41606
Intervenor #383- Yolanda Speece, on behalf of Olga Villarreal.

My mother is 75 years old, lives on a fixed income and does not speak English. It is exploitative to expect her to do this statement of position on her own, to hire an attorney, to fend off this organization from her property and neighboring properties, and to do it in a language she does not speak! Therefore, I will be speaking on her behalf because she has asked me to. Any and all questions will be handled through me, her daughter, Yolanda Speece. With respect to the power lines that ETT/Sharyland Utilities wishes to **impose** in front of the property in question(Section 269), located on the corner of Yost and FM 510 aka Line M Rd, which leads down to the canal, we are **OPPOSED** to those lines going up from Yost to Pennsylvania along FM 510/Line M Road. We do not want these lines up for many reasons. The fact that we even have to argue against it under the circumstances should be argument enough not to allow them to do this.

The first, and most obvious reason, is that the power lines that they wish to put up are an EYESORE. This area is slowly but surely becoming a residential area even though currently it is listed as an agricultural area and there are not many homes built up in the area. However, some of the homes that are going up are very upscale and expensive. People move to these areas for the lower taxes, the peace and quiet that you do not find in the city residential areas and for the wide open spaces. Putting up these lines would decrease the value of the homes in the area and it would surely decrease the value of my mother's property if they went right up to the front of, or directly on the property. She does not want them there and I do not want them there. If either I or another family member decided to develop and build homes there in the future, we would be exposed to those monstrosities on a daily basis as would anyone who purchased a home there. The eerie, droning, buzzing noise is also a problem that will discourage anyone from building homes or purchasing the property simply because they will hear them day and night. When there is no rain, salt deposits develop on these power lines and they make that noise. These power lines are not only ugly, they are noisy. According to several articles like the one in parentheses, direct electrical lines can drive property prices down exponentially.

(<http://www.bbrec.com/attachments/articles/17/articlePowerLines.pdf>).

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In some instances, some articles indicate that property values could drop as much as 25%. In essence, this is financially damaging for property owners if these power lines were allowed to go up in this area. It certainly does not help my mother. However, it is a financial boon for carpet baggers like ETT/Sharyland Utilities.

The second reason is that these power lines may expose the residents or future buyers to potential radiation and it could also be a hindrance to agricultural operations. The power lines that they wish to install in the aforementioned area in San Benito will be **"double circuit 345 kv transmission lines"**. These are also known as **"EXTRA HIGH VOLTAGE TRANSMISSION LINES"**. According to the CDC, several tests have been conducted concerning the potential for future illnesses such as Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia (ALL) or "childhood leukemia". There have also been other articles discussing the dangers of radiation exposure leading to other forms of cancer. According to an EPA study conducted in 1998 by the NIH's National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, it conflicts with any inconclusive rulings that are out there. Here is the link concerning this study:

<http://www.epa.gov/radtown/docs/power-lines.pdf>.

It shows that there is a possible link between power line exposure and increased cancer risk! Even though some sources out there are contraindicative, is this a risk we should take because ETT/Sharyland Utilities wants to put their power lines close to homes and a local elementary school? Do they think so little of the lives of the surrounding residents that they are willing to take this risk? Then there is the issue of being a hindrance to the agricultural operations. If farmers cannot get to their property, they cannot take care of their crops. If they cannot take care of their crops because of the power lines, then crops die and this is what farmers do to earn a living. So to sum up, if those power lines went up and we decided to sell the property, we would have to do so for *pennies on the dollar* because of ETT/Sharyland Utilities' whim to build their heinous looking power lines there; that is, IF anyone ever wanted to purchase it! Aside from that, any farmers in the area would be prevented from conducting daily business operations. In essence, this is about the health of our community but much like everything else in life, this is also about money! They want to build there because it will be money lining their pockets. We don't want them there because their financial gain will be our financial loss and we were here first.

The third reason is very much related to the previous reasons. If the power lines go up, they will be located less than a half a mile away from Dr. Raul Garza Elementary School. Some of the many reasons why parents are attracted to the area are because of the school, the low taxes and the fact that their children can walk home safely to and from school. There was even talk of building more educational facilities in this area in the future. Small children will

not only live in the area, they will go to school and they will play in the area. Is it safe to have power lines like these so close to them? According to some articles, these power lines can have negative, irreversible effects on children's health. Some of these studies are inconclusive, but wouldn't it be wiser to rule it out now rather than "waiting to see" what will happen with these children? Chemotherapy, radiation treatment, and anything that entails treating cancer, is painful, not just for the patient, but for the family. To watch a child undergo treatment is gut-wrenching and expensive. Imagine having to watch YOUR child go through that. Will the treatment work? There is a strong possibility that it will not work. Even if they receive treatment, they will still be exposed to the potential root cause on a daily basis after the fact. Imagine entire families destroyed because of the exposure. They can move but we already established that they won't get a fair price for their home. On the other hand, they may not sell the property or they may be oblivious to what is causing the illnesses. Furthermore, who is going to pay for that? ETT/Sharyland Utilities, the city of San Benito? San Benito is a relatively "poor" community. What if that family doesn't have medical insurance? Are we to let a child die because ETT/Sharyland Utilities wanted EXTRA HIGH VOLTAGE transmission lines to run through the area because THEY felt it was "necessary" and PUC Texas allowed it? Imagine the lawsuits. In the end, the taxpayer will have to foot the bill for the mistakes of these organizations because companies like this ALWAYS pass the buck to the customer. The funny thing is they never pass the savings on to the consumer. This brings me to the next reason.

Central, Power and Light (CPL) currently provides service to the area. The area already has electrical service, so their argument that it is a "necessity" is false. When we lived on the property in San Benito in one of the homes, it was quite a distance away from the power lines but day and night you could hear the buzzing even with the A/C turned on when the area would get so dry that salt deposits would develop on the lines. When there were storms, it was NEVER wise to be outside near them. One time, I got caught in a storm just outside the house on the driveway near the power line and I have never been so terrified in all of my life. It was in June 1991. It was one of the worst storms because San Benito and Harlingen got flooded out. I was driving home from work when the rain started pouring down. The gate, which was made out of metal hurricane fencing, was locked and then the lightning started. I was LITERALLY trapped in my vehicle for as long as the storm occurred. I had never seen lightning like that and it seemed that the electrical lines were attracting the lightning. These are the electrical lines which I have provided in the enclosed photographs. These are nothing compared to the monstrosities they want to install. I realize that this was 20 years ago and there have been technological advances that may have changed that I may not be aware of. However, imagine if a child is riding home on a bike or walking and not in an enclosed vehicle. Imagine they get caught on the way home and may get stuck near one of those power lines. It was not safe for me back then and I don't think it will be safe for children

now. To be completely honest, none of us have heard a detailed explanation as to why they even need to put up their power lines in our neck of the woods. This question has not been specifically answered in our contact with Sharyland and company. All we have been told is that it is "necessary" but there has been no justification. Where is the study they conducted? What are they basing it on and where has it been posted? The argument of "necessity" has been left very vague by ETT/Sharyland Utilities. They say that they need it for future growth but what homework have they done to demonstrate that the area really needs it?

On another weather related note, this area is notoriously prone to land-falling tropical cyclones. When there is heavy rain in the area there is flooding. Since this area is close to the coast line, the power lines that ETT/Sharyland Utilities is proposing would likely be more susceptible to wind damage and could potentially result in human casualties. Imagine if one of those power lines went down on a home. How safe would it be for the residents in the area to do something as simple as venture outside to survey the damage to their property? Could it result in a life threatening situation?

The last point I want to bring up is maintenance. These power lines have to be maintained. How is this going to inconvenience local residents who live so very close to them? What if one falls on a home? Will the PUC and ETT/Sharyland Utilities pay for the home? What about if someone gets killed by one of those fallen power lines? Will the money bring back that family member? Will the PUC and ETT/Sharyland Utilities want to settle out of court or somehow blame the family because they built a home too close to the power lines? This is standard operating procedure for a defendant this big in the event of a wrongful death lawsuit. The first step is not to accept blame and then assign blame to the victim and plead ignorance even if the home was there before the power lines were put up in the area.

As mentioned earlier, my mother is at a disadvantage against ETT/Sharyland Utilities. My father came to this country with NOTHING. Between him and my mother, they worked hard, raised six children and were able to scrape enough money together to purchase this land. It might not seem like much to ETT/Sharyland Utilities or to PUC Texas but that property is what my father was able to leave her. She has sold off portions of it as a way to purchase a small home in Brownsville. She did this to facilitate getting around on public transportation as she does not drive. She also worked on a deal with the Texas DOT to facilitate construction on the road that is now known as Line M Road and was built near her property. When the project started out, they were only asking for 5/100 of an acre. By the time they finally had the plans and were definite on the decision concerning which option they were going to work with, it turned out that they wanted 1/2 an acre because the neighbors had built their home too close to where they wanted to construct the road. Rather than leveling their home, they took more land from us at cost. Can we expect this behavior

as well from ETT/Sharyland Utilities and the Public Utilities Commission if things are not surveyed accordingly beforehand? ETT/Sharyland Utilities has not exactly been forthcoming. They have shown us what they want, but no viable pictures have been provided to indicate what the area will look like after ETT/Sharyland Utilities have put up the power lines. Is it possible they have not surveyed the land where they want to develop? Will we be forced to sell the property to them so they can install their **"extra high voltage power lines"** and potentially expose our neighbors and children to radiation? We do not want them there at all. This should not even be up for discussion or even negotiable!

Just for the record, my father died of cancer. So the thought of causing someone else to have to go through that pain is not something my family takes lightly. ETT/Sharyland Utilities may be able to sleep at night but we cannot. This is one of the few things that he left her. This is his investment in our family. ETT/Sharyland Utilities wants to **mutilate** this investment because of their desire to compete in this market against companies like Central Power and Light. It is very upsetting that ETT/Sharyland Utilities and the Public Utilities Commission are not willing to discuss this in the Rio Grande Valley considering that this will affect people locally; **not the communities in Austin**. When the chaos hits the fan, it is going to be affecting the Rio Grande Valley, not Austin. Furthermore, if this is going to be "such a financial burden" to hold it in the Rio Grande Valley, then why do it at all? After all, the way things are going right now, this is a financial burden and a burden of time for the people of the Rio Grande Valley. Yet we are being FORCED to accommodate PUC and ETT/Sharyland Utilities by going up to Austin to hash this out or rather simply hear what they want to do. Doesn't that seem blatantly unilateral? Is this progress or is this just another bully looking to exploit people who don't know their rights? Why is it not possible to hold video conferences/Skype to conduct these hearing for the benefit of the PEOPLE who are going to be affected by this? By forcing local RGV residents to attend these hearings in Austin, it almost seems as though the message being sent is that even if we write up these statements of position and put up a fight, we are still doomed to fail because ETT/Sharyland Utilities and the PUC want what they want, which is to put up power lines that are potentially detrimental to our community.

Putting up power lines in front of our property is not good business for us and putting them ON the property is definitely NOT an option for various reasons from health to aesthetic to financial reasons. Since this "proposal" has been brought to our attention, I have been doing research on it and it is not going to be good for this budding neighborhood to be exposed to this type of eyesore or danger.

Is there truly "a necessity" for ETT/Sharyland Utilities to build power lines in front of our property or other surrounding properties? No. Is this simply a desire to establish a bigger

market share and use people and their property to do it "by any means necessary"? It seems that it is the latter more than the former. Have they even considered putting those power lines underground? Who knows? Once again, ETT/Sharyland Utilities is not doing this for the benefit of the people near my mother's property or for my mother. They have not been completely forthcoming with their intentions. They are doing this for **their bottom line and expanding their power base**. This is not for our benefit or our bottom line. They are not our friends and they do not have the best interests of the residents. Please do not approve this development. It is obvious that enough people are opposed to the construction of these power lines. ETT/Sharyland Utilities is not welcome nor wanted.

I have enclosed photographs showing our property and the surrounding properties. It includes images of the school and the surrounding homes. I am also including summaries with each photograph. Those power lines will not improve the area. They will make it less attractive, drive property values down, expose people unwittingly to potential radiation and put our children at risk of either getting hurt or getting sick. Is that what ETT/Sharyland really wants?

This is my statement of position. Thank you.

SUMMARY OF PHOTOGRAPHS

During this entire experience, all we have seen are graphs, charts and the alleged advantages to putting up these power lines. We have even seen the power lines they wish to install. No one has bothered to show pictures of the properties they will be affecting. By putting up these power lines along some of these roads, these are the areas that will be affected. This is an example. This may not sway anyone regarding the power lines because it was made clear that ETT/Sharyland Utilities and the PUC want to move "forward" with this without regard to whom it will affect and how it will affect them but it is worth a shot! Hopefully, all we can ask is that you take sincerely consider our plea and make them find an alternative route far away from our section along their planned route.

Photograph I This is Olga Villarreal's property. It consists of 12.5 acres on the corner of Yost and FM 510/Line M Road.

Photograph II This is the neighboring Gracia Home. It is caddy corner to our property. Their home was built right up against the road and, as a result, the TXDOT took half an acre from our property to build the road. As you can see, they have utility service in the area. Putting up the power lines on their side or across the street would not be safe for their families. There is no room to put the power lines on their side of the street. If the power lines were placed across the street, it would be too close to their home and therefore exposing them to something neither ETT/Sharyland Utilities or the city of San Benito is prepared to pay for or willing to pay for in the event of a catastrophic illness.

Photograph III This is the neighboring home. This is the home across the street from our property on the corner of Yost and FM510/Line M Road. As you can see, they have service as well.

Photograph IV This is the Lopez home. This was the home my father built for my mother. We sold the home so that my mother could live in a town with public transportation. This is also where I got caught outside during the lightning storm that trapped me in the vehicle for what seemed like forever.

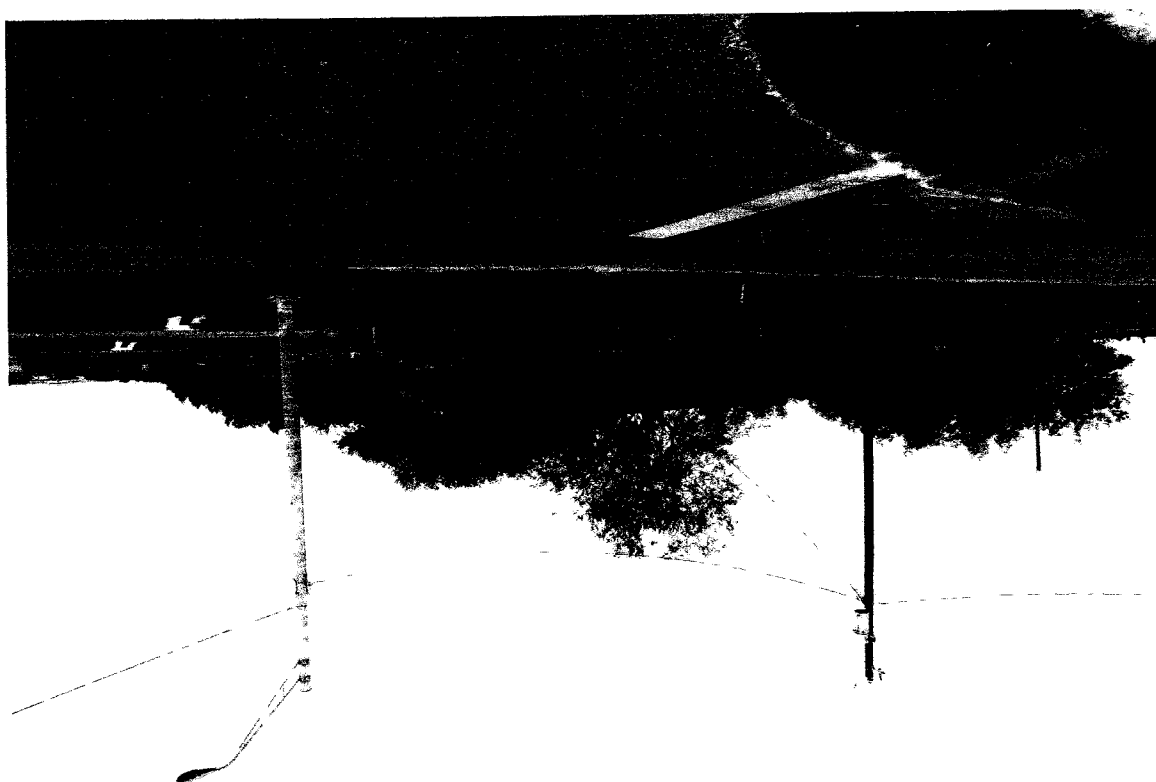
Photograph V This is the residential area that is being built next to the Lopez home. As you can see, several of the homes are upscale. The property will obviously be worth a lot more as time goes on and as more people build homes in the area. The power lines will depreciate the value not only of these peoples' homes but it will also drive the price of my mother's property down.

Photograph VI This is the elementary school less than half a mile away from the proposed location of the power lines. As you can see, they have service as well.

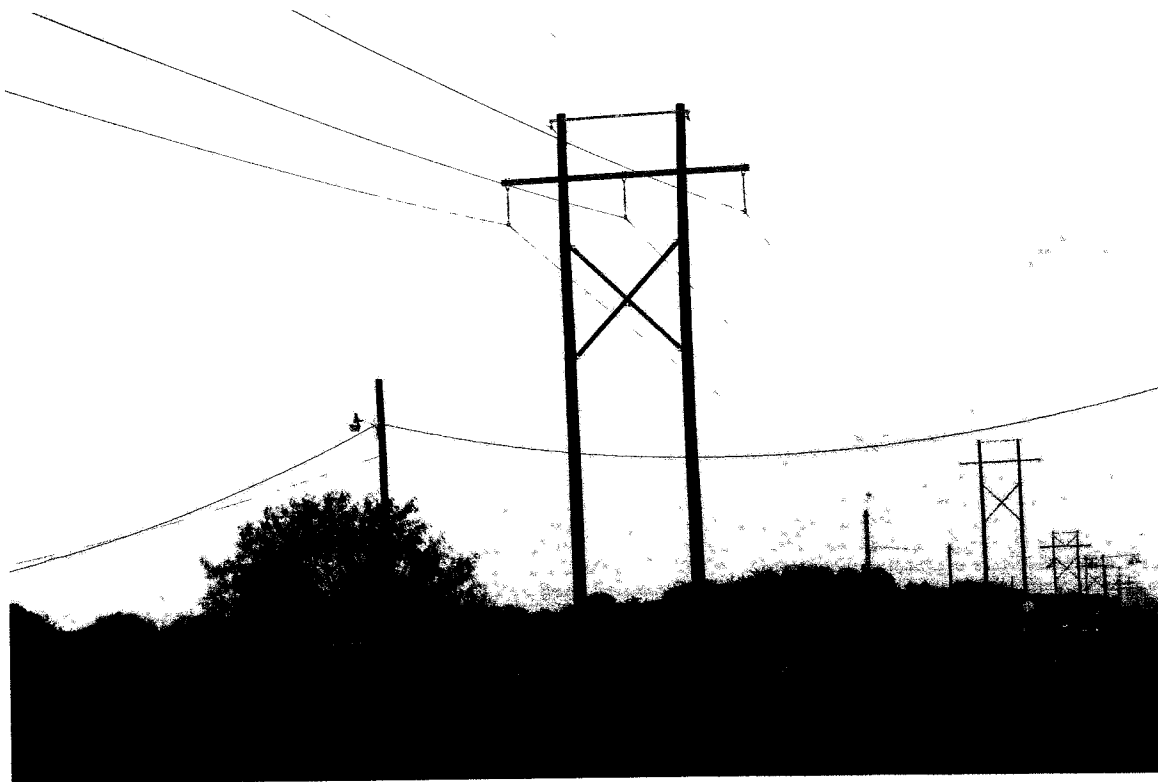
Photograph VII and VIII These are images of the power lines that currently surround my mother's property and the surrounding properties. Central Power and Light currently provides service to the area. There is no "need" for ETT/Sharyland Utilities. They are what the British would call "redundant". If you look at the previous photos, there are currently power lines there as well.



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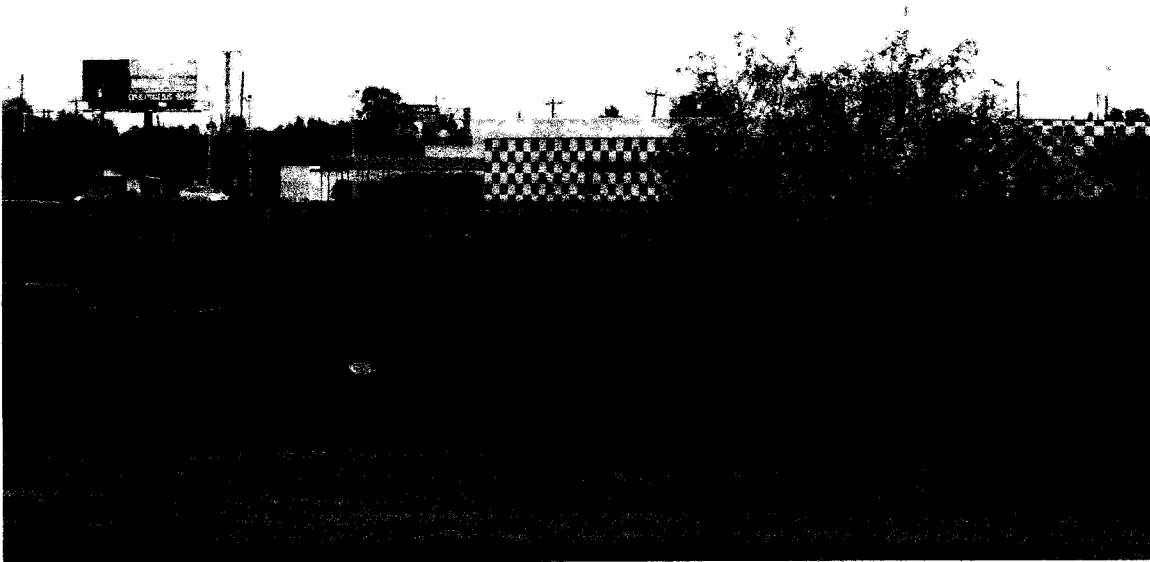
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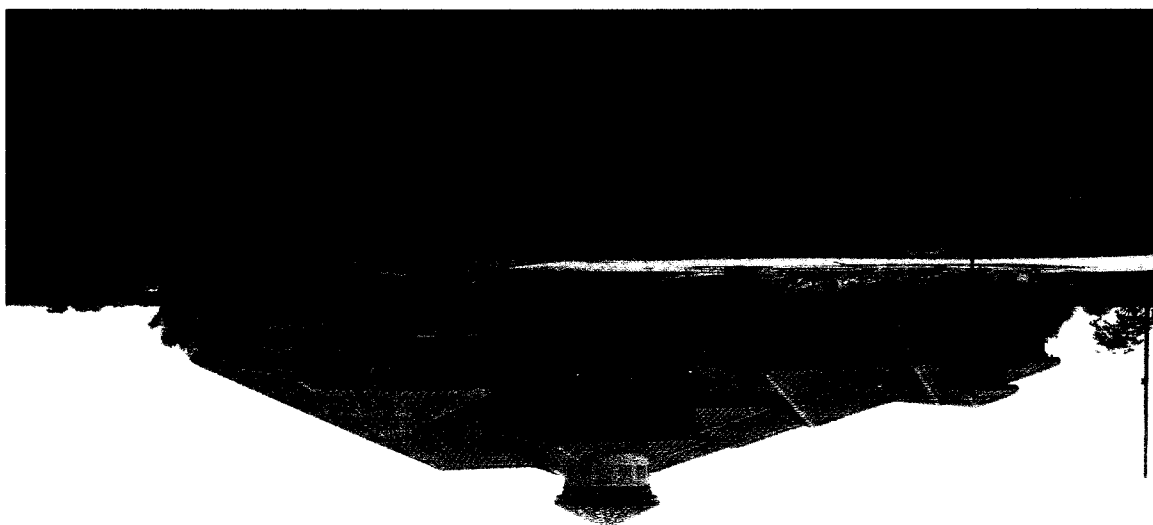
IV



III



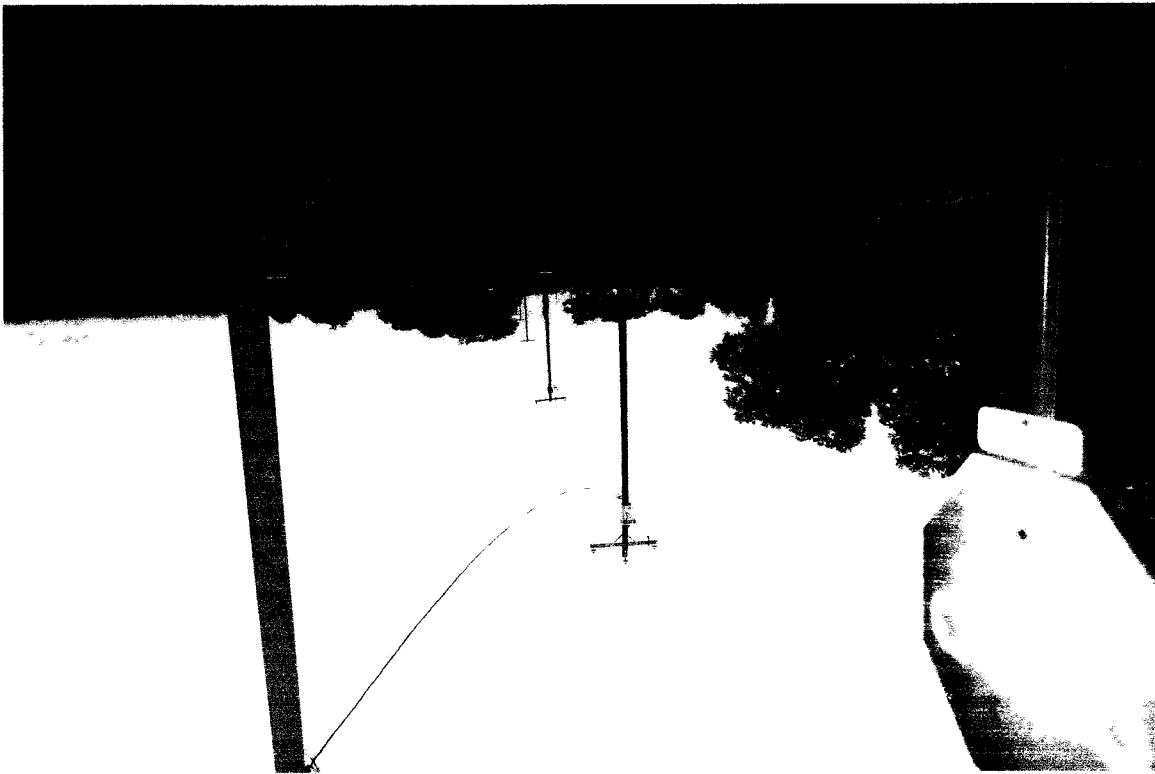
VI



A



VIII



VIII