

VOLTAGE SAGS: THEIR CAUSES, EFFECTS AND HOW TO CORRECT THEM

By Ian K. P. Ross, MIEE, Omniverter Inc.

VOLTAGE SAG DEFINITION

A Voltage Sag as defined by IEEE Standard 1159-1995, IEEE Recommended Practice for Monitoring Electric Power Quality, is a decrease in RMS voltage at the power frequency for durations from 0.5 cycles to 1 minute, reported as the remaining voltage.

The measurement of a Voltage Sag is stated as a percentage of the nominal voltage, it is a measurement of the remaining voltage and is stated as a sag TO a percentage value. Thus, a Voltage Sag to 60% is equivalent to 60% of nominal voltage, or 288 Volts for a nominal 480 Volt system.

In North America, a Voltage Dip is usually understood to mean the amount by which the nominal voltage declines - in percentage terms this is 100-Voltage Sag. Thus a voltage dip of 40% equates to a Voltage Sag TO 60%.

Unfortunately, in practice there is confusion and the terms Voltage Sag and Voltage Dip are sometimes interchanged. It is therefore important that data is clarified.

WHERE DO VOLTAGE SAGS OCCUR?

Voltage sags can occur on Utility systems both at distribution voltages and transmission voltages. Voltage sags which occur at higher voltages will normally spread through a utility system and will be transmitted to lower voltage systems via transformers.

Voltage sags can be created within an industrial complex without any influence from the Utility system. These sags are typically caused by starting large motors or by electrical faults inside the facility.

CAUSES OF VOLTAGE SAGS

If, for any reason, a sub-station circuit breaker or a recloser is tripped, then the line which it is feeding will be temporarily disconnected. All other feeder lines from the same substation system

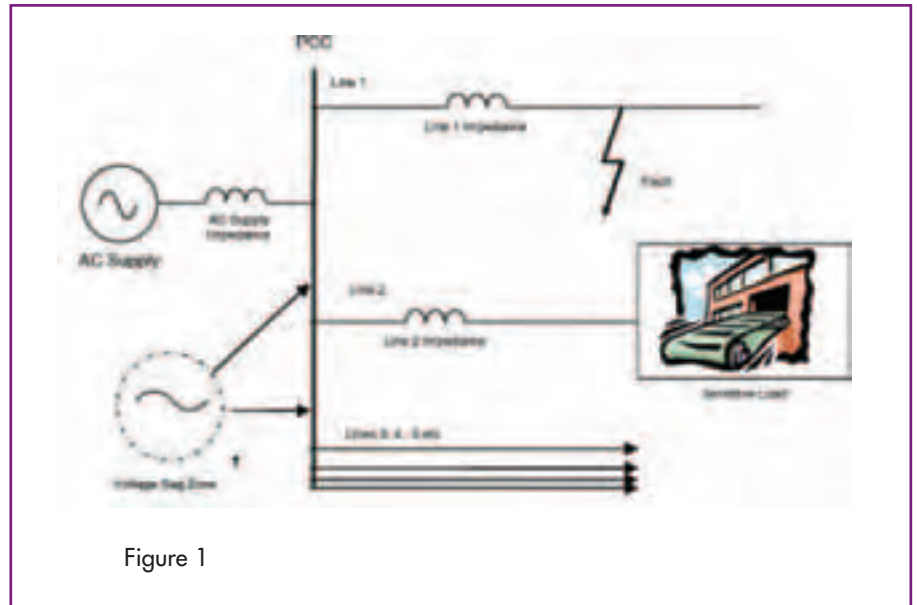


Figure 1

will see this disconnection event as voltage sag which will spread to consumers on these other lines (See Fig.1). The depth of the voltage sag at the consumer's site will vary, depending on the supply line voltage and the distance from the fault. Typically, a higher supply voltage will have a larger sag affected zone.

If electrical equipment fails due to overloading, cable faults etc., protective equipment will operate at the substation and voltage sags will be seen on other feeder lines across the utility system.

Thunderstorms and lightning strikes cause a significant number of voltage sags. If lightning strikes a power line and continues to ground, this creates a line to ground fault. The line to ground fault in turn creates voltage sag and this reduced voltage can be seen over a wide area. Note the lightning strike to ground causes Voltage Sags on all other lines (See Fig 1). Circuit breakers and reclosers operate more frequently in poor weather conditions.

High winds can blow tree branches into power lines. As the tree branch

strikes the line, a line to ground fault occurs which creates voltage sag. If the line protection system does not operate immediately, a series of sags will occur if the branch repeatedly touches the power line. Broken branches landing on power lines cause phase-to-phase and phase-to-ground faults.

Snow and Ice build-up on power line insulators can cause flash-over, either phase-to-ground or phase-to-phase. Similarly snow or ice falling from one line can cause it to rebound and strike another line. These events cause voltage sags to spread through other feeders on the system.

Salt spray build-up on power line insulators over time in coastal areas, even many miles inland, can cause flash over especially in stormy weather. Dust in arid inland areas can cause similar problems. As circuit protector devices operate, voltage sags appear on other feeders.

Animals, particularly squirrels,

Continued on Page 24

voltage sags

Continued from Page 22

racoons and snakes occasionally find their way onto power lines or transformers and can cause a short circuit either phase-to-phase or phase-to-ground. Large birds, geese and swans, fly into power lines and cause similar faults. While the creature rarely survives, the protective circuit breaker operates and a voltage sag is created on other feeders.

Utility power lines frequently run alongside public roads. Vehicles occasionally collide with utility poles, causing lines to touch. Protective devices trip and voltage sags occur.

Even when all power lines are underground, digging foundations for new building construction can result in damage to underground power lines, and create voltage sags.

Voltage sags can be caused within an industrial facility or a group of facilities by the starting of large electric motors either individually or in groups. The large current inrush on starting can cause voltage sags in the local or adjacent areas, even if the utility line voltage remains at a constant nominal value.

MULTI-PHASE SAGS AND SINGLE-PHASE SAGS

The most common voltage sags, over 70%, are single-phase events which are typically due to a phase-to-ground fault occurring somewhere on the system. This phase-to-ground fault appears as a single-phase voltage sag on other feeders from the same substation. Typical causes are lightning strikes, tree branches, animal contact etc. It is not uncommon to see single-phase voltage sags to 30% of nominal voltage or even lower in industrial plants.

Two-phase, phase-to-phase sags may be caused by tree branches, adverse weather, animals or vehicle collision with utility poles. The two-phase voltage sag will typically appear on other feeders from the same substation.

Symmetrical 3-phase sags account for less than 20% of all sag events and are caused either by switching or tripping of a 3-phase circuit breaker, switch or recloser which will create a 3-phase voltage sag on other lines fed from the same substation.

Three-phase sags will also be caused by starting large motors, but this type of

event typically causes voltage sags to approximately 80% of nominal voltage and is usually confined to an industrial plant or its immediate neighbours.

Both single-phase and multi-phase voltage sags can cause unplanned production stoppages, but single-phase (120V) control devices and electronic sensors can be very vulnerable to voltage sags.

Modern electronic equipment requires more precise voltage regulation than traditional devices such as induction motors. When manufacturing industry used mechanical devices and gearboxes to control the speed of its processes, many of which were relatively slow and

ly be measured in minutes, hours or even days. Costs per event can be many tens of thousands of dollars.

An EPRI study in 2005 suggests that the cost to North American industry of production stoppages caused by voltage sags now exceeds US\$250 billion per annum.

WHO IS TO BLAME?

Frequently, industrial customers blame their local electrical supply utility for unplanned production stoppages and claim that other jurisdictions have "much better power quality".

Unfortunately, in many cases, there is little or nothing the utility can do. It is true that certain parts of North America experience more storms than others so voltage sags are more prevalent in some areas.

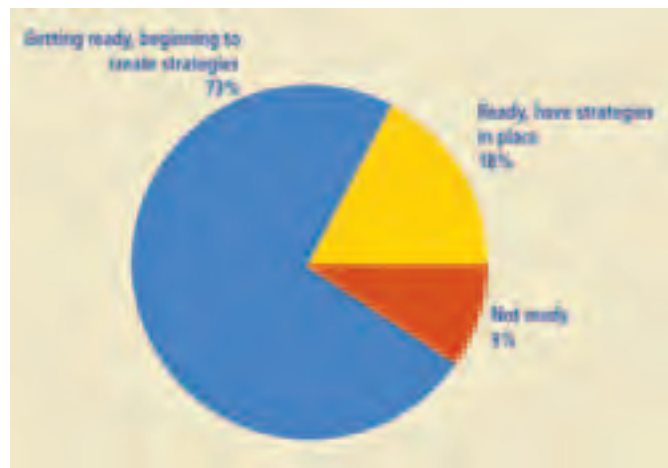
Even in desert areas devoid of trees, storms and lightning strikes occur. Given the large distances between power plants and consumers in North America, the cost of underground conductors at all voltages would be prohibitive, even if un-

derground rights of way were available. Few consumers would wish to see their utility power bill increase several fold in order to pay for this.

Very few utilities, anywhere in the world, escape voltage sags. Even those with total underground systems in a small geographic area such as Singapore suffer voltage sags. These may be due to damage to cables by digging for new construction or due to failure of electrical equipment from cable faults, overloads etc.

Industrial customers who have invested heavily in production equipment which is susceptible to voltage sags must take responsibility for their own solutions to voltage sags or lose some benefit from their investment.

Voltage sags are a fact of life – they cannot readily be eliminated from regular utility systems.



How well-positioned is your organization to address anticipated talent shortages?

required manual operation or intervention by operators, voltage variations were not such a serious issue.

Automation has led to high speed processes, automatic electronic sensing and controls; precision machine tools have sophisticated electronic controls, variable speed drives have replaced many gearboxes and any unplanned manufacturing stoppage can be very expensive.

Electronic process controls, sensors, computer controls, PLCs and variable speed drives, even conventional electrical relays are all, to some degree, susceptible to voltage sags. In many cases, one or more of these devices may trip if there is a voltage sag to less than 90% of nominal voltage, even if the duration is only for one or two cycles, i.e. less than 100 milliseconds.

The time to restart production after such an unplanned stoppage can typical-

Continued on Page 26

voltage sags

Continued from Page 24

For the industrial customer, the solution may involve replacement of components or devices, which are especially sensitive, with less voltage sensitive substitutes or installation of some form of protection against voltage sags.

THE SOLUTION: FIRST IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

In order to provide an optimal and cost effective solution to voltage sag problems, it is necessary to determine which equipment is susceptible to unplanned stoppages. In most industries, there is still a significant amount of electrical equipment which is not sensitive to voltage variation or which can be restarted at little or no cost. Usually it is not necessary to protect an entire industrial facility, it is sufficient to protect the key sensitive equipment.

The next stage is to determine the frequency, depth and duration of the voltage sags.

These can vary widely even in apparently similar industrial facilities. Collection of this data is essential if the optimal solution is to be identified.

In North America, only a small proportion of manufacturing businesses have installed electrical metering which is capable of measuring and recording the voltage variations which are responsible for the majority of their very costly Unplanned Production Stoppages.

MEASURE THE PROBLEM

To identify the depth of the voltage sags and their duration, the sag events need to be measured and recorded for subsequent analysis. As typical voltage sag events last only a few cycles, the most cost effective way to measure these is by installation of an electronic meter with waveform capture capability.

As, and when, voltage sag occurs, these devices capture the 3-phase voltages values throughout the sag event, the duration of the event in cycles, and can time stamp the start and/or finish of the event. The data is captured automatically and is downloaded to a computer for later analysis.

It is extremely helpful to record precisely the time and date of unplanned production stoppages and then to compare these against voltage variations

recorded by the meter, as not all voltage sags lead to stoppages. This analysis will show the value of the sag voltage which typically causes production problems and equally those events which have not caused problems.

Surprisingly, in many industries, people are so busy trying to restart the process they fail to record the time of the stoppage with any formal system. Even in large companies, precise data on the number and duration of unplanned stoppages is often difficult to find.

METER COST VS. COST OF UNPLANNED PRODUCTION STOPPAGE

The cost of an installation with a meter capable of wave form capture and its software is typically a few thousand dollars.

This is often only a small fraction of the cost of even one unplanned production stoppage. Unfortunately, installation of such meters has not become commonplace in many industries, as "there is no money in the budget for this".

Once the characteristics of typical voltage sag have been determined by examining recorded data from the waveform capture meter over a period of time, it is possible to calculate the type of voltage sag correction required to cover the depth and duration of expected future voltage sag events.

If it is possible to correct the problem by changing some sensitive components, this may well be the least expensive solution. This approach has been widely adopted in the semi-conductor industry and it is notable that this industry has invested heavily in high quality meters to identify the problems. This is an industry where an unplanned stoppage may cost \$1 million per event or more.

If component substitution is not practical, it is necessary to identify the size of the load to be protected in kVA and its supply voltage. This may be an entire plant at medium voltage or a critical machine at low voltage or anything in between.

THERE ARE VOLTAGE SAG CORRECTION DEVICES AVAILABLE

Traditional methods of Voltage Control included Transformer Tap



Develop-Deploy-Connect model

Changers, both mechanical and SCR switched units, Servo-Variac technology and Ferro-Resonant Transformers (constant voltage transformers).

In some cases and for some applications, these traditional technologies may still be applicable and work well, but in many cases they were designed to correct problems other than voltage sags.

Uninterruptible Power Supplies (UPS) technology has been available for over 20 years and is ideally suited for those applications such as high speed data processing where continuous protection against any power variation and, more importantly, against any power interruption is essential.

Industrial UPS units are widely used to protect electronic process control equipment and to allow for an orderly shutdown of the process but it is rarely economic to install large UPS systems with their attendant large battery banks for high power electrical equipment such as high horsepower drives, extruders etc.

There are several manufacturers of devices designed specifically for voltage sag correction in industrial applications. These devices use a combination of an inverter plus short-term electrical storage or an inverter with a specially designed injection transformer to provide voltage correction against voltage sags as they arise.

Typical response times from initiation of voltage sag to its correction are of the order of one-half cycle or less.

Some devices offer limited ride

Continued on Page 30

voltage sags

Continued from Page 30

through a zero voltage event for a short time, others do not.

These devices provide excellent protection against both 3-phase and single-phase voltage sags.

Some manufacturers offer small single-phase devices at low voltage 120V or 220V typically with small kVA ratings.

Others provide only 3-phase devices at low voltage 208V – 600V and at medium voltage to 36kV.

The kVA ratings of 3-phase devices typically range from <20kVA -5 MVA at low voltage and from 1MVA to 50MVA for medium voltage applications.

A few manufacturers offer solutions in the 50MVA to 100+MVA range at medium voltage but demand for these occurs infrequently.

Typically pay-back periods for actual savings achieved by businesses who have installed voltage sag correction equipment can be as little as a few weeks, more commonly 12 months or less, but rarely exceed two years.

SUMMARY

Voltage sags occur throughout North American utility networks, some areas are more susceptible than others, as the frequency of events is related to weather and climate.

Electrical utilities are unable to eliminate the causes of voltage sags and this situation will not change in the foreseeable future.

Industry has invested heavily in high speed and precision equipment, much of which is more sensitive to voltage variation than traditional machinery.

It is possible to establish a history of voltage sags in any given facility for a modest investment in one or more suitable meters and their associated software. The events from this history can be compared to the incidence of unplanned production stoppages, if adequate records are kept.

There are a number of alternative solutions available for the correction of voltage sags and, typically, the financial case for investment in these solutions will meet or exceed the investment criteria for many industries.

ADVERTISERS INDEX

October/November/December, 2006

ADVERTISER	CONTACT	PAGE
3M.....	..www.mmm.com	7
Assemblage Paro.....	..www.assemblageparo.com	28
DewLine .....	.....	27
Durham Electric.....	..www.durham-electric.com	28
Eaton Power Quality Company .....	..www.eaton.com	23
ESA Inc.....	..www.easypower.com	5
The Electricity Forum.....	..www.electricityforum.com/esore	15
Ferraz Shawmut .....	..www.ferrazshawmut.com.com	25
Flir Systems Ltd.....	..www.flir.com.......www.electricityforum.com/products/flir.htm	11,28, 32
G.T. Wood .....	..www.gtwood.com.......www.electricityforum.com/products/gtwood.htm	28
H2O .....	..www.h20control.com	13
Hubbell Power Systems .....	..nfoHPS@Hubbellonline.com.......www.electricityforum.com/products/hubbell.htm	2, 21, 28
Infrared Imaging Solutions Inc. ....	..www.iristhermography.com	28
Megger.....	..www.megger.com.......www.electricityforum.com/products/avo.htm	10
SKM Systems Analysis, Inc. ....	..www.skm.com	31
Synergy Energy Inc. ....	..www.synergyengeryinc.com.......www.electricityforum.com/products/synergy_energy_inc.html ..	9
United Wire & Cable.....	..www.unitedwc.com.com	17