

**PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17105-3265**

**Electric Distribution Company Service Outage Response and
Restoration Practices**

**PUBLIC MEETING
September 25, 2008
SEPT-2008-C-0008
Docket No. _____**

**JOINT MOTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN TYRONE J. CHRISTY AND
COMMISSIONER KIM PIZZINGRILLI**

As the remnants of Hurricane Ike met a cold front, higher than predicted winds hit portions of Western Pennsylvania on September 14 and 15 that resulted in significant damage to the electric distribution system. The high winds brought down trees, which damaged numerous electric lines and poles and also caused other electric infrastructure damage. All of this resulted in an extended loss of electric service for more than 300,000 Pennsylvanians.

In the aftermath of this event, utilities moved to restore service, with priority being given to repairs that could restore critical care customers, such as hospitals and nursing homes, and the largest number of customers in the most prompt and responsible manner. Utilities also invoked mutual aid agreements, in which line repair personnel from unaffected utilities travel to the site of the outages and assist in the restoration of service. The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, to which the Commission is a support agency under the State Emergency Operations Plan, monitored the scope of the outage and the progress of restoration, and provided regular updates to other government agencies. All customers had service restored as of September 22. The work efforts of the utilities to restore service were appreciated as they encountered numerous dangerous situations. Unfortunately, one New Jersey utility employee who was assisting as part of mutual aid died in the course of restoring service.

The Commission maintains and enforces standards and procedures for the safety and reliability of the electric transmission and distribution system in Pennsylvania. 52 Pa. Code § 57.191, *et seq.* Consistent with these regulations, the affected utilities will provide reports on their storm response to the Commission. These reports will include specific information on restoration times, restoration procedures, preparations in advance of the storm, response times, clean up, and remediation. As with any outage, the Commission reviews the reports and evaluates whether the utility responded to the outages appropriately, whether they were adequately prepared and whether they were in compliance with the Public Utility Code and regulations. Typically, the Commission evaluates these reports, and directs individual utilities to take any additional measures to improve reliability if appropriate.

However, given the magnitude and duration of these recent outages, we find that it is necessary to conduct a statewide evaluation of aspects of electric distribution company storm response, service restoration, and customer communication practices. We will therefore, pursuant to Section 331(b)(4) of the Public Utility Code, 66 Pa.C.S. § 331(b)(4), direct staff to undertake a study of these issues. As an initial step in this proceeding, we will direct that all jurisdictional electric utilities review and respond to the attached questions within 15 days of the adoption of this motion.

We also find that it is appropriate to conduct a public input hearing on this matter. We will therefore direct the Office of Administrative Law Judge, with the assistance of the Office of Communications, to schedule at least one public input hearing in the area affected by the recent power outages within two weeks. This hearing will provide an opportunity for utilities, government agencies, and emergency service providers to share information. It will also provide an opportunity to affected customers to share their experiences and how they could best be notified of outage related information during future incidents.

THEREFORE, WE MOVE THAT:

1. The Law Bureau prepare a Secretarial Letter, with a copy of this motion, and the directed questions, to be served on all jurisdictional electric distribution companies.
2. Electric distributions companies file a response to these questions and data requests with the Commission's Secretary's Bureau within 15 days.
3. The Office of Administrative Law Judge, with the assistance of the Office of Communications, schedule a public input hearing to be held in the affected area within two weeks of today.
4. Upon the completion of the review of the information collected pursuant to this proceeding, the Bureau of Conservation, Economics and Energy Planning, with the assistance of other appropriate staff, will prepare a report on this matter that will include recommendations for future action, including changes in policies and regulations governing electric service reliability.

September 25, 2008
Date

TYRONE J. CHRISTY, VICE-CHAIRMAN

KIM PIZZINGRILLI, COMMISSIONER

Directed Questions to Electric Distribution Companies

1. All electrical distribution companies shall provide the number of personnel employed as line or substation repair crews for each of the years beginning with 1998 and up to and including 2007 and shall indicate whether those personnel are utility employees or utility contractor employees.
2. All electrical distribution companies shall provide the following details concerning mutual aid received for outage restoration for each of the years beginning with 1998 and up to and including 2007.
 - a. The company name and location of origin for each mutual aid provider for the year, whether from another utility or a utility contractor.
 - b. The number of times each mutual aid provider was utilized during the year and the number and type of personnel provided for each incident.
3. All electrical distribution companies shall provide for each of the years beginning with 1998 and up to and including 2007 the Pennsylvania inventory levels kept on utility property of the below listed equipment related to storm restoration.
 - a. Utility poles
 - b. Utility pole crossarms
 - c. Transformers used for provision of residential service
 - d. Length of primary wire
 - e. Length of secondary wire
 - f. Length of service drop wire
4. What method or methods of communication with customers was used in this outage, or if not affected by this storm, would have been used in the event of an outage?
5. Have you considered use of 21st Century technology in reaching out to customers, keeping in mind that they are without electricity? Why or why not?
6. Assess whether technological enhancements in communications can be made to keep the public better informed as utilities respond to the operational issues involved in resolving emergency situations such as reverse 911, e-mails or text messages.
7. Do you have a crisis communications plan in writing for outages? If yes, please attach a copy.

8. What is the proactive outreach (i.e. direct contact or through media) conducted by your utility to keep customers informed of conditions, restoration times and tips for staying safe during an outage?
9. How are restoration times communicated to the PUC, customers, county emergency management agencies and media? Do you have a single-point of contact for this information?
10. What is the procedure if a customer receives a busy signal on your outage line? On your customer service line? Are they called back? Do they receive an automated message? Are your customer-call systems tested to be able to receive and process calls from a significant number of your customer base in a short period of time and how many calls can your customer call center receive at one time?