



New Jersey Board of Public Utilities

NEWS RELEASE

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N.J. Board of Public Utilities receives Staff's Report on Electric Companies Responses to June 23rd Storm

– Board orders improvements in the areas of communications and establishment of estimated times of restoration –

Trenton, N.J. - The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (Board) today received staff's report on the review of the electric companies' preparation and response to the June 23rd severe storm that produced a macroburst with strong straight-line wind gusts that caused over 400,000 electrical outages predominately in Atlantic City Electric (ACE) and Public Service Electric and Gas (PSE&G) territories in southern New Jersey. In response to staff's findings, the Board ordered a total of five improvements in the areas of internal and external communications and the establishment of timely and accurate Estimated Times of Restoration (ETR).

Staff's review focused primarily on ACE's response since the company's infrastructure suffered the brunt of the storm's impact and the company's situational awareness and implementation of its storm response plan were hampered by Verizon's wireless service outage, which negatively impacted the company's storm damage assessment efforts, establishment of ETRs and communications with customers, local officials, media outlets and the BPU.

"While much was accomplished by ACE in mobilizing and augmenting its regular workforce with a substantial number of mutual aid crews, more work is needed to accomplish a satisfactory level of performance in the areas of communications and the establishment of accurate ETRs," said Richard S. Mroz, President of the N.J. Board of Public Utilities. "Today's Board ordered improvements deal with issues impacting ACE's internal and external communications and the establishment of accurate ETRs."

The unusual weather event known as a “bow echo,” produced winds in excess of 85 mph that struck the state causing massive damage to the transmission and distribution systems of both ACE and PSE&G, and also knocked out Verizon wireless service in areas of southern New Jersey. The majority of storm damage was concentrated in ACE’s territory causing extended outages for more than 259,000 customers. President Mroz visited the affected area several times immediately after the storm to assess the power outages and worked with local officials and the power companies on the restoration of service. In addition, on July 2nd the Christie Administration organized a “mobile cabinet” meeting in Woolwich Township where the Lieutenant Governor, along with leadership from the Department of Banking and Insurance, Office of Emergency Management, Department of Community Affairs and the Board, met with local officials and residents to discuss storm recovery efforts. On July 13th, after the completion of a lengthy damage assessment in the region led by the Office of Emergency Management, Governor Chris Christie formally requested disaster relief aid from FEMA.

While the utility demonstrated compliance with previous Board directives, gaps and challenges to the company’s emergency plans that were developed in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy were noted. As such, the Board ordered two improvements to be implemented by each of the regulated electric companies and three improvements to be implemented by ACE.

For each of the electric distribution companies (EDCs), the Board ordered the following:

- The EDCs shall formalize back-up communications plans, to include the possibility of wireless service failures, to collect and disseminate voice, data, and text information to their workforce – particularly their field personnel - during an emergency event or major outage.
- During a major event and after the release of a global estimated time of recovery, the EDCs shall identify the areas and pockets of customers that are projected to be restored last in the restoration process. This information should be made available to municipal officials in the communities where customers that are last to be restored are identified so that they can prepare for an extended loss of service.

The Board ordered the following particularly for ACE:

- ACE shall revise its emergency operations plan so as to improve outreach and dissemination of information to public officials impacted by a major weather/emergency event. ACE should also clarify and confirm officials’ contact information and preferences. During major outages ACE will utilize these contacts and references to convey situational awareness to effected areas, regardless of the time of day.
- ACE shall work with Board Emergency Management Staff on ways to improve coordination on outage information, particularly in the early stages of a major storm. In addition, there shall be direct contact between Board Staff and the Regulatory Liaison during a major event.

- ACE shall reassess the methodology and processes employed to develop a global estimated time of recovery for major events. The purpose is to ensure that the estimated time of recovery are based on the best available information on the extent of damage, immediately available workforce, arrival and deployment of mutual assistance workforce and materials. These estimates should also reflect experiences gained from past events.

The June 23, 2015 “Bow Echo” Weather Event Report can be found here:

http://nj.gov/bpu/pdf/reports/ACE_Restoration_Report_june23_storm_8_28_15.pdf

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About the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU)

The NJBPU is a state agency and regulatory authority mandated to ensure safe, adequate and proper utility services at reasonable rates for New Jersey customers. Critical services regulated by the NJBPU include natural gas, electricity, water, wastewater, telecommunications and cable television. The Board has general oversight responsibility for monitoring utility service, responding to consumer complaints, and investigating utility accidents. To find out more about the NJBPU, visit our web site at www.nj.gov/bpu, <http://www.bpu.state.nj.us/>