



## New Jersey Board of Public Utilities

### NEWS RELEASE

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**Contact:**  
Greg Reinert  
609-777-3305

### **N.J. Board of Public Utilities Releases Staff's Preliminary Report on Electric Companies Planning and Response to Major Storms**

TRENTON, NJ – The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) today released a preliminary report on major storm event planning and emergency response by the four regulated Electric Distribution Companies (EDCs). Shortly after Hurricane Irene exited New Jersey, Governor Chris Christie directed BPU President Lee A. Solomon to assess the performance of the EDCs prior to, during and after the storm.

The preliminary report calls for immediate action by the EDCs to improve communications including the addition of staff during storm events to handle expected calls, the use of social media to inform affected customers, and having a full communications plan approved by the BPU in advance. These recommendations are designed to address some of the problems identified during BPU staff's review of the electric utilities' responses to Hurricane Irene and the October snow storm. In addition, the report recommends areas warranting further investigation by BPU staff with the assistance of a soon-to-be appointed consultant.

Specifically, BPU recommends improvements in EDC communications with customers, municipal and county officials and Office of Emergency Management (OEM) personnel; acquisition of supplemental crews; prioritization of service restoration; and infrastructure issues affected by vegetation management and substation flooding. In addition, the BPU report recommends the utilities adopt procedures to identify and prioritize service to special needs customers, such as those with health issues and well water dependent customers.

The report is available on the BPU's website at: <http://www.nj.gov/bpu/> .

Currently, the State is collecting responses to a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for an expert consultant. All responses to the RFQ are due by December 20, 2011. A recommendation will be presented to the Board for approval in January.

In the weeks prior to the arrival of Hurricane Irene, which made landfall as a Category 1 hurricane on the morning of August 28<sup>th</sup>, the state already had several heavy rainfalls which saturated the ground and caused rivers to be running high. Rainfall totals from Hurricane Irene totaling between 6 to 12 inches throughout the state caused widespread record flooding that

inundated 15 electric substations. Sustained tropical storm force winds covered the majority of the state with gusts up to 75 mph and sustained 70+ mph winds as the eye passed up the coastline. These winds, combined with the saturated ground caused many trees and limbs to fall onto wires. As Hurricane Irene exited the state there was a peak of approximately 930,000 customers without power. Statewide, approximately 1.9 million of the 3.9 million total customers were affected by outages due to this storm at some time during the event. According to the report, PSE&G and JCP&L reported approximately 873,000 and 780,000 customers affected, respectively, while ACE had 273,898 and Rockland Electric had 27,220 affected by Hurricane Irene.

To receive input from the public, elected officials and local OEM officials regarding the EDCs preparations and restoration performance relative to Hurricane Irene, the BPU conducted six public hearings. These hearings were convened in the service territories of each of the EDCs. In addition, three meetings were held with mayors and municipal officials; two meetings were held in JCP&L's territory, with the third held in PSE&G's territory. The Board also received numerous letters, calls and emails which were made part of the record and considered as part of this review.

At the hearings, the vast majority of complaints were made with regard to JCP&L's storm response. To a much lesser extent, complaints involved PSE&G or Rockland Electric. The most predominate complaints concerned communications with mayors and local officials; communications with the public; Estimated Restoration Times (ETRs); prioritization of restoration efforts; infrastructure issues related to system design and/or maintenance; flooding of substations; and, tree damage on the distribution system and effectiveness/ineffectiveness of EDC's tree trimming practices.

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