

Electric Utility Industry and Federal Government Agency Areas for Coordination to Ensure Effective Disaster Response

The purpose of this document is to outline areas where the electric utility industry and federal government agencies should establish and formalize coordination mechanisms. The ability of utilities and federal government agencies to coordinate in these areas in large part depends upon electric utility personnel being granted first responder status by being designated “Essential Service Providers” or the like.

A. Transportation and Access to Disaster Areas.

1. **Personnel and Vehicle Identification.** There is a need to develop a credentialing program that will provide certainty to both utilities and public safety officials controlling access to disaster areas without hampering restoration efforts. This program should address the following issues:

- Utility personnel generally carry utility identification, but contractors may not.
- Utility-owned vehicles are generally marked but utility employees or contractors may use personal vehicles to conduct utility business.
- Out-of-state utility crews operate using a utility name that may not be recognized by local officials.
- A credentialing program should be workable on a large scale (e.g. 15K-20K utility personnel deployed in Katrina/Rita restoration).

2. **Travel Within Disaster Area and To-And-From Disaster Area.** There is need for government assistance in clearing roads and helping local public safety officials manage traffic flow. The following issues should be addressed:

- Clearing routes to allow utilities to move personnel and equipment from one utility to another, regardless of state boundaries.
- Minimizing public traffic congestion in severely damaged areas.
- Limiting immediate public return after evacuation. Minimizing public sightseeing and coordination with utility before establishing return policy.
- Waivers (weight restrictions, etc.) for restoration crews traveling into a restoration area from out of state.
- Expediting arrangements to move Canadian (and possibly Mexican) restoration crews, resources and materials support across the border. This includes immigrations and customs for crews as well as waivers for various vehicle/cargo restrictions.
- Government/military assistance with flying in heavy equipment and/or workers from a great distance.

3. Fuel for restoration equipment and crew transportation.

- Government agencies should not seize utility fuel supplies intended for restoration equipment or vehicles.
- In the event of a fuel supply shortage, government agencies should facilitate priority access by utilities to fuel utility trucks and equipment.

B. Health and Safety of Utility Crews Deployed in Disaster Areas.

1. **Security.** While security is generally the responsibility of state and local public safety officials, such resources may be overtaxed and unable to provide adequate security to a disaster area. In such event, it may be necessary for the federal government to provide assistance with security. The following issues should be addressed:

- Local security contractors, particularly those who have armed capabilities, may not be available. Out of state armed security personnel may require reciprocity or waivers of firearms permitting regulations.
- Government assistance to escort utility personnel into areas where there is civil unrest or other breakdown in law and order.

2. **Supplies and Equipment Needed by Electric Utility Crews.** Utilities prepare for their response needs and frequently have arrangements with vendors for essential items such as hotel rooms, space for staging areas, buses, portable toilets, helicopters, food, water, ice, etc. In addition, utilities deploying crews to disaster areas will send crews equipped in accordance with their agreements with the host utility, which may include self-sufficient crews that bring such essential resources with them. Government agencies should not impair or preempt utility arrangements.

3. **Inoculations and anti-viral or other drugs.** Government agencies should advise responding utility companies of any requirements for inoculations or other preventative health care considerations before crews are sent to a disaster area.

C. Waiver of Environmental Regulations.

Utilities should endeavor to comply with all environmental regulations, and should only seek short-term waivers to the extent that compliance jeopardizes or hampers restoration. Government agencies should grant environmental waivers as necessary and appropriate. The following issues should be addressed:

- Burning restrictions.
- Access of utility crews/equipment to protected wetlands or endangered wildlife habitat.
- Oil spills.
- Migratory bird issues.

D. Communications.

1. Collection and Dissemination of Outage and Restoration Information.

- Utilities should use existing outage/emergency communications channels such as NERC, State emergency agencies, DOE 417 reports, etc to report on emergency outages and response. Government requests for data should be channeled through these existing channels or trade associations.
- Government agencies should coordinate collection and dissemination of electric restoration information through a single designated lead agency and avoid unnecessary and duplicative data requests or dissemination of conflicting data.
- To the extent existing data forms are insufficient, the lead agency should work with NERC, EEl and other industry associations to establish an agreed upon format for the type of data to be collected and the method of reporting it.
- Utilities and government agencies should agree on current restoration status before communicating with media, to assure consistency and credibility of information.

2. Coordination and Prioritization of Restoration.

- The local utility, with input from local, state and federal government, is responsible for establishing and executing electric system restoration priorities, and should be involved in all decisions about restoration priorities.
- Government agencies should coordinate their input regarding specific and significant restoration priorities.
- Utilities should participate in multi-agency communications and coordination calls on a regular basis to increase utility and government coordination.

3. Spectrum/Communication Networks. Government agencies should provide utility with priority status on cellular and satellite communication systems as necessary and appropriate.

4. Pandemic information-sharing. Government agencies should provide utilities with timely information regarding pandemics.

E. Pre-Event Coordination

- 1. Contact Information.** Government agencies and utilities should develop for mutual use contact information for key personnel and protocols for utilizing such information.
- 2. Exercises and Drills.** Disaster planning coordination drills should be planned and coordinated on a state and regional basis in order to minimize disruption to normal utility operations.