

STATE OF NEW YORK

# Public Service Commission

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## **POWER COMPANIES RESPONDED ADEQUATELY TO STORMS — While Restoration Efforts Largely Successful, Some Improvements Needed —**

Albany, NY—09/16/10—The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today received a report from Staff of the Department of Public Service (staff) that assessed Central Hudson Gas and Electric Corporation’s (Central Hudson), Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Inc.’s (Con Edison), New York State Electric and Gas Corporation’s (NYSEG), and Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc.’s (O&R) restoration and customer service performance during the February and March 2010 storm events. Staff’s report, where appropriate, included recommendations to improve future storm responses.

“The assessment process undertaken by staff after major storms is an invaluable tool that identifies opportunities to improve response and restoration procedures,” said Commission Chairman Garry Brown. “An opportunity for improvement that is critical to customers is more localized estimated restoration times, so customers can make necessary plans and minimize the effects of storm outages. Improving storm response and restoration efforts is a critical part of our mission to ensure safe and reliable service.”

Staff’s evaluation of the utilities’ performance, in response to the storms during the first quarter of 2010, finds that the utilities responded adequately, for the most part, to the February 23 and 25 and March 13 storms.

Nonetheless, staff did note concerns associated with estimated restoration times. For example, Con Edison failed to develop localized estimated restoration times and O&R failed to develop localized estimated restoration times properly and/or timely during the storms. Additionally, staff

noted that improvements are needed in Central Hudson's and Con Edison's outage management systems (OMS) to provide accurate and timely customer restoration information.

As safety is a fundamental aspect of storm response, NYSEG needs to take steps to ensure that it follows the company's Emergency Plan guidelines for determining the required number of personnel needed to keep the public away from downed lines, which was insufficient during restoration efforts in the Brewster and Mechanicville Divisions.

Staff noted a lack of feedback about life support equipment customers when utilities use police or other responders to assist them. Consequently, staff will coordinate a collaborative process with the utilities to develop guidelines and protocols for the utilities to properly communicate with life support equipment customers during both the pre-storm preparatory and post-storm service restoral phases to make sure the life support equipment customers are safe.

Staff made a series of recommendations:

**All Utilities:**

- Development of formal procedures for updating OMS such that it matches actual field conditions as accurately as possible. The procedures should describe how information from damage assessment, field crews, and monitoring systems are entered.
- To ensure that Life Support Equipment customers are communicated with properly, procedures are to be developed through a collaborative process involving all investor-owned utilities. The resulting guidelines are to include pre- and post-storm expectations applicable to all utilities.

**Central Hudson:**

- To ensure damage assessors are familiar with company practices, Central Hudson should develop a procedure to mandate annual training, at a minimum, and provide training within 30 days, whenever the damage assessment practices change. Proper performance of damage assessment activities during a recent storm event may exempt an employee from having to participate in the annual training.

**NYSEG:**

- NYSEG should revise its procedures associated with guarding downed lines to ensure that the company will deploy the appropriate number of personnel as recommended by its existing guidelines.
- NYSEG should enhance the Outage Central link on its Web site to provide outage location maps displaying the severity of outages, estimated restoration times, and summaries of outage information at various levels.

**Con Edison:**

- Con Edison should modify its Overhead and Underground Emergency Response Procedure to require that localized ETRs be developed in a timely manner and communicated effectively. The revisions should be filed within 30 days.
- Con Edison should report to Staff potential solutions to the problem of liaisons not being able to access the company's outage management system due to lack of network connections or cell phone service.

**O&R:**

- O&R should modify its Emergency Response Procedure to require that global and localized ETRs be developed in a timely manner and communicated effectively. The revisions should be filed within 30 days.
- O&R's Electric Emergency Plan should be revised to require municipal conference calls with public officials during major outages for the purpose of providing them with updates on restoration efforts and responding to their questions and concerns.

Staff's assessment of the utilities' performance in responding to the three storms was based on a combination of factors, including: a thorough review of the self-assessment reports filed by the utilities as required by the Commission's rules and regulations, discussions and interviews with public officials, and evaluation of complaint data filed with the Commission's Office of Consumer Services.

### **Storm Background**

On February 23, 2010, heavy, wet snow began to accumulate in the upper Hudson Valley and areas in northern New York. A second, more powerful storm hit on February 25. Much greater snow than expected accumulated making the response more challenging. As a result of the two February storms, approximately 300,000 customers were without power in Central Hudson's service territory. During the early stages of restoration, road closures hindered access for utility line crews and limited the ability of damage assessors to survey some circuits in their entirety. Final restoration of service to all customers affected by the two February storms took eight days and occurred on March 3.

On March 13 a major rain storm with tropical storm force winds hit the New York City metropolitan area including the lower Hudson Valley and Long Island. The storm caused significant flooding due to the rain and melting snow pack, forcing many road closures. Approximately 475,000 customers were without power in the region. Final restoration to all customers took seven days and occurred on March 20.

A copy of Staff's report, when issued, may be obtained by going to the Documents Search section of the Commission's Web site at [www.dps.state.ny.us](http://www.dps.state.ny.us) and entering Case number 10-E-0331 in the input box labeled "Search for Case/Matter Number." Many libraries offer free Internet access. A copy of the report can also be obtained from the Files Office, 14<sup>th</sup> floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500).