

STATE OF NEW YORK

# Public Service Commission

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## **ELECTRIC RELIABILITY AND STRAY VOLTAGE REVIEWED**

**—Utilities Overall Perform Well; Stray Voltage Surveys Meet Expectations—**

Albany, NY—06/13/13— The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today received a report from Department of Public Service staff assessing electric service reliability by electric utilities in New York State and on its stray voltage findings. Overall system reliability, excluding major storms, was better than or equal to statewide performance in 2012; and utilities met stray voltage testing and inspection requirements.

Staff reported that 2012 was by far the worst year for storm effects in its 24 years of recordkeeping. Superstorm Sandy caused the overwhelming majority of the storm related outages during 2012. In total, more than two million customers were affected by this event. In addition to Superstorm Sandy, several other storms affected New Yorkers in 2012, including snowy wind events in January and severe thunderstorms in July, August and September. While these storms are excluded from reliability performance because they are circumstances over which the utilities have limited control, some spillover effect in the periods following the storms may have impacted the overall performance.

Staff's assessment of electric service reliability performance by utilities relies on two primary metrics to measure performance: the System Average Interruption Frequency Index (SAIFI or frequency) and the Customer Average Interruption Duration Index (CAIDI or duration). SAIFI is the average number of times that a customer is interrupted during a year. CAIDI is the average interruption duration time for those that experience an interruption in electric service during the year.

Frequency of outages is influenced by factors such as system design, capital investment, maintenance, and weather. Decisions made by utilities today on capital expenditures and maintenance policies, however, can take several years before being fully reflected in the frequency measures. Duration, on the other hand, is affected by workforce levels, management of the workforce, and geography.

The statewide interruption frequency for 2012, excluding major storms, was better than statewide performance in 2011 and better than the statewide five-year average. Every investor-owned electric company improved when compared with 2011 and out-performed their five-year averages. The one exception was National Grid which, although demonstrating improvement over last year, was slightly worse than its five-year average.

Statewide duration performance in 2012, excluding major storms, was equal to 2011 and generally consistent with the history of the past four years. Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Inc. (Con Edison), New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG), and Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation's (RG&E) performance improved slightly compared to 2011; while duration performance was slightly below 2011 levels for Central Hudson Gas and Electric, National Grid and Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc. Compared to the major electric companies' respective five-year averages, Con Edison's performance was similar to its own best results from the past five years, while the other companies' performance was about the same as their five-year averages.

With respect to stray voltage, staff reported that all utilities are in compliance with testing requirements of the Electric Safety Standards. In 2012, manual stray voltage testing was performed on approximately 4 million utility facilities statewide, with 1,893 stray voltage findings identified. Of the total stray voltage findings, 462 (25 percent) were at voltage levels of 4.5 V or higher. Findings on streetlights accounted for 309 (67 percent) of the conditions at voltage levels of 4.5 V or higher.

In addition to the testing program, utilities are required to respond to and investigate all shock reports received. Staff reported that in 2012 there were 185 calls from customers reporting shock

incidents that resulted in confirmed cases of stray voltage, constituting a 27 percent reduction from 2011, and the lowest shock incidents since 2009. Sixty eight incidents were caused by problems with utility facilities and 117 were traced to faulty customer equipment and wiring.

The utilities are also required to test annually streetlights along public thoroughfares for stray voltage, regardless of streetlight ownership. Stray voltage testing is generally a manual process performed using handheld devices. The Commission also requires that 12 mobile surveys be performed in New York City; two mobile surveys be completed in Buffalo; and one each in Yonkers, White Plains, Albany, Niagara Falls, Rochester, and New Rochelle. In areas served predominantly by underground facilities, utilities can use mobile testing instead of manual testing. Con Edison, National Grid, and RG&E all utilized mobile testing as a means of compliance.

Utilities are required to test annually all publicly accessible facilities for stray voltage and to inspect all of them at least once every five years. The inspection process involves visual inspection of electric facilities to identify any damage that may cause hazardous conditions or reliability concerns. Inspections are done by a combination of trained company employees and contractors. If an inspection reveals a deficiency, the safety standards require utilities to make all repairs necessary to eliminate the deficiency based upon its severity. Staff reported that all utilities are in compliance with the visual inspection requirements of the Electric Safety Standards for 2012.

Staff's 2012 Electric Reliability Report and Stray Voltage Report, when issued, may be obtained by going to the Commission Documents section of the Commission's Web site at [www.dps.ny.gov](http://www.dps.ny.gov) and entering Case Number 13-E-0148 in the input box labeled "Search for Case/Matter Number." Many libraries offer free Internet access. Commission orders may also be obtained from the Commission's Files Office, 14th floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500). If you have difficulty understanding English, please call us at 1-800-342-3377 for free language assistance services regarding this press release.