

STATE OF NEW YORK

# Public Service Commission

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## **PSC STRENGTHENS ELECTRIC SAFETY STANDARDS -Comprehensive Stray Voltage-Related Testing and Inspection Program-**

Albany, NY—12/10/08—The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today took action to strengthen and clarify requirements of the Commission’s electric safety standards. The Commission’s safety standards require electric utilities in New York State to test annually all of their publicly accessible transmission and distribution facilities for stray voltage and to inspect their electric facilities every five years.

“The Commission’s comprehensive and rigorous electric safety standards demonstrate our commitment to New Yorkers to ensure that utility services are provided as safely and reliably as possible,” said Commission Chairman Garry Brown. “New York stands at the forefront of using new technologies to detect and mitigate the occurrence of stray voltage and expanding its use in New York State to better safeguard the public.”

Chairman Brown continued: “The new modifications to the electric safety standards reflect experience and lessons learned over the past several years. The modifications strike the appropriate balance among the interests and needs of the utilities, ratepayers, and the general public.”

The term “stray voltage” means voltage conditions on electric facilities that should not ordinarily exist. These conditions may be due to one or more factors, including, but not limited to: damaged cables; deteriorated, frayed or missing insulation; improper maintenance; or improper installation.

The Commission invited comments in July concerning proposed modifications by Staff of the Department of Public Service to the Commission's electric safety standards. Upon a thorough review of the comments received, the Commission modified certain requirements of the electric safety standards.

### **Summary of Changes**

The Commission determined that all equipment used for stray voltage testing must be certified and able to reliably detect voltages of 6 to 600 volts. In the event of a finding on an electric facility or streetlight during testing for stray voltage, a utility will be required to further test for stray voltage on all publicly accessible structures and sidewalks within a minimum 30-foot radius of the point of a finding of stray voltage. The utility must make an area safe upon any finding of stray voltage.

The use of mobile survey testing technology by the utilities has been determined by the Commission to be an acceptable method of testing for compliance with the revised electric safety standards. Commencing in 2009, the Commission will require mobile survey testing for underground distribution systems in appropriate areas of cities with populations of 50,000 or more. Mobile survey testing for stray voltage detection on underground facilities is already in effect for the City of New York.

The intent of the inspection component of the electric safety standards is to ensure the utilities are checking all transmission and distribution facilities for safety and reliability concerns on a routine basis. If an inspection reveals a deficiency (hazard condition or other problem) whether related to stray voltage or otherwise, the Commission's safety standards require utilities to make all repairs necessary to eliminate the deficiency.

As part of the revised inspection process, the Commission established a common system to categorize deficiencies identified by utilities for repair. This process also establishes expected timeframes for repair based upon the severity of the deficiency. These changes will allow for

more uniformity and accountability for safety and operational repairs of electric facilities by the utilities.

Also, today's action by the Commission will require quality assurance activities to be performed independent of stray voltage testing and inspection activities. The Commission clarified that stray voltage testing and inspection requirements are to be performed on a calendar year basis.

In a related matter before the Commission today, Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc. filed a petition in November 2006 seeking permission to comport the annual requirement for stray voltage testing to a five-year cycle to coincide with the inspection program. The petition was denied.

The Commission will issue a written decision detailing the modifications to the electric safety standards. The decision in Commission Cases 04-M-0159 and 06-M-1457, when available, can be obtained from the Commission's [www.dps.state.ny.us](http://www.dps.state.ny.us) Web site in the Access to Commission Documents section of the homepage. Many libraries offer free Internet access. The Commission's decision also can be obtained from the Commission's Files Office, 14<sup>th</sup> floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500).