

Electric Utilities Critical To Disaster Recovery

By James C. Rogers, Director of Economic Development, Duke Power; President, Utility Economic Development Association

The recent devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma made us all painfully aware of the importance of electricity to our daily lives. After every disaster, electric utilities must adapt quickly to dangerous, demanding conditions in order to bring customers back online as quickly as possible and lay the foundation for renewed economic development in the affected region.

As a Duke Power employee and president of the Utility Economic Development Association, an industry-wide group of investor-owned utility economic developers, I am keenly aware of the key role utilities play in economic development after any disaster. Without electric power, the fabric of life is impossible to mend.

The first step in recovery is assessing damage to the electric infrastructure. Then, downed wires must be isolated and de-energized. Lights must be brought back on as quickly as possible. Power must be restored to hospitals and other critical facilities. Additionally, customers must receive information about electrical safety as fully and quickly as possible.

National Cooperation

A critical ingredient in restoring a power grid after a major disaster is cooperation from other electric utilities. This is why you may see convoys of service trucks and utility crews from non-affected utilities heading toward a devastated area immediately after disaster strikes. At Duke Power alone, we sent more than 1,400 people to assist Entergy with hurricane restoration in Louisiana and Mississippi. They brought along service and support units, equipment, portable showers, food, air mattresses, first-aid supplies, and other essentials. Our crews remained in the Gulf Coast region for more than seven weeks.

This type of cooperation is unusual in many industries, but not in ours. Working in affected utility service areas, these skilled specialists provided extra

resources to bring remaining retail and business customers back online. Although our employees often worked in 100-degree temperatures and slept in tents, they were committed to helping fellow utility workers get the lights back on.



Disaster Planning

Every electric utility in the country develops and maintains disaster plans that often dovetail with each other. They integrate electrical system restoration with other operational areas, and even contain plans for migrating to an alternate site when an existing facility has been destroyed or made unusable. The plans cover both residential and industrial customers, and have an impact on economic development since reliable power is critical to most industries.

Utility disaster recovery planners coordinate personnel from the various departments that may be called upon to respond to a disaster. This requires close internal coordination of all the departments' plans. Since every utility company has limited personnel, chances are good that several operating units will be named in more than one plan.

Restoring electricity to an area struck by disaster, either natural or man-made, is vital to bringing back a sense of normalcy, a key factor in disaster recovery. Utilities and their workers are proud to be an essential part of this important process.

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