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September 15, 2011

Dear Chairpersons and Members of the Labor, Public Safety, Planning and Development and Energy and Technology Committees:

I am sorry I cannot be with you at your September 19th meeting on the Storm Irene Preparation and Response Assessment. As the Town Manager of Hebron, I had firsthand experience dealing with the State and the utilities during this tropical storm.

On the Monday after the storm, 100% of our Town was out of power. On Tuesday, the large majority of the business district as well as public buildings had power and I was very surprised and pleased that this occurred so quickly. We had one school that was out of power, but this was brought up to full power within 24 hours after the other public buildings were up and running. On Wednesday, I was told by our CL&P municipal liaison that they had to pull the Hebron crews into Glastonbury, as Glastonbury still had major intersections without power, and this was a safety issue that needed to be taken care of immediately. I certainly had no qualms with this, as this affected a lot of people traveling throughout the area.

But what happened after that was it appeared that we were then forgotten and no one came back to Hebron. Our numbers changed a fraction of a percent, day by day, to the positive, but by the Saturday after the storm, 51% of the Town was still without power.

In the beginning, the Towns around us were in much worse shape, but very quickly their numbers began to change to the positive, and our numbers stayed stagnant. Needless to say, our residents were very frustrated, as they too could see on CL&P's maps that while our neighboring communities were receiving power back at a very fast rate, our Town remained at the same amount of customers out, as it was on Tuesday evening.

After calling the State and telling our Region 3 Coordinator that having 51% of our customers out of power by the Saturday after the storm was unacceptable, we began to receive some attention and they did work over the weekend to finish the work necessary to have most of our residents and businesses with power by Monday. We should not have had to wait that long to see some action.

Hebron's Municipal Liaisons were very helpful, but it was the follow through that was not happening, and that was not their fault. Having a Municipal Liaison did assist me with receiving information and getting out our concerns, but the person could only do so much. For the future, I would certainly encourage that CL&P continue the liaison program. For years, I have also encouraged AT&T to do the same, to no avail. As much as there were issues with power, there were also many problems with phones and phone lines, and I had no direct person to call with my concerns. Every utility company should have a municipal liaison, especially during emergencies, as now a days the utility poles are so interconnected, that a power company may not be able to work on a pole, until the telephone company comes in and vice versus. As municipal leaders, we need to have one contact person for each utility company to help us get through these emergencies.

The other frustration that our residents and I had was the maps that were put on CL&P's website. There was the general map that showed the amount of outage for each Town that would fluctuate up and down during the day. In speaking to our municipal liaison, she said that the numbers were not necessarily correct because the linesmen from other States did not know how to use the system. So my question is.....then why have the map up and running if it is inaccurate?

But the second interactive map was the worst. Customers could put in their addresses and it would tell them when their power would be back on based on that address. The problem was that the information was incorrect, therefore causing more frustration from our residents. Some people took time off from work thinking their power would go back on, and then it was another 2 days before they actually had power. That map caused more problems than it was worth, causing more and more customers to become angrier. If the public portion of a utility's website is not accurate, then do not have it on the website.

One thing that would be helpful to each Town Chief Executive Officer would be to know how their Town's grid interacts with other municipal grids, so that there is a working knowledge of how a specific Town's electrical power is brought back up. For example, in Hebron, we may have to wait until Glastonbury and/or Marlborough's backbone is up and running before we can see power come back on here. That would then help us to explain to our residents why they may not see trucks in Hebron, but our power problems are being worked on through another Town.

May I also share with you this conversation I recently had with an out of State linesman who I was speaking to while my husband and I were on vacation last week. Yes, he was called to Connecticut to work and I thanked him profusely for his time and energy on our behalf. He said he spent 6 hours per day sitting in a parking lot in another part of our State, waiting to be told what to do.....to no avail. He might work a few hours per day, but most of the time he did nothing and this has happened to him every time he has come to Connecticut to assist us. His view of the situation is that CL&P has all of these outside linesmen come in and then has no idea how to dispatch them, with no orderly plan on how to have the power come back on quickly and efficiently. This is a pretty sad statement of events, when we had all of these linemen come into our State, with nowhere for them to go, and Hebron sat for almost one week with 51% of our residents with no power.

I would also like to comment on our State Emergency Management teams. I felt that our Region 3 team did a great job for us. I know there was a lot of confusion on the first day with the disbursement of the water and food, but eventually things did work out.

We had closed our Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on Monday after the storm. Later in the week, we received an e-mail from CCM and the Council of Small Towns requesting that we open our EOC back up and have one person at the EOC that would be the direct link back and forth from the State and utilities. For a small town, this is impossible. We only have so many staff and volunteer members and our group was out straight. To now have a different person, other than the Chief Executive Officer, become involved with communications didn't make sense to us, and we did not open the EOC. Communication was flowing fine through me, while our Emergency Management Director took care of his other duties coordinating water and food supplies.

Thank you for the opportunity to give you my thoughts and concerns. If you need further information, please feel free to contact me at 860-228-5971, x122.

Sincerely,

**Bonnie L. Therrien
Town Manager**

**CC: Hebron Board of Selectmen
Senator Edith Prague
Representative Pam Sawyer**

