



**Testimony
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Before the Energy & Technology Committee
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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on behalf of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) relative to storm preparedness and response.

COST supports the following bills which are aimed at addressing concerns relative to storm response efforts:

- **SB-23, An Act Enhancing Emergency Preparedness and Response, which authorizes the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority to establish minimum standards of performance for electric and telecommunications utilities;**
- **HB-5544, An Act Concerning Storm Preparation and Emergency Response, which also establishes performance standards for electric and telecommunications utilities as well as create a micro-grid program; and**
- **SB-450, An Act Concerning Energy Conservation and Renewable Energy, which includes provisions requiring electric utilities to submit a plan to enhance infrastructure and resiliency**

COST recognizes that state agencies, municipalities and electric and other utilities were faced with the enormous challenge of responding to an unprecedented number of power outages and fallen trees following Storm Irene and Storm Alfred. To assist public officials in developing a framework for improving future response efforts, COST conducted a survey of member towns following Storm Alfred and identified the following issues:

Utility Response Efforts

Following Storm Irene, many of our member towns expressed frustration relative to the response efforts of the major electric utilities, identifying difficulties in 1) obtaining accurate information about restoration efforts, 2) coordinating tree and branch removal with local public works crews to clear major roads and intersections; 3) prioritizing power restoration in areas that serve vulnerable populations, such as nursing homes and hospitals; 4) prioritizing power restoration to business centers and 5) managing and dispatching utility crews in a timely manner. Based on the survey results, these issues continued to be a problem for many towns hard hit by Storm Alfred. At the same time, some towns gave the electric utility's positive marks for their response efforts following Storm Alfred.

- 40% of towns responding rated their electric utility's overall response efforts "Poor" following Storm Alfred.
- 60% of towns responding rated their electric utility's overall response efforts "Good", "Very Good"

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or "Excellent" following Storm Alfred.

Clearly, towns that had timely information about power restoration efforts, including when and where crews would be assigned to their area, had a much more favorable opinion about the utility's response efforts. Unfortunately, many towns felt "abandoned" by their electric utilities because they did not receive accurate, timely information, leaving them literally and figuratively in the dark.

Clearing Roadways and Intersections

Following Storm Irene, COST members expressed concern that utilities and state agency crews failed to clear critical roadways and intersections in a timely manner, jeopardizing the ability of residents to obtain food, shelter, health care and other critical services.

Coordinating Electric Utility and Local Work Crews

Following Storm Irene, many towns indicated that they had difficulty working with electric utilities in coordinating efforts between utility work crews and local public works crews.

Role of Municipal Liaisons

CL&P designated a municipal liaison in each community following Storm Irene in an effort to improve communication with towns during power restoration efforts.

- 50% of member towns indicated that their municipal liaison was "Extremely Helpful" or "Very Helpful".
- 41.7% of towns indicated that their municipal liaison was "Helpful" or "Somewhat Helpful".
- Only 4.2% indicated that their municipal liaison was "Not Helpful at all".

In additional comments provided by towns, several towns noted how effective the liaison was in improving communication between CL&P and town officials. However, some continued to indicate that their liaison was not able to obtain accurate information on the timing of restoration efforts or when and where crews would be assigned. In those towns where clear channels of communication were maintained, town leaders could coordinate with utility crews to expedite restoration efforts and clear roadways.

Prioritizing Areas for Power Restoration

- 96% indicated that they were able to work with their electric utility to prioritize areas for power restoration, such as nursing homes, hospitals, schools and business centers.
- Only 4% indicated that they were not able to work with electric utilities to prioritize restoration efforts.

Management of Work Crews

Town leaders across the state have applauded the efforts of linesman and other utility crew members who worked tirelessly to help restore power, telephone and cable lines. However, following Storm Irene, there were several comments questioning whether linesman and other restoration personnel, particularly out-of-state work crews, were managed appropriately so that they could be dispatched to sites more quickly and advised on how to begin or assist in restoration efforts.

Improvements in Response Efforts Following Storm Alfred

In response to the question, "Did the utilities take any steps following Storm Irene that improved response efforts following Storm Alfred:

- 43.5% of towns indicated "Yes"
- 56.5% of towns indicated "No"

Towns indicating that the utilities did take steps following Storm Irene to improve response efforts noted

in particular the appointment of the municipal liaison and the ability to coordinate utility crews with local public works crews to clear roads and downed wires.

State Agency Response Efforts

Some towns identified the following issues relative to state agency response efforts:

- **DOT Response** - Several noted that the state Department of Transportation (DOT) was slow in clearing routes and that (DOT) resources from other towns less impacted by storms should have been redeployed to needy towns.
- **Delivery of Supplies** – The response from state agencies in coordinating the distribution of supplies was slow and in some cases, towns were receiving mixed messages. One town suggested that the commodity distribution should be pre-staged before the storm.

COST and its member towns therefore support provisions in the bills which require electric and telecommunications utilities to meet performance standards, including appropriate staffing levels and a communications plan that will ensure that town leaders are able to coordinate restoration efforts more effectively to ensure that service is restored and critical roads and intersections are cleared more quickly. In addition, COST supports efforts to address the following:

■ Electric Utility Communication

- Develop a comprehensive communications outreach plan to improve coordination of restoration efforts with town officials, including the dispatching of crews to ground downed wires;
- Provide towns with emergency contact information to ensure that town officials can get in contact with utilities to ensure that crews are dispatched immediately to respond to dangerous or life threatening situations;
- Establish a centralized contact point for town officials to communicate with utility officials to better coordinate efforts between utility work crews and public works departments;
- Continue to utilize municipal liaisons to improve communication between town officials and electric utilities;
- Ensure that municipal liaisons have accurate and timely information on power restoration efforts to relay to towns;
- Provide accurate timeline for restoration efforts.

■ Utility Response Efforts

- Work with town officials to identify critical public safety service areas, such as fire or police stations as priority areas for restoration efforts, even if they are not in densely populated areas;
- Work with town officials to identify areas that serve vulnerable populations, such as elderly housing, as priority areas in restoration efforts, even if they are not in densely populated areas;
- Work with town officials to identify key access roads in small towns that are vital to obtain food, water and health care services or to evacuate residents;
- Improve coordination between assessing storm damage and beginning restoration efforts to that restoration efforts are not delayed;
- Maintain a data base of municipal priorities for power restoration rather than compile such data during each power outage.

■ Utilization and Management of Crews

- Following a storm event with significant power outages, immediately assign one line crew to each town to work with town officials to identify what needs to be done to render areas safe and to restore or repair power;.

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- Dispatch more "make safe" crews assigned immediately;
- Communicate directly with town officials regarding the number and location of crews assigned to a town;
- Maintain a visible presence in towns experiencing widespread power outages – many towns and residents were understandably frustrated when they did not see any crews or 1 crews were redirected after a short time in town;
- Better manage crews once they arrive on site, particularly out of state crews that must wait for direction;
- Enable liaisons to keep track of field crews directly through the use of GPS;
- Incorporate into any response plan procedures for employing sufficient staffing levels in the event of widespread outages, including customer service representatives and work crews.

■ **State Agency Response Efforts**

- Ensure that the state Department of Transportation (DOT) clears state roads in a timely manner, which many small towns depend on as major access roads;
- Redeploy DOT crews and resources from other towns less impacted by storms to harder hit towns;
- Pre-stage the distribution of commodities prior to the storm to ensure timely distribution;
- Develop best practices from regions that were successful in communicating with town officials and other emergency personnel and share with other regions.

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns. More information is available at www.ctcost.org