



# COUNTY OF HUNTERDON

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY



April 27, 2018

Dear Board of Public Utilities;

By way of introduction, my name is George F. Wagner, and I am the Director of Public Safety for Hunterdon County. I have been a County Employee for 38 years and have served as the Director of Public Safety since 2004.

My role as the Director of Public Safety is to supervise the Hunterdon County Department of Public Safety which consists of the County Communications Division (9-1-1), the Emergency Management Division, Office of the County Fire Marshal, Emergency Services Training Center, Homeland Security and the Division of Public Health. The mission of Hunterdon County's Department of Public Safety is to provide a wide range of preventative, protective, and emergency services aimed at maintaining the quality of life for the general public.

During my career, I have personally responded to many emergency situations including weather related events.

My submission in writing, and appearance here, is to personally testify to the response, or lack thereof, of our local electrical provider Jersey Central Power and Light (JCP&L), and continued lack of improvement or compliance with the recommendations previously cited in the 2012 BPU Report entitled **"PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF EDCS IN 2011 MAJOR STORMS"**.

An incident, such as a power outage, must be managed effectively to ensure minimum adverse impact to public safety. Mismanaged events can become large scale disasters. Citizens need to receive accurate and timely information and guidance in order to make informed decisions. Specifically, sheltering in place can only be sustained for a limited duration. Power outages in rural areas adversely affect heat, wells, refrigeration of food as well as food establishments and other businesses in the community that residents depend on.

While the storms were unique in many ways, the response of JCP&L was inadequate, uncoordinated, and a repeat of previous experiences.

JCP&L customer engagement was inaccurate and in some circumstances downright false.

Here are some specific examples;

JCP&L automated phone system kept calling Customers to advise they had been restored when they hadn't been.

JCP&L Estimated Time to Restoration (ETR) was not accurate nor updated. (During the storm on 3/7 it was determined by JCP&L at 10:00 a.m. that JCP&L would pull crews at 3:30 pm due to safety concerns however the ETR continued to reflect 11:30 pm that night)

Irate JCP&L Customers inundated County 911 and Administrative phone lines – County Staff were relegated into acting as JCP&L Customer Service Representatives taking focus away from primary Public Safety duties.

Establishing Priorities.... JCP&L leads everyone to believe they are a priority. (OEMs, Mayors, Citizens, Critical Infrastructures, Schools, all calling into someone.)

JCP&L Area Managers were receiving direct calls circumventing Chain of Command;

JCP&L lacks implementation of an Incident Command System (ICS) and principals;

Localized Strike Teams – County previously recommended localized response teams consisting of JCP&L, Forestry Crew, County Roads, Telephone/Cable Companies to quickly open roads for first responders. This recommendation was never implemented. JCP&L references a "Cut and Run" practice however in our experience this is selectively applied. There continues to be lack of road clearing because of territorial issues such as ownership of lines or poles. Roads that remain closed for long periods of time have an adverse effect on first responder response times. Especially, in a rural setting where responders are volunteers this added time can lead to fatalities.



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JCP&L Area Representative (Stan Prater) has not been present at a Freeholders Meeting during or after the storms. (Meetings were held on March 6<sup>th</sup>, March 20<sup>th</sup>, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, and April 17<sup>th</sup>)

These examples are similar to the previous recommendations cited in the 2012 report below.....

On December 14, 2011, the Board publicly issued the BPU Hurricane Irene Report, which detailed the results of Staff's preliminary investigation of the EDCs performance regarding Hurricane Irene. The BPU Hurricane Irene Report states at the hearings: "numerous people testified with the vast majority complaining about JCP&L's service. To a much lesser extent, complaints involved PSE&G or RECO."

The following is a summary of the most predominate complaints:

**#1 - Communications with mayors** by JCP&L: Many mayors, municipal officials and local offices of emergency management (OEMs) had an extremely difficult time reaching JCP&L to get information regarding restoration in their towns.

**#2 - Communications with the public** by JCP&L: Many customers could not contact JCP&L to get information regarding restoration of their service and automated company call backs were confusing.

**#3 - Estimated Restoration Times (ETRs)** provided by JCP&L were inaccurate or nonexistent.

**#4 - Prioritization of Restoration** by JCP&L of special needs customers or customers utilizing well water: these should be given priority restoration.

**#5 - Infrastructure** issues related to JCP&L's system design and/or maintenance and whether this increased the level of outages in the event.

**Flooding** of PSE&G and JCP&L substations, more specifically why were they built in flood areas, and that they should be moved to higher ground or flood proofed.

**#6 - Tree Damage** on the JCP&L distribution system and whether this was related to ineffective tree trimming practices.

Attached please find specific Hunterdon County Situation Reports, County Emergency Proclamation, and other pertinent reports and records to reflect the effects that the prolonged power outage had on the residents of Hunterdon County.

Thanking you in advance for the opportunity to submit these comments and experiences for your review.

Respectfully submitted,

*George F. Wagner*

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