

Comments on Sept. 8 Power Outage

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Joint Legislative Oversight Hearing

San Diego, California

October 26, 2011

- Good afternoon. My name is Don Robinson. I am the president and chief operating officer of Arizona Public Service. We are the largest and longest-serving electric utility in Arizona, with more than 1.1 million customers.
- Thank you for the opportunity to appear at this joint legislative oversight hearing regarding the power outage that affected customers in portions of California, Arizona and Mexico on September 8, 2011. We have been communicating openly with the Arizona Corporation Commission and our Arizona state officials since the first hours of the outage. We welcomed the invitation to appear here in California.
- I look forward to answering your questions today to the best of my ability. Before doing that, I would like to share three points that are critical to understanding the events of that day.
- The first point is that a comprehensive, accurate and useful analysis of the power outage will take time.
- The electricity grid has often been called the most complex machine ever built. Power is generated by a diverse network of generating facilities, transported thousands of miles over an intricate network of wires, and consumed by customers at any time and any amount of their choosing — and it all happens instantaneously.
- The outage on September 8th involved dozens of generating facilities, power lines and substations across multiple utility service territories. Creating a complete picture will require the collection and analysis of data from all the affected utilities and balancing authorities. No one entity has all the information. We need to exercise care so that the responses we provide today are not premature or incomplete.

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- The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the North American Electric Reliability Corporation have launched a joint inquiry. We are actively participating in that effort. We look forward to the disclosure and subsequent discussion of the results at the appropriate time.
- There are some things we do know about the outage, which leads to the second point I would like to share today. The outage was not caused by the actions of a single utility worker. This was an unfortunate early misperception that thankfully is being corrected.
- We have been forthcoming about the fact that APS employees were doing work at a substation in Yuma, Arizona, when the Hassayampa transmission line, which runs from the metro Phoenix area to Yuma, went out of service. However, the loss of the Hassayampa line — whether due to human error, mechanical failure, wildfires or storms — should not, and did not, interrupt service to customers as a single, isolated incident.
- The electricity grid is designed with multiple layers of redundancy specifically to prevent a single event from causing a large outage.
- When the Hassayampa line went out of service, no customers lost electricity. The system initially operated as designed. Over the next 11 minutes, however, a series of events across California, Arizona and Mexico occurred that culminated in the widespread loss of service to customers. A significant focus of the ongoing investigations will be the events and system conditions leading up to and during those 11 minutes.
- The final point I want to emphasize today is that the first priority for my company, as for all the organizations represented on this panel, is to keep the lights on. Reliable service is the heart of our business.
- When the outage occurred, we worked to restore power for our customers safely and quickly. Our first job was to get the Hassayampa line back in service, which we did in slightly less than an hour. We were then able to bring local Yuma generation back on-line, restoring power to customers as we went. All of our customers were back in service by approximately 9:30 p.m. that evening.
- We then turned our attention to learning the right lessons. All of us here today have a deep interest in understanding the precise causes and effects of this unfortunate event. Our particular interest is a practical one. Working collaboratively with our neighbors, we hope to use the lessons from this event to minimize the likelihood of a similar incident in the future and improve the service we provide our customers.

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