

STATEMENT OF LYNDA ZIEGLER
ASSEMBLY UTILITIES AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE
JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
ALHAMBRA CITY HALL
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2012

I. INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Bradford, Chairwoman Lowenthal and Members of the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee and the Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Preparedness. My name is Lynda Ziegler and I am Executive Vice President for Power Delivery Services for Southern California Edison. I am responsible for the transmission and distribution system that delivers power to our over 4.5 million customers as well as the call centers and many other aspects of our communications with our customers.

I recognize that the focus of this hearing and the primary interest of all participants today is the windstorm, so I just want to briefly highlight current information on the recent issues at the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. At no time did the leak at Unit 3 pose a danger to the public or our workers, and we will inspect all 19,400 tubes and have completed 13,000 so far, which will yield additional information in the coming weeks. We will continue to provide briefings on San Onofre to you and your staff in Sacramento as more information becomes available.

I am pleased to be able to tell you briefly about SCE's response to the November 30-December 1 windstorm, what lessons we have learned thus far, and how I think all of us can be better prepared for the next emergency that we know is coming. With me today is Lars Bergmann, Managing Director of the Distribution Business Line. Lars was on the ground in the San Gabriel Valley throughout the storm recovery and he and I will try to answer any questions you may have.

II. THE STORM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SCE SYSTEM

This storm hit the San Gabriel Valley in the overnight hours with hurricane wind gusts at and possibly above 100 miles an hour. The winds were unprecedented for these residential cities and communities. They took down thousands of large, mature trees – in many places falling into our wires and causing utility poles to break. Three-quarters of our customers in the San Gabriel Valley were without power for at least some period of time.

Our first concern in such situations is the safety of the public and our personnel. We received literally thousands of “wires down” calls during and right after the windstorm, and our policy was to give those calls top priority, sending our ground personnel out to be sure our conductors and wires are de-energized. Once we were confident that downed lines did not pose a serious threat, our storm managers decided that service restoration would have to begin at the affected substations, with crews working radially outward along the open circuits to assess damage, remove trees and other debris and then repair or replace wires, poles and transformers. We did prioritize circuits that included public agencies, including water, police and fire services. Thereafter, circuits were prioritized according to the number of customers served.

SCE has experienced many severe wind, rain and heat storms, as well as earthquakes. We are not strangers to outages affecting even more customers than this event did. But the hundreds of damage points, the complete shutdown of several substations and all the circuits they serve – this was a pattern of concentrated damage that was unprecedented for SCE. That is why immediately after the event we brought in consultants and talked to utilities with significant hurricane experience. We are learning from them why some of our outage management policies and customer communication systems that have served us well in major past emergencies did not work as effectively in this case.

But there is one fact I would not want to change: despite the thousands of manhours devoted to tree removal, securing and re-stringing electric lines, installation of over 200 new poles and restarting service for hundreds of thousands of customers – we did not experience a single serious injury to the public or to any of our personnel.

III. CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS DURING THE OUTAGE

SCE operates two customer call centers in Southern California. When an unplanned outage occurs, customers (and sometimes first responders) will call to report a problem. Thereafter, our Outage Management System routinely groups calls affected by the same problem. Once the source of trouble is identified, field personnel provide updates including their estimation of when the particular problem will be resolved and service restored. This information is electronically available to our customer service representatives in the phone centers, used by the interactive voice response system, and shown on our internet-based outage map.

In the case of this windstorm, our distribution system serving the San Gabriel Valley suffered massive damage overnight. This was not a collection of individual damage incidents occurring over a period of time but rather a total loss of power within a couple of hours and covering much of a 114 square mile area. Providing and updating restoration estimates for discrete groups of customers in such a circumstance was not possible. As a result, our electronic outage information was not accurate nor was it updated. This meant that our call center representatives, the interactive voice response system, and the website could not supply accurate and current outage information applicable to individual customers. This is why many of our customers have expressed dissatisfaction with the accuracy and timeliness of the information we supplied through our usual channels. I agree with them. We have learned from utilities in areas prone to this kind of area-wide damage that they disable their usual outage management systems and shift to outage and restoration reports that cover the entire affected area in more general – but more accurate -- terms. Should SCE experience another storm of this type, that is what we will do.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS WITH FIRST RESPONDERS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Throughout the recovery effort, Local Public Affairs Region Managers were engaged with local governments in the affected areas. They attended local government Emergency Operations Centers, visited impacted areas with local government elected officials and staff, communicated with local officials in person and through distribution of press releases. Unfortunately, these employees were using the same automated outage data with the problems I have just described.

We know that officials in some cities have expressed frustration with their ability to contact SCE to exchange information. We are planning for improved emergency communications with the elected officials and public works managers in the jurisdictions we serve, including added outage exercises and dedicated phone lines.

V. THE CPUC PRELIMINARY REPORT AND POLE ISSUES

The preliminary report of the staff of the California Public Utilities Commission was released just two days ago. It is critical of SCE's outage response in some areas in which we agree and in a number where we do not. We will have a detailed response shortly, pointing out what we regard as errors or unjustified conclusions. Today, I want to mention the report's conclusion that pole "overloading" caused a number of poles to fail during the storm. The staff relied on loading calculations that SCE supplied and that we know are subject to correction. More important, even if a given pole did not have the required safety factor, that condition may have had nothing to do with its failure. Wood pole design standards anticipate that even properly-loaded poles can fail when winds reach 100 MPH. We had many poles with safety factors that were far above the standard required, yet they failed in this storm. Furthermore, many of the failed poles had large trees fall into the conductors adjacent to the poles. This would create an enormous additional load on those poles sufficient to break a pole whether or not it met the loading standard. The staff report considers none of these facts.

In addition, you should understand that a great many of the wood poles in the SCE system (including many of the poles that broke in this storm) are "joint poles" which means that they are owned by SCE and one or more telecommunications companies that have put cables and other equipment on these poles. It is the responsibility of each attaching utility to be sure its attachments meet the safety factors stated in the Commission's General Order (GO) 95.

Others have speculated that the age of the poles might have been a factor. While it is true that SCE has an aging infrastructure, we have a major pole replacement program underway. Our spending for distribution wood pole replacements has increased by 20% since 2007. In addition, all SCE poles are visually and intrusively inspected on schedules approved by the CPUC. While we do not have all the data assembled, at least in the case of the sequential pole failures on Live Oak Road, some had been set in the mid-1960s but several were set in 1997.

Finally on the subject of poles, the CPUC staff preliminary report faulted SCE for not retaining all of the 200 or so failed poles. As Lars can more fully explain, to have met this after-the-fact requirement, we would have to have put retention of poles ahead of restoring service to our customers. We were operating in a dynamic situation and were, as you can imagine, very focused on safe and prompt restoration of the system. We were in frequent contact with CPUC staff and

complied fully with their instructions, including providing access to the poles as they were encountered in the field. We preserved poles to the extent reasonably feasible in the particular circumstances of this event. We have and will continue to cooperate fully with the CPUC in its investigation.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED

1. I have already mentioned the changes we will make to customer communications should we encounter another area-wide outage like this one. We are also looking at our outage plans and policies to be sure that they are tested not just for use in typical storm outages over large areas but also in storms with massive but concentrated damage to our system.
2. One very positive lesson learned was that although not fully deployed yet, Smart Meters provided an additional source of valuable and reliable information about which customers did or did not have power. When fully operational, Smart Meters will be an even more important tool in quickly diagnosing the nature and location of major outages.
3. We are exploring alternative means of communicating with our customers and improving call center technology and processes. We have expanded our social media to include not only Twitter but also Facebook.
4. As of January 19, 2012, SCE automatically contacts all Medical Base Line customers via phone, text, email or TTY when an outage occurs in their area. In addition, an interim process is in place to have field personnel go door to door to Medical Base Line customers impacted by an outage projected to last more than 12 hours. Work is currently being done to systemize this process.
5. We are speaking with local communities and agencies to see how we can better align our resources to assure customers are better served and informed. This includes first responders, city and town council leadership, public works officials, and community emergency response teams (CERTs). We are consulting these leaders on how best to implement regular update calls.

VIII. CONCLUSION

I can assure you that all of the men and women of SCE worked very hard to restore service and provide information and support to our customers during this difficult time. We were not able to meet our standard for accurate customer information because of the unique aspects of this storm. But we are committed to learning from this experience. Thank you.