

Emergency Planning, Preparedness, and Response

From Criticism to Praise

In 2010 and early 2011, Pepco Holding, Inc.'s operating companies (Atlantic City Electric, Delmarva Power and Light, and Pepco) experienced significant weather events that resulted in prolonged customer outages. While all three brands were affected, Pepco, in particular, experienced the brunt of the weather and its customers experienced a less-than-acceptable number and duration of outages. Immediately following the summer 2010 events, Pepco proactively engaged Davies Consulting to develop an after action report that evaluated the company's response to the outages, identified gaps, and included improvement recommendations. In early 2011, PHI, with Davies Consulting's support, launched the Emergency Restoration Improvement Project (ERIP), focusing on four key areas of improvement: Emergency Management, Planning & Analysis, Restoration Execution, and Customer & Community Engagement. The cross-functional ERIP team was tasked with implementing best-in-class restoration processes and procedures in each of those areas by the summer storm season (July 1, 2011).

Establishing a core team that involved key staff with unparalleled leadership qualities from across PHI and clearly communicating the importance of the effort to the entire organization, PHI officially launched the project in January 2011. From the project's inception, executives within the company consistently communicated to the project participants and the entire organization that improving emergency preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery was of paramount importance – and that failure to do so was not an option. Immediately, team members, with Davies Consulting's subject matter expertise, identified best practices related to: damage assessment; estimated times of restoration (ETRs); field crew and work management; customer, community, and government collaboration; restoration prioritization, communications; forensics analysis; and emergency management, including organizational structure, roles and responsibilities, training, plans, exercises and lessons learned. Next, the teams identified "quick-win" initiatives that could be built upon to implement best practices and provide both the teams and the company with tangible successes early in the project.

In a short period of time, the ERIP team was able to make significant improvements, including:

- Revising the incident management organizational response structure to meet Incident Command System (ICS) concepts;
- De-centralizing work and crew management functions to more effectively conduct damage assessment, manage and prioritize work, manage resources, and develop ETRs;
- Conducting extensive training (classroom, field, and ride-alongs) including, but not limited to: 70 damage assessor teams, 40 de-centralized dispatchers, 240 crew leads/guides (bird-dogs), 10 media overhead crews, and 275 second role Customer Service Representatives;

- Implementing improved technologies for damage assessment, order grouping changes with the Outage Management System, and dispatchers/crews on Mobile Data Terminals;
- Re-locating the company's Crisis Information Center to the regional incident command center to improve collaboration between all response groups and communication with stakeholders;
- Developing and launching a new ETR process to ensure timeliness and accuracy;
- Launching the use of off-site "Crisis Call Centers" during major events to eliminate/minimize busy signals;
- Engaging with communities to align restoration priorities;
- Launching a storm web portal providing customers with easy access to outage reporting and status checking, outage maps, and news;
- Launching a mobile app that allows customers to report and check status of outages; and
- Conducting the largest exercise in the company's history, involving nearly 10% of PHI's employees – 500 people in total across three states and the District of Columbia.

On August 28, 2011, these improvements were tested, as Hurricane Irene made landfall on the service territory, causing more than 220,000 customer outages in Pepco and more than 430,000 outages across all PHI companies. The company communicated with customers early and often, restored power quickly (more than 90% of customers were restored within two and a half days), provided accurate estimated times of restoration, and generally performed better than it had at any time over the previous year and a half. This improvement was noted by some of the company's harshest critics: "in key test, Pepco's reputation weathered the storm." The Washington Post, August 29, 2011. The ERIP project is not, however, merely a 6-month project. It will be ongoing, as Pepco continues to position itself as a leader in emergency response.