

Public Utility Commission of Texas

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News Release
Monday, June 14, 2010

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PUC rule strengthens infrastructure study **Storm hardening plans to reveal outage protection**

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) has approved a new rule requiring electric utilities to file storm hardening plans to reduce outages and limit infrastructure damage from weather-related events.

“This rule marks a big step forward,” said PUC Chairman Barry Smitherman. “Utilities in Texas must continue preparing themselves and the electric grid so that reliability before, during and after bad weather is maintained.”

Utilities are required to file their reports no later than May 1, 2011 and must include vegetation management plans, pole construction standards, post-storm damage assessment procedures and improvements in data collection.

The rule requires utilities to provide annual progress reports and a complete plan update every five years. A special provision regarding priority load service requires utilities to file plans and procedures to reduce the number of outages and reduce the length of outages if they occur.

In 2009 the Texas Legislature passed HB 1831, which directs electric transmission and distribution utilities to annually report to the PUC all storm hardening measures undertaken in areas susceptible to severe weather.

The PUC authorized a study of distribution system hardening by Quanta Technology. The company surveyed 26 utilities in the United States and reported that some utilities either have no storm hardening program or are at the early stages of development.

Quanta noted that power restoration costs from storm damage in Texas since 1998 have totaled \$1.8 billion. In addition to major hurricanes such as Rita and Ike in recent years, tornadoes, ice storms and heavy winds also caused major power outages.

The new rule applies to regulated investor-owned utilities outside the grid of the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) and regulated transmission and distribution utilities within ERCOT. It does not apply to municipal utilities and electric cooperatives.

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