



Brockton, Massachusetts
"City of Champions"
Linda M. Balzotti – Mayor

TESTIMONY OF
MAYOR LINDA M. BALZOTTI, CITY OF BROCKTON
TO
THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES
ON
NATIONAL GRID'S RESPONSE DURING TROPICAL STORM IRENE
Tuesday, Nov. 8th, 2011

Good evening. My name is Linda M. Balzotti, and I am Mayor of the City of Brockton.

I want to thank the Department of Public Utilities for holding these important hearings, and for choosing Brockton as a site. Unfortunately, due to the city's municipal election, I am unable to attend the hearing in person. Therefore, I respectfully submit these comments concerning National Grid's response to Tropical Storm Irene to the DPU for consideration.

During the last two years, the City of Brockton has had to deal with several natural disasters – from extreme flooding in March 2010, to record snowfall, tropical storms, and most recently a Nor'easter. Unfortunately, each of these incidents of extreme weather have given our city departments – from public safety and emergency management to parks and highways an opportunity to hone their response and communication policies and procedures to better service and inform our residents. Our strides in these areas have been hindered, to a degree, by the lack of planning and clear communication on the part of National Grid.

While I can understand that the volume of National Grid customers impacted by the storm was enormous, Tropical Storm Irene was not the first extreme weather event the company has had to respond to during the past year. Following the snow storm of December 26th, 2010, my staff and I spoke with representatives from

National Grid about their subpar response efforts, as well as issues that needed to be addressed and improved. National Grid assured us that changes would be made. It was an empty promise, based on the company's response to Tropical Storm Irene.

As writer George Santayana aptly said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." National Grid is repeating things at the expense of Brockton residents and those living across the Commonwealth. National Grid is the only electrical service provider operating in Brockton, and because of this, the appearance is that the company takes advantage of their position without consideration for the level of service they provide to the city and its customers.

To that end, routine maintenance of wires and tree limbs and branches is lacking. Due to this, power outages are exacerbated, creating a situation where thousands of customers are without power for a prolonged period of time.

National Grid's lack of preparedness placed undue strain on Brockton's already limited resources to provide services to residents, and effectively tied Brockton's hands and stunted our own storm response efforts. Hundreds of hours of public safety overtime was expended simply because National Grid could not respond quickly enough.

The utility company was not prepared for Tropical Storm Irene. There was not enough staff to handle the work in the field to restore power, nor was there an appropriate number of personnel to provide a base level of customer service to residents calling for updates.

There was also a lack of coordination in the days that followed the storm. National Grid representatives could not provide a clear picture of where their crews were or what their restoration plans were.

During Tropical Storm Irene, I felt as if National Grid misled municipal officials about the amount of coverage and personnel they had available. We were told 65-70 trucks were stationed in Raynham and ready to respond to outages or issues related to the storm in the Brockton area. Those trucks were there, but not to respond to Brockton which had as many as 27,000 households without power following the storm.

These outages impacted both residential and commercial customers. The most egregious were two elderly complexes that were left without power for an extended period of time.

Each day, National Grid would hold phone calls with officials from impacted communities. These calls were not productive. In a word, they were patronizing. National Grid representatives were unable to answer questions with specific details that we, as officials, could relay to staff and residents.

While the company's communication with officials was not satisfactory, their ability to disperse relevant and accurate information to customers was also not effective or efficient. Residents sought out information from all other channels, including government offices which had little more detail to offer.

It is clear from National Grid's response to the most recent weather-related event over Halloween weekend that few changes have been made since Tropical Storm Irene.

I ask the DPU to protect the residents of my City and the Commonwealth by requiring National Grid to address the staffing and maintenance deficiencies that result in an inability to restore power after a weather-related event in a timely manner.

Again, thank you for listening and allowing me the opportunity to provide this testimony.