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Executive Director  
Connecticut Council of Small Towns  
Before the Energy & Technology Committees  
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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on behalf of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) relative to utility response efforts to recent storm events.

Following severe storm events in 2011, utilities implemented many measures to improve storm response and restoration efforts, including developing communication outreach plans, identifying critical facilities and vulnerable populations to prioritize service, hardening infrastructure and trimming trees to prevent downed wires, responding to public safety issues with single access roads in smaller communities, and improving the overall coordination of restoration efforts with local officials.

Given these “lessons learned”, town officials were very disappointed in the utility response efforts to the recent storm in late October and raised the following concerns:

**Utility Response Efforts**

Although town officials recognize that restoring power to densely populated areas and major intersections is and always has been a top priority, concerns were raised in several small towns that Eversource failed to respond to situations such as downed power lines which posed a direct danger to residents. In some cases, downed power lines made critical access roads impassable, jeopardizing the ability of residents, including vulnerable populations, to access health care or obtain needed supplies.

**Communication**

Many towns indicated that they were very frustrated with the lack of communication between Eversource and local officials and responders, stating that there were no clear channels of communication. Calls to Eversource personnel identified as contact points went unanswered. As a result, town officials were unable to provide critical information to residents and businesses regarding restoration efforts and timeframes for restoring power. Moreover, local officials had no way of communicating to Eversource about situations involving critical facilities, intersections, roadways or other issues that posed a danger or jeopardized the safety of vulnerable populations. In addition, the lack of communication made it impossible to coordinate clean-up efforts with local public works departments, who could not begin clearing



roads of debris because they had no idea when utility work crews would be available to ground wires.

### **Municipal Liaisons**

Although many towns indicated that they had positive relationships with municipal liaisons assigned by Eversource they indicated that, in many cases, the liaisons did not have any information or could not provide any information to them regarding restoration times and the coordination of restoration efforts.

### **Outage Maps**

Many town leaders and residents were frustrated with the information they were able to obtain from the utility's website, particularly the outage maps, because the information conflicted with what they were told by work crews or by customer service representatives or what was reported on the news.

### **Management of Work Crews**

Several town officials pointed out that work crews were not managed properly or dispatched to sites quickly enough. It appears that crews were dispatched to areas with widespread power outages. However, priority should be given to situations that pose life safety issues regardless of the number of outages in the area.

I have included some examples of input received from towns relative to these issues below.

COST and its member towns stand ready to work with lawmakers and public officials to assist in developing recommendations to address these issues. Based on the preliminary input of our small towns, COST recommends that policymakers require Eversource and other power utilities to adhere to the following protocols:

- 1) Ensure that "Make Safe Crews" are dispatched to respond to life threatening situations involving downed wires and other issues and that such efforts are coordinated with local officials, public works crews, and first responders;
- 2) Prepare and continuously update a communications outreach plan to improve coordination of restoration efforts with town officials, including the dispatching of crews to ground downed wires;
- 3) Ensure that local officials are provided with emergency contact information to guarantee that town officials can get in touch with utilities to dispatch crews to immediately respond to dangerous or life threatening situations;

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- 4) Establish a centralized contact point for town officials to communicate with utility officials to better coordinate efforts between utility work crews and public works departments;
- 5) Include key access roads which are vital to the ability of residents to obtain food, water, medical supplies and health care services or to evacuate dangerous areas as top restoration priorities in addition to facilities that provide services to vulnerable populations, such as hospitals and nursing homes;
- 6) Employ sufficient staff to ensure adequate response in the event of widespread outages, including customer service representatives and work crews.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

#### **Examples:**

In one small town in Northwestern Connecticut, there were 3 locations with live wires on the ground. One was burning the asphalt in the road and another was actually burning the pole. The pole eventually burned through and the transformer crashed to the road. Volunteer firefighters and later public works crews spent many hours standing watch at both sites. Attempts to contact Eversource to kill the power were unsuccessful and voice mail boxes were full.

Blocked roads in a small town in Northwestern Connecticut involved elderly and infirm residents were not addressed in a timely manner. Although crews in the area were asked for help from public works foreman, the crews were reassigned to another area and the roads were closed for an extended period. When the PW Foreman checked on road opening statuses and when some first responders called Eversource, the road status on record was either inaccurate or not recorded as a problem. We believe this indicated that the reporting system must have been overwhelmed or was staffed by untrained personnel.

Another municipal official indicated that the system for notifying customers when power would be restored and the ability of customers to log an outage failed miserably. There were people who looked on the website and it showed that they had power when they did not. They could not notify Eversource that their power was not on. For some time it seemed that there was not one truck working in the area.

In a community in Northeastern Connecticut, Eversource was contacted by the Town Manager and a formal request was made to have an EOC liaison report to assist in the coordination

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efforts. Follow up calls were made to ensure a response to our town would be made and not just telephone support from a remote location. After some additional follow up calls and prompting, a representative from Eversource did respond to town and worked directly with the Emergency Manager. However, the Eversource liaison unable to provide the town with updates. Eversource had difficulty utilizing software and could not access emails and their system. Although only two roads were closed for an extended period, one resident in this area did have a cardiac arrest. Although Fire, EMS personnel and police officers were able to gain access to the patient, the road closure clearly jeopardized this individual's life.

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