



Hamden Alliance for Trees
Diane Hoffman
Convenor
190 Wilmot Road
Hamden CT 06514
203 387 1695
Hamdentrees@gmail.com



8 September 2020

Commissioners Marissa Gillett, John Betkoski III, Michael Caron
Public Utilities Regulatory Authority

Chairs Norman Needleman, David Arconti
Members Connecticut Committee on Energy and Technology

Storm Isaias was not an Act of God!

On Thursday, August 27th at the forum of the Energy and Technology Committee of the CT General Assembly in Hartford, Eversource CEO Jim Judd proclaimed that storm Isaias was an act of God. Hamden Alliance for Trees (HAT) begs to differ. This storm was not an act of God. This storm was a result of human failure to heed the scientists who have warned for decades that fossil fuels contribute to climate change and thus ever [increasingly violent storms](#)¹, flooding, drought, wild fires, heat waves and more.

The comments by Eversource officials defending their performance and blaming “trees, trees, trees” for the destruction that resulted on August 4th, continues the utilities’ refusal to acknowledge the true causes of these storms. Through their vegetation management plans and their capital improvement projects like erecting new, higher poles they are keeping us tied to fossil fuel electric power. They need to acknowledge their role in creating our climatic problems.

Their determination to blame our trees is consistent with their goal of removing every tree that might possibly fall on their electric lines, lowering their operating expenses while increasing their revenue from the increased air conditioning that ratepayers will need. Natural cooling is one of the important services trees provide.

During the hearing, there was much discussion of why so many trees came down. Both Eversource and UI pointed to the recent droughts and the diseased and pest infested trees in their service areas. One would think it would have been a top priority to remove these trees, but NO! dead and diseased trees were routinely left standing while healthy trees were being removed. At one point Hamden had a list of over 200 trees that had been reported to UI for removal but were ignored.

UI reported to the Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) that statewide in 2016 11,043 trees were removed by the utilities. Only 703 (6.4%) were classified as hazard trees. The

1 <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/08/climate-change-is-causing-more-rapid-intensification-of-atlantic-hurricanes/>

rest, 10,340 trees, were NOT hazardous trees and should not have been removed! In 2018, UI reported removing 2,267 hazardous trees and 4,522 non-hazardous trees. Shortly before he retired, Dave Goodson, UI's tree manager testified to PURA that the health of a tree is not a consideration when deciding to prune or remove a tree.²

Trees are known to support each other when growing in groups. Unwarranted pruning and removal actively weakens the tree system, contributing to the problems in violent weather. Trees on the edges of forests suffer the most damage. The utility companies should be required to replace every tree removed with two healthy trees.

Just before he retired, Chris Donnelly, Connecticut's long time State Forester, testified before PURA about storm damage.³ He noted that the weight of winter snow and ice does cause limbs to break, sometimes damaging wiring. Some pruning may reduce that. But major wind events like hurricane Isaias and the more recent tornadic event on August 27th illustrate the limits of what pruning can do. As Donnelly and the recent storms both testified, no tree policy is going to protect us from that sort of damage.

The climate changes that are already happening and will continue to happen will bring more frequent and more intense storms. We have seen that the current utility programs are not working to provide resilience and reliability. Indeed, by their design they cannot work. In fact they make Connecticut less livable and uglier. It is time to try better options.

It is time for both legislative and administrative action. Action to reform utility vegetation management practices so they consider the environmental consequences and are in fact both more effective and less costly. Actions like urgently advancing a program of undergrounding our wires so they will be less vulnerable. Actions like encouraging wind and solar and distributed networks. We call on both PURA and our State government to act promptly.

Sincerely,
Diane Hoffman
Ralph Jones
Hamden Alliance for Trees

2 PURA 2019 Biennial Report to the General Assembly Concerning its Review of Each Electric Distribution Company's Vegetation Management Practices, May 17, 2019, Docket 19-01-25 pp. 33-34.

3 Transcript of hearing, Docket 18-12-25, June 23, 2020, pp. 131-134.