



Review Faults Vegetation For June Central Ohio Power Outages

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Increased vegetation management and enhanced dispatcher training are a few of the next steps following an after-action review of widespread power outages that hit Columbus this summer.

Those were the takeaways from a presentation from PJM Interconnection staff to members and stakeholders Thursday as they unpacked the dayslong outage that at its peak saw the company cut power to 250,000 customers.

The outages the week of June 13 came after a severe storm was followed by a heat wave that taxed the grid, prompting the utility to cut power to prevent further damage.

During a presentation for PJM's Operating Committee, staff characterized the situation as unprecedented in the transmission organization's region.

Their summary of recommendations, which are based on AEP's own internal review, are that the utility:

- Improve vegetation management to prevent transmission lines from sagging and making contact.
- Review tools used by dispatch staff to evaluate events with the potential for cascading outages.
- Enhance training provided to dispatch staff to include simulations with multiple overloads and multiple potential cascading conditions.
- Provide additional clarity and enhance decision-making guidance for pre-contingency load shedding due to potential cascading conditions.

AEP spokesman Scott Blake in response said the company remains "committed to a thorough evaluation" of June's events.

"We have worked cooperatively with PJM throughout this process and are putting in place preventative measures to help reduce the impact of severe weather events on our system in the future," he said.

He said highly loaded transmission lines sag during high load events. The lines in question sagged on June 12 but did not contact any vegetation that day. But the severity of the June 13 storm displaced trees, leading those sagging lines to make contact and cause outages, he said.

"Since June, AEP has enhanced its vegetation management practices in the Columbus area and is using advanced laser aerial evaluation (LiDAR – Light Detection and Ranging) and expanded visual inspection of the transmission lines delivering power into Columbus to reduce the potential impact of future severe storm events on our system," he said. "We have fixed any damage or hazards we discovered.

"Additionally, we are working closely with Columbus-area community leaders to develop better communications and community support plans to help customers when severe weather or other unforeseen events disrupt service in the future," he added.

The Ohio Consumers' Counsel, the Ohio Poverty Law Center and Pro Seniors Inc. have pushed for a formal investigation by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio into the outages – calls AEP has urged the PUCO to reject.

OCC spokeswoman Merrilee Embs said the office appreciates PJM for providing the public more detail about the event but said the presentation "raises more questions about the cause of the outages than it could answer."

"Considering that AEP has been charging consumers for tree-trimming and AEP has a duty to provide reliable electric service, there should be more answers for the public," she said. "Five months ago, we sought answers by filing a motion for an investigation, but the PUCO has yet to open a case in response. The AEP outages that imperiled so many Ohioans should not become 'out of sight, out of mind.'"

AEP has yet to release its findings publicly, but company leaders previously told the PUCO they believed there was nothing they could have done differently to handle the situation.

PUCO staff have also launched their own review of the occurrence, which remains ongoing.

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