

DOE Questions Utility Reliability; IBEW Drives Point Home

Following the release of a Department of Energy report questioning the reliability of the electric utility system, IBEW representatives expressed the union's strong views on the growing threat to consumers and workers at three agency-sponsored field meetings.

The report called "Interim Report of DOE Power Outage Study Team," from the U.S. Department of Energy, concluded that as economic changes are made in the power industry, some utilities have cut spending on infrastructure and other factors that affect reliability. At the same time, regulatory policies and technology have not caught up with the changes, and management responsibility for reliability has been extended to many more industry players. The Power Outage Study Team (POST), made up of academic members and DOE experts, further states that with increased reliance on electricity and peak demand, the infrastructure for reliability assurance has diminished.

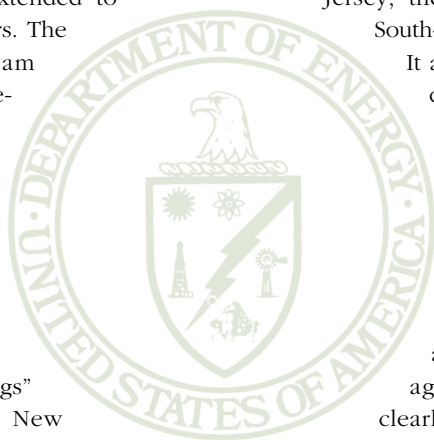
At "stakeholder meetings" held in San Francisco, New Orleans and Newark, New Jersey, in late January 2000, IBEW spokesmen relayed the experience of front line workers in the industry. Their message to DOE was: Nobody's minding the store on system reliability. Jack McNally, Business Manager of Local 1245, Walnut Creek, California, represented the IBEW at the San Francisco meeting. Seventh District International Representative Jon Gardner spoke at the New Orleans meeting. Jim Hunter, President of Local 1900, Washington, D.C., delivered the union's message in Newark. All discussed the cutbacks in personnel that have

taken place across the nation as the utility industry undergoes restructuring. They also stressed that a growing shortage of trained utility workers will play havoc with the system's ability to cope with routine maintenance, let alone respond during severe weather or other crises.

The POST report studied outages that occurred in New York City, Long Island, New Jersey, the Delmarva Peninsula, the South-Central states and Chicago. It also looked at the significant disturbances that occurred in New England and the Mid-Atlantic area.

According to the report, reliability measures not only the extent of the outage, but also the ability of the system to avert or recover from an outage. The level of reliability clearly depends on the redundancy of the system and the availability of generation reserves, both of which exist at a sufficient level when there is good long-term planning. Responsibility for planning has become distorted during the electric power industry's deregulation, and planning has become inadequate.

Press releases about the appearances of Brothers McNally, Gardner and Hunter, as well as the full text of their public statements, can be found on the IBEW's web site, www.ibew.org. The DOE report can be found on the POST web site, <http://tis.eb.doe.gov.gov/post/>.



WISCONSIN PASSES

RELIABILITY LAW

A Wisconsin law passed in October 1999 gives electric utility union members in that state some of the country's best legal employment security protections in cases of ownership transfer. The statute, called Reliability 2000, requires that the new employer must meet specific union contract conditions regarding offers of employment, wage retention, fringe benefit continuance and maintenance of work conditions. Other provisions of the law provide protections for utility workers affected by the state law creating a separate transmission company.

The landmark legislation was passed with the help of an unconventional alliance of various stakeholders, including IBEW Local 2304 in Madison, the Utility Workers Coalition, Customers First! Coalition, Energy Wisconsin, a coalition of large holding company utilities and the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO.