

**Testimony of Kevin Burke  
Chairman and CEO of Consolidated Edison Company of New York  
Before  
The Standing Committee on Energy  
and  
The Standing Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions  
New York State Assembly  
September 28, 2006**

Good morning Chairman Tonko, Chairman Brodsky, and other distinguished members of the New York State Assembly. My name is Kevin Burke. I am the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Con Edison. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committees today on the September power outage in Westchester County, which was caused by the remnants of Tropical Storm Ernesto, and to update you on the power outage in Long Island City that occurred this past July.

First, I would like to thank the Westchester County Office of Emergency Management, the local fire departments, the police departments, and the utilities and contractors that assisted us in meeting the challenge of restoring service to our customers. I also would like to thank our customers for their patience.

The first part of my testimony will focus on the outage in Westchester County caused by the remnants of Tropical Storm Ernesto.

## **WESTCHESTER COUNTY: TROPICAL STORM ERNESTO**

At 11:00 p.m. on August 31, Hurricane Ernesto made landfall in North Carolina. By September 1, it had been downgraded to a tropical depression bringing with it significant rainfall that covered much of the Mid-Atlantic region.

Based on reports from the National Weather Service and our own meteorological contractor, the storm was initially predicted to pass well west of our area into eastern Ohio. Sustained winds were forecast to be in the range of 15 to 25 miles per hour, with gusts along coastal Westchester predicted to be as high as 30 to 35 miles per hour. Based on the weather forecast, we expected approximately 7,000 customers to be affected by the storm.

### **Storm Preparation**

In preparation for the predicted storm, the company undertook several important steps.

On Thursday, August 31, we began storm preparations with a premobilization conference call. We held a second call to update our planning efforts on the morning of Friday, September 1. It was at this time that Con Edison declared a category 1 event, based on weather forecasts and the company's storm classification matrix. We use the storm classification matrix to estimate possible damage from a storm and determine staffing levels for the safe restoration of any customers who lose power as a result of a storm.

### *Electric Operations*

On Friday, September 1, we scheduled the following crews for the 24-hour period on Saturday, September 2: 35 troubleshooters, 58 overhead linemen, 18 ladderline personnel, 54 line clearance personnel, and 8 damage assessors for a total of 173 people. Our normal staffing for a Saturday is 27 people.

### *Customer Operations*

Our Customer Operations Call Center also prepared for the storm. On a normal Saturday, our call center is staffed with eight customer service representatives between the hours of 12:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., 67 customer service representatives between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., and 24 representatives between 5:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. During a typical Saturday 24-hour period, our call center experiences approximately 18,000 general customer calls and 900 emergency calls.

Because a category 1 storm was expected, customer operations anticipated the volume of emergency calls to increase. On Friday, in preparation for the storm, we scheduled for Saturday 84 customer service representatives to be on duty from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and 24 representatives to be on duty from 5:00 p.m. to midnight. We knew that if we needed additional customer service representatives after 5:00 p.m., we could ask the customer service representatives, who worked between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., to extend their shift.

### *Mutual Aid*

In preparing for the storm, beginning on Thursday, August 31, Con Edison also participated in mutual aid calls with other utilities from the Mid-Atlantic region, other parts of New York State, and New England. These calls were conducted to determine the availability of utility and contractor mutual aid throughout the region and to monitor the progress of the storm. Mutual aid calls continued throughout the week and weekend, concluding on Monday, September 4.

### **Mobilization During the Storm**

#### *Weather*

Rather than moving west, as forecasted, Ernesto moved east and slowed down for approximately 18 to 20 hours over Westchester County, dropped nearly two inches of rain, and had sustained winds of approximately 30 miles per hour and gusts up to 48 miles per hour. By 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, 29,700 of our customers in Westchester County had lost electric service.

#### *Tree Damage*

The storm's sustained high winds and soaking rains over an 18 to 20 hour period toppled mature trees and tore off large tree limbs throughout Westchester County. The fallen trees and tree limbs resulted in massive damage to the Westchester overhead electric system. Ernesto caused more than 1,000 downed trees and large tree limbs. This tree damage caused more than 2,300 high-voltage primary and low-voltage secondary wires to come down, and more than 100 fallen or damaged utility poles. The fallen trees and limbs also damaged approximately 70 transformers. As a result of the downed trees and limbs and

the resulting damage to our system, approximately 76,000 customers lost electric service in Westchester County.

### *Electric Operations*

On Saturday, it became clear that the storm was causing more damage than we had anticipated. Therefore, additional personnel were called in to respond to the actual damage. For the 24-hour period on Saturday, September 2, we had increased our staffing to a total of 294 people. The crews included 35 troubleshooters, 78 overhead linemen, 44 ladderline personnel, 56 line clearance personnel, and 81 damage assessors and site safety personnel.

For the 24-hour period on Sunday, September 3, we more than doubled our staffing from the day before to 660 people. The crews included 35 troubleshooters, 130 overhead linemen, 68 ladderline personnel, 98 line clearance personnel, and 329 damage assessors and site safety personnel.

For the 24-hour period on Monday, September 4, we further increased our field staff to 779 people, consisting of 42 troubleshooters, 210 overhead linemen, 136 ladderline personnel, 112 line clearance personnel, and 279 damage assessors and site safety personnel.

For the 24-hour period on Tuesday, we had 1,151 field staff on duty. They were 42 troubleshooters, 362 overhead linemen, 180 ladderline personnel, 114 line clearance personnel, and 453 damage assessors and site safety personnel.

On Wednesday, September 6, for the 24-hour period we had staffed 1,098 people: 42 trouble shooters, 380 overhead linemen, 196 ladderline personnel, 116 line clearance personnel, and 364 damage assessors and site safety personnel.

For the 24-hour period on Thursday, September 7, Con Edison utilized a total of 839 people. This number included 38 trouble shooters, 360 overhead linemen, 184 ladderline personnel, 116 line clearance personnel, and 141 damage assessors and site safety personnel.

#### *Customer Operations*

On Saturday, September 2, the call volume increased during the storm and it became apparent that some customers were experiencing long wait times and busy signals. In response, we increased the number of customer service representatives on duty. From Saturday, September 2, through Monday, September 4, the call center focused exclusively on emergency calls from customers and stopped taking general calls.

On Saturday, September 2, 84 customer service representatives were on duty from 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., and 89 representatives were on duty from 5:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m.

On Sunday, September 3, we had 30 customer service representatives working between 12:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., 98 customer service representatives between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., and 108 representatives on duty between 5:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m.

On Monday, September 4, 33 customer service representatives were on duty from 12:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., 133 customer service representatives were on duty between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., and 55 representatives between 5:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m.

On Saturday, September 2, Customer Operations received more than 32,000 emergency calls, 36 times more than normal. The two periods in which customers received busy signals were Saturday, September 2, between 1:30 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., and Sunday, September 3, between 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Seventy-three percent of those customers called back and got through.

#### *Mutual Aid Requests*

As I previously indicated, the company began planning for the storm, including the possibility for needing mutual aid, on Thursday, August 31. Our own crews and crews from other utilities, who assisted us through the mutual aid program, worked tirelessly throughout this storm. We sought assistance from Mid-Atlantic and New York State utilities, and received crews from Orange and Rockland Utilities, Allegheny Power, and National Grid. A number of utilities allowed contractor crews, who worked for them, to come to Westchester to assist us in restoring customers to service. These contractor

crews were provided by Welsbach, Lewis Tree, Utility Lines Construction, Asplundh, and Hawkeye. All were critical in restoring power to our customers.

Unfortunately, because the storm also damaged the systems of our neighboring utilities in the Mid-Atlantic region and New York State, many other utilities and contractors were unable to provide us with additional crews immediately because they were busy restoring their own customers.

On Sunday, September 3, beginning at 7:00 a.m., mutual aid crews joined Con Edison resources in the restoration efforts. In addition, as they became available, we were able to redirect resources from other parts of the company to assist with the restoration efforts in Westchester County.

#### *Communication with Municipalities*

Throughout the storm, we took several steps to keep municipalities informed of our restoration efforts. We maintained dedicated phone lines for municipal officials to facilitate providing information to local governments. We also sent company representatives to act as municipal liaisons to towns and villages affected by the storm, including New Rochelle, Rye, Harrison, Mamaroneck, White Plains, Mount Vernon, and Scarsdale. We held daily teleconference briefings for municipal leaders, county leaders, and local fire and police departments.

In addition to the daily conference calls we held with county and municipal officials, we staffed the Westchester County Emergency Operations Center and its “60 Control” emergency services dispatch center with Con Edison representatives 24 hours a day. These communication channels helped to establish restoration priorities and ensured that public safety and critical infrastructure concerns were addressed.

#### *Customer Outreach and Restoration*

We dispatched customer outreach advocates to various locations within the affected areas of the county to provide information to customers, answer questions, and distribute storm emergency brochures in both English and Spanish. We had customer outreach advocates assisting with the distribution of ice in White Plains, Rye, Yonkers, New Rochelle, and Armonk. We publicized information about dry-ice distribution locations and pick up times to customers through local media, municipal officials, and customer service representatives.

All customers were restored by Thursday at midnight. While some customers endured outages of five to six days, almost half of our customers were restored on Saturday and Sunday, and two-thirds were restored by Monday.

#### **Con Edison Response Following the Storm**

We are taking several steps to improve our storm preparedness and response by enhancing our customer service system, improving our outreach efforts to customers and

municipalities, and reducing the number of customers affected by storms by enhancing our tree-trimming program.

### *Customer Operations*

To address problems with our customer service system, we have taken significant steps to increase the capacity of our telephone lines to our call center. By the end of this week, we plan to add 92 new telephone lines to increase our call capacity, bringing the total number of lines to 529. An additional 100 telephone lines are planned to be installed by the end of October. This increase in available telephone lines will reduce the number of customers who experience a busy signal.

On Friday, September 22, we modified our automated system for self-service applications, which is intended to make it easier and faster for customers to report an electric outage. This system allows customers to report an outage without speaking to a customer service representative. We estimate the modified system will reduce the time to report an outage by 90 seconds, cutting the time in half. In addition, customers who use this system will free up lines more quickly and those lines will be available for other customers. And, we continually work to provide more accurate and useful information to customers, including restoration times.

### *Outreach to Municipalities*

By the end of this year, the company plans to meet with representatives from the municipal governments in Westchester County to enhance our coordination and communication with them during emergency situations.

### *Tree Trimming*

The vast majority of the outages during this event was caused by downed trees and tree limbs. An effective way to reduce the number of customers affected by storms is to adopt an enhanced tree-trimming program. Beginning in January, we plan to increase the tree-trimming clearances above and around our wires. We generally trim trees on a three-year cycle throughout the county. The current policy is to trim 10 feet above and six feet below and to the side of all primary wires. By increasing our tree-trimming clearances to 15 feet above and 10 feet below and to the sides of wires, we expect to reduce the number of customers who lose power in storm situations and help expedite restoration of customers that do lose power. While increasing clearances will not reduce the number of outages caused by downed trees, it will reduce the number of outages caused by falling limbs and wind.

### **LONG ISLAND CITY**

I would now like to give you a brief overview of our progress in rebuilding the Long Island City network. Beginning on July 18, Con Edison began to experience outages in our Long Island City network. Since the last customer was restored on Tuesday, July 25, Con Edison has worked to rebuild the damage to the infrastructure in this area.

On July 29, I appointed a vice president to lead the team that is rebuilding this network. More than 100 employees and contractors are currently working to rebuild the damaged network. The team directs engineering resources, logistics, operations, and construction coordination.

To date, we have made significant progress. All temporary shunts that were laid to expedite the initial restoration to the area have been removed. As of August 17, all 52 temporary generators were removed. We have completed the enlargement of 87 service boxes. These service box modifications are needed to accommodate the new cable being installed, which in some cases is twice the diameter of the cable it is replacing. In addition to these changes, we are replacing 70 transformers and adding additional transformers to the network. Finally, we have replaced 348 secondary mains.

We have opened two field offices at 28-40 Steinway Street, near 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and 46-14 Queens Boulevard. The offices have personnel available to help our customers with filing claims and answering questions about the rebuilding of the Long Island City network. Customers can obtain claims forms at these field offices.

Earlier this week, we submitted a filing to the Public Service Commission regarding the Long Island City power outage. This filing addresses the company's emergency preparedness, actions to restore our customers' service, and communications during the events. It is not the company's report of its comprehensive study of the Long Island City

network outage event. We anticipate issuing that report on October 12. It will, among other things, examine the causes and identify measures to strengthen the reliability of our network system, including the Long Island City network. Our report will include proposals for addressing the causes of the event, enhancing network reliability, improving secondary system monitoring, reviewing the network shut-down process, and augmenting the company's processes for emergency preparation, response, and communication.

We also need to better identify an accurate count of our customers without service. We are actively pursuing this matter, and our findings and enhancements will also be addressed in the report.

We continue to look for ways to improve service to our customers. The recent outages in Long Island City and Westchester County underscore the importance of our current plans to strengthen the system. The men and women of Con Edison strive to provide New Yorkers with the most reliable energy infrastructure in the country.