

Public Power Mutual Aid

Just as firefighters, police officers, and other emergency responders combine forces to help rebuild communities devastated by natural disasters, lineworkers and other electric utility personnel come together in an emergency to turn the lights back on.

A national mutual aid agreement links more than 1,100 utilities so they can help each other in times of need. Some public power utilities may also have other local, state, and regional contracts and agreements in place to render mutual aid.

How does mutual aid work? How is it invoked?

Mutual aid is just what it sounds like — utilities helping each other in times of need. The Association, together with state and regional public power utilities and organizations, coordinates the mutual aid network for the nation's public power utilities. More than 1,100 utilities across the country participate. Utilities that want to give and get help for power restoration after a disaster sign up for this network. The network also maintains a list of independent contractors that can be called upon when extra help is needed.

When (and even before) a major disaster hits a utility's territory and the utility knows that its own crews and equipment won't be enough to restore power quickly, it calls for mutual aid. It provides its best estimate of how many people it needs and what type of skills they should have. The utility also specifies equipment and material needs. Other utilities in the network respond with what they can offer.

The actual dispatch and movement of crews from different utilities is coordinated by utility and public power association personnel who volunteer as regional and national mutual aid coordinators. Such efforts require substantial logistics management. The utility that is requesting mutual aid must make arrangements to house, feed and care for the crews that come in from outside, and provide them the necessary work/safety briefings to do their jobs effectively. Requesting utilities generally send their own employees out to support visiting crews.

Who pays for mutual aid?

Typically, a public power utility requesting help pays other utilities that send help. Rates are determined through agreements that are put in place well in advance of a disaster. As units of state and local government, public power utilities are generally eligible for partial reimbursement of restoration expenses by FEMA, if all the relevant conditions and requirements are met.

For more information, visit www.PublicPower.org/MutualAid