

Testimony of
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Commission on Electric Utility Restructuring
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Mr. Chairman, and members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I am Janet Clements and I serve as Chief Deputy State Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM). Our agency is a part of the Public Safety Secretariat, and we are responsible for coordinating the state's preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery to emergencies and disasters. The agency is responsible for managing the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which was the hub of the state's response to Hurricane Isabel. VDEM continues to coordinate overall statewide response and recovery activities related to Hurricane Isabel between federal, state and local authorities as well as citizens.

The impact of Hurricane Isabel continues to be felt across the Commonwealth. The President has declared 99 jurisdictions in Virginia as major disaster areas. Tragically, 28 people died in the Commonwealth as a result of this devastating storm. Hurricane Isabel brought an unprecedented amount of damage to over two-thirds of Virginia. More than 1,062 homes were reported destroyed and 8,886 homes sustained major damage. More than 77 businesses were reported destroyed and over 1,400 businesses received some type of damage. Now individuals and communities are confronted with the monumental task of cleaning up debris and repairing and rebuilding homes, businesses and public facilities. As of yesterday, over 70,441 Virginians have applied for disaster assistance. There remains a long process to restore a sense of normalcy to affected individuals and communities.

Governor Warner took a proactive approach to the impending hurricane by declaring a State of Emergency in the Commonwealth on September 15, 2003, three days prior to the expected arrival of the storm. We augmented the Virginia EOC beginning on September 16, 2003 with representatives from key state agencies as well as the American Red Cross, Dominion Virginia Power, FEMA liaisons and others. We pre-positioned National Guard soldiers and airmen, additional State Troopers, VDOT road clearance specialists, Department of Forestry chainsaw crews and others in areas forecast to feel the brunt of the storm.

In addition, on September 17, over 24 hours in advance of the storm, the Governor authorized mandatory evacuation of designated coastal jurisdictions in low-lying areas. These actions may have saved hundreds of lives.

I know this commission is most interested in the interface and coordination between the Virginia Emergency Operations Center and the state's electric utilities. In the state's emergency operations plan, the State Corporation Commission is the primary point of contact with electric utilities. They provide us twice daily status reports of the extent of outages from all electric providers in the state. In addition, we have Dominion Virginia Power representatives in the Virginia EOC and those individuals provided a valuable direct liaison with the company.

On Wednesday, September 17, top officials from Dominion Virginia Power met with the Governor and other key officials at the Virginia EOC to discuss the potential impact of Hurricane Isabel. After the storm hit, Dominion worked closely with the state to do priority restoration to such critical facilities as hospitals, critical pumping stations and nursing homes. As we got requests from localities regarding critical facility restoration, we were able to immediately coordinate those requests with Dominion.

Dominion Power also allowed the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Virginia EOC staff to review their overall power restoration plan, so we could have data to begin forecasting future needs for ice, water, generators and other commodities affected by extended power outages.

In our assessment, the cooperation and coordination with Dominion Virginia Power and the electric cooperatives was very good in all phases of the preparation and response to Isabel. We have a long history of coordination with Virginia's electric utilities both during emergency events such as ice storms, hurricanes and in our emergency planning efforts for Dominion's Surry and North Anna nuclear power stations. These longstanding working relationships as well as advanced planning efforts, created an environment for effective communication and a coordinated approach to facing and dealing with the unprecedented damage that Hurricane Isabel caused in the Commonwealth.

However, every disaster presents lessons and opportunities to improve. Representatives from the state's emergency management team will be sitting down with the electric utility companies to do a detailed assessment of our performance and to seek ways to further enhance our coordination for future emergencies and disasters.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today and I am happy to answer questions.