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Contact:

Steven Johnson, Vice President, Communications
(804) 297-3644 (O) • (804) 624-1791 (C) • sjohnson@vmdaec.com

Electric Cooperatives Restore Power in Wake of Winter Storm

Crews from electric cooperatives in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware joined more than 100 cooperative lineworkers from four states to restore power to tens of thousands of members affected by a powerful winter storm.

Winter storm Frida started overnight Jan. 2 and lasted until dusk on Jan. 3, disrupting power to more than 160,000 meters in the three states at its peak.

That represented nearly 20 percent of all meters in the 15 cooperatives that are members of the Virginia, Maryland and Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives. Most of the damage was in Virginia, with more than 155,000 meters out of power. As of 8 a.m. on Jan. 4, workers had reduced the number of outages in Virginia to 120,800.

The out-of-state lineworkers came from co-ops in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana and Pennsylvania, with additional personnel likely as the multi-day restoration progressed. The association coordinated the relief efforts in conjunction with its member co-ops under the cooperative mutual-aid program.

“This was a fairly brief but very intense storm. We’re extremely grateful to our cooperative family to help us respond to this event and get the lights back on as quickly and as safely as possible,” said Alan Scruggs, vice president of safety, training and education for the association.

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, based in Fredericksburg, and Central Virginia Electric Cooperative, based in Arrington, were particularly hard hit. REC had 90,000 of its 170,000 connections out at the peak, with CVEC experiencing about 25,000 outages among its 38,000 members.

Thirty lineworkers from 10 co-ops in Indiana, and 40 from 18 co-ops in Ohio, were dispatched to REC alone. REC also had more than 100 tree-trimming crew members in the field.

Sixteen two-member crews from nine Pennsylvania co-ops began arriving at the Warsaw, Va.-based Northern Neck Electric Cooperative warehouse, bringing additional bucket trucks and equipment to expedite restoration efforts.

Other states were expected to send personnel after the situation on the ground was fully evaluated.

The snow was heavy and wet, bending and breaking trees and power lines across the area, particularly in rural areas with substantial tree canopies. As many as 8 to 10 inches of snow fell in a stretch from Culpeper to Manassas, according to reports.

All the electric cooperatives were well-prepared for the event, working with updated emergency response plans to facilitate outage restoration. They notified members in advance of potential outages, prestaged supplies and materials essential for restoration, and placed crews on call with prepped trucks and gears.

Headquartered in Glen Allen, Va., the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives provides safety and training, communications and legislative services to 15 electric cooperatives serving the three-state region. For more, visit www.vmdaec.com.