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To: The Members of the Two Storm Commission
From: State Representative Linda Schofield
Date: November 18, 2011
RE: Post Alfred Ideas for Change

As the State Representative for Simsbury - one of the hardest hit towns in Storm Alfred, I participated in once or twice daily meetings with our town's EOC and with CL&P. I took copious notes, including items that struck me as areas to consider for "Continuous quality improvement" purposes.

The list below is a compilation of observations and areas of concern that I think you would find helpful to your post-storm review. These items are not limited to CL&P alone, as I understand the Two Storm commission has a broader mission than just reviewing CL&P. I would be more than happy to talk with you formally or informally, if you would find that helpful. I can be reached at my cell phone at 860-604-6578 or by email at Linda.schofield@cga.ct.gov.

I am also attaching an email I received from a constituent, regarding tree cutting, which I found very informative.

Thanks for your time in reading my input.

Post Alfred Ideas for Change:

Utility company issues(CL&P, Comcast, and AT&T)

1. AI would strongly urge that a survey of out-of-state line crews be taken to debrief them about their experience and impressions here. Were they well-managed? Did

2. they find the poles and lines to be in poor repair, as we heard on the radio? Do they have best practices or better equipment that they thought we should use in CT?
3. It isn't clear to us how CL&P assigned crews in the early days after the storm. It seemed they followed the rule of trying to restore the most people first – which makes sense if the problem is only about power outages. But, when there are roads that are inaccessible to public safety vehicles, clearing roads should take precedence over power restoration. If CL&P had prioritized public safety first, the hardest hit towns would have had the most crews in them in the early days, and the reverse was true.
4. There needs to be a clear “field commander” in each town who directs the assignment of DOT, town, CL&P, and national guard crews for purposes of road clearing. That would assure co-ordination and communication, which was inadequate during Alfred. As a result of inadequate communication and inadequate numbers of CL_P crews, town and DOT crews could not clear roads, because they didn't have a CL&P lineman with them to identify that wires were dead and safe to be moved.
5. We need to look into the whole issue of why no one can touch a downed-wire to clear a road unless a CL&P crew is there. That slows productivity and safety too much. Some options to consider:
 - a. Cross-train town and DOT folks to identify whether lines are dead, so we don't have to wait for CL&P crews to do it.
 - b. A retired lineman told me that it's easy and fast to simply cut wires (which one can do with special gloves even if the wires are live), and then town crews can clear roads quickly. But, he said, utility companies don't like to do this because they can't re-use the wire and it costs more later to replace the lines rather than splicing them. If this is true, we should require CL&P to use the quicker method of cutting wires when roads are inaccessible to public safety vehicles. We must prioritize public safety over cost.
 - c. CL&P should have “reservists,” who can be called into action prior to a storm. They should be assigned to identify live or dead wires in each affected area and to assess damage for purposes of estimating resource needs and timeframes.
6. The out-of-state crews were working from paper orders, unlike the CL&P crews who have some kind of real-time communication device. As a result of the paper orders, the out-of-state crews could not be easily re-directed as priorities changed and could not report their work completion to the main office until they finished their shift. This seems like an inadequate communication system in this digital age. Either the utility should have extra devices they can hand out, or they should have an easy to use program that any out-of-state linesman can use through their own smart phone or Ipad to enable electronic communications.
7. Comcast, AT&T and other communication companies should also have town liaisons assigned if the town wants them. They were not present at most of our meetings.
8. CL&P, ATT, and Comcast need to coordinate responses and repairs as part of their emergency planning. Residents and responders cannot determine which lines are electrical or and which are communications. Fixing one downed line does not necessarily clear a road for traffic if other lines remain down.
9. CL&P's assessment of damage in Simsbury was clearly incomplete. The liaison came with a daily information sheet, and on it was indicated the number of poles and

transformers down. There were more poles down in one neighborhood than they had indicated for the whole town, so they really didn't have a firm grasp of the extent of devastation. This surprised me, since one of the worst neighborhoods was on a side road directly across Rte 10 from the CL&P service center in Simsbury. When I questioned how they could have missed the assessment by so much, a CL&P Vice President told me that when CL&P assessed the storm damage, they did it by driving the "main arteries." But of course, the main roads have nowhere near as many trees as the neighborhood roads, so they grossly under-estimated the number of damaged trees and wires. They need a new template for damage assessments, which includes:

- a. A sampling of different kinds of roads – main roads and small roads. If you're going to use a sample on which to base an assessment, the sample has to be representative. A look at only the main arteries is a skewed sample.
 - b. Input from town officials – who knew which neighborhoods were hardest hit. CL&P should have visited three neighborhoods in each town, selected by the town DPW as the hardest hit places.
10. Leaking transformers were left lying on the side of the road for days, even after being reported. Sometimes they were tagged but not removed. These contain hazardous materials and all crews should be instructed to remove them immediately whenever they see them.
 11. CL&P's website gave percentages of outage by town. We were told repeatedly by the CL&P liaison and VPs who came to our meetings that these were unreliable numbers that fluctuated wildly because of anomalies in the computer algorithms. Indeed, the numbers did fluctuate from 28% one moment to 89% the next. They should remove this from their website or fix it! It only served to mislead people, or worse, to inflame them when they saw numbers that seemed to indicate that the percent without power was getting worse instead of better.
 12. CL&P has lists of medically dependent folks who need power for medical equipment. The towns should be given CL&P's list prior to storms, so that outreach can be made to these folks by local public safety officers or volunteers.

Town Issues

1. We need a more complete registry of folks who are frail or disabled so that police or social services can check on them after a storm. The town should consider an "adopt a senior program" where intergenerational connections can be made over time and counted on in times of great need. We saw first hand how many of our seniors are without support systems in town and we have many families whose grandparents live far away. In addition, as noted above, it turns out CL&P has lists of medically dependent folks who need power for medical equipment. The town should be given their list, so that outreach can be made to these folks by local public safety officers or volunteers. Local home health agencies and meals-on-wheels programs also have knowledge of who is homebound in their service area, and the town should work with them to obtain those names. We should encourage town residents to register with the town's social services department, if they are frail or medically fragile.

2. We need to explore options for a special shelter for folks on oxygen, apnea machines, home dialysis, ventilators or other electricity-dependent medical care. Being in a generator –dependent facility may not be ideal. In addition, other medically complex people – such as people who are incontinent or have Alzheimers, severe mental illness, or serious chronic illnesses - should also be in a place more conducive to good care. Perhaps this special shelter should be in a local nursing home, VNA, or ambulance facility, or should be set up as a regional resource. Otherwise, perhaps we could keep a registry of retired nurses who would be willing to volunteer in times of need. In addition, if schools are closed, perhaps school nurses could help out. OF course, nurses would need some kind of liability protection as good Samaritans, since they would be working without orders in a volunteer capacity.
3. We should consider burying power lines downtown to protect both the key business resources people need (pharmacies, gas stations, grocers) and the sycamores.
4. Should Simsbury or the Farmington Valley consider having their own power company, as in Wallingford?
5. We need to encourage residents to sign up their cell phones at www.ctalert.gov for reverse 911 calls.
6. We need to establish a data base of emails that residents can give the town for emergency use only.
7. The town needs to re-evaluate its communications in general. We should consider:
 - a. an information campaign to let folks know where they can look for information during an emergency (i.e. which radio station, hard posting at the library, our town web site, twitter site, police and fire dispatch numbers, etc). We could possibly distribute magnets with some of this information.
 - b. consider improving use of social websites like facebook and twitter.
 - c. consider the need for a dedicated town radio station.
 - d. add more information hard boards for distribution and posting around town for situations when no electronic communication is possible. (One town posted an 800 # people could call for info on town services)
8. We need to communicate more clearly about how people can volunteer in an emergency and provide a clear name and contact number for people and organizations to call to get volunteer assignments. If we haven't already, we should set up linkages with faith-based groups to coordinate volunteers and communications.

State issues

Some laws that are meant to protect public safety during normal times seem to actually jeopardize public safety during a crisis like the power outage:

1. Current DPH rules prohibit a nursing facility (NF) from admitting someone without a form W-10 and detailed physician orders. As a result, people who really should have had access to a bit of nursing or nurse's aide care and to medical equipment (like oxygen) had to stay at shelters, rather than in nursing homes. Our local NFs had capacity and would have been willing to take a few folks, but could not because of the DPH rules. During a declared emergency, a temporary stay at a NF at the request of a shelter should not be considered an admission at all. Perhaps the NF could be considered a shelter. Then the NF wouldn't have to comply with DPH paperwork requirements. Furthermore, the NF should be protected from liability under a good Samaritan rule, in the event someone has an adverse event while in their temporary "shelter.". In Simsbury, McLean Home couldn't accept folks without doctors orders and W-10 forms, even though the shelter was accepting them without doctors orders. Clearly some of the seniors and disabled persons in the shelters would have been safer in a nursing home, and McLean's, as a good corporate citizen, has been willing in the past to help out by taking folks into their facility.
2. Grocers threw away vast quantities of food because the DPH does not allow them to give it to a shelter or to use it in anyway after some critical period of time (I believe it is two days) without power. However, insurers will not pay for food losses if the grocer donates the food before the two days has elapsed. It would make sense to require the insurers to pay for the loss if the outage has persisted for say 36 hours and is predicted to last more than 48 hours. That way the food is not wasted and can be used by the shelters.
3. CL&P cannot trim trees on private property without permission. While clearly some trees should be preserved for the value they bring in shade, beauty, and clean air, there needs to be a process by which CL&P can cut hazardous trees on private property, even over objections of the property owners. Maybe CL&P could give notice and assume permission is granted unless the property owner appeals within 2 weeks to a board set up to review such requests. However, that board should hear appeals from property owners who don't want specimen or historic trees cut, and should assure that we don't denude our neighborhoods and streetscapes of trees in the name of outage prevention. In some areas, infrastructure hardening should be pursued instead of tree cutting. (See attached email from a constituent on this topic)
4. State police were "guarding" DOT work crews. This seems a waste of their talent at a time when first responders are at a premium.
5. One of the national guardsmen I spoke with told me that the National Guard is not allowed to "compete" with the private sector. Since private companies were contracted to remove trees from roads, they couldn't come in and help until some sort of waiver of the non-compete policy was executed. If this is true, did this slow down their use as adjunct tree cutters? Does this policy make sense?
6. Current law prohibits propane tanks from being refilled by anyone but the owner of the tank. (Actually I question whether this should be a law at all under any circumstances.) The governor wisely suspended this law by executive order.
7. Current law prohibits out-of-state arborists from working in CT. Removing hazardous "widow-makers" was far more urgent than protecting local arborists' business or preventing unscrupulous out-of-state arborists from doing shoddy work. The governor wisely suspended this law by executive order as well.

Federal

1. According to CL&P, Homeland Security rules prohibit CL&P from letting anyone else have a circuit map. Having a map would make it easier for town crews to clear roads, if they knew a sub-station was out and knew what area it fed so that they therefore could assume the lines were dead. Perhaps this rule should be suspended during a natural disaster. Clearly the most imminent threat to our homeland security after the storm was the lack of road access, not terrorists.

From: 123456zzz@charter.net [mailto:123456zzz@charter.net]
Sent: Wed 11/16/2011 11:07 AM
To: Rep. Schofield, Linda
Subject: How not to screw up the CL&P fix

To those involved in figuring out what went wrong with CL&P during the two recent storms and how to fix it, I beg you: Please don't reinvent the wheel. Especially don't reinvent a wheel that's square. It won't work.

Many of the complaints, arguments and proposed remedies being proposed make sense, at least initially. One - perhaps the easiest - doesn't. Bear with me, please, so you don't make the same mistake.

Here's some history and some thinking I promise you haven't heard. I hope you'll invest the four minutes it'll take you to read through. Check my facts. Go beneath the talking points that are already floating around. Let's see if you can help Connecticut to get it right this time.

Some officials and other commentators have been quick to say that to minimize damage from severe storms such as we've just experienced the power companies should do a better job of pruning trees near their lines. Don't just prune, say others; trim ruthlessly. And a few have gone further, prescribing clear-cutting of all trees on both sides of every street in Connecticut.

But hold on.

When trees and power lines conflict, do trees have to be chainsawed into unhealthy and dangerous lopsidedness? Should they be removed entirely? Fact is, you needn't be a tree hugger to appreciate that there are other, better choices, among them stronger wire, stronger poles and putting power lines underground. And no, despite what you've heard, those alternatives are not necessarily unaffordable. In various situations, there are powerful economic arguments for each. And, more persuasive, if you look beneath the surface you'll find that the simple-sounding zap-the-trees solution doesn't work.

To avoid reinventing that square wheel I mentioned up top, please learn and heed the history.

In 1985, Connecticut's power system was whacked by Hurricane Gloria. (Remember Gloria? As in the most recent two storms, hundreds of thousands of households and businesses were without power for days.) The DPUC asked for an explanation and a remedy. CL&P brought back a long report prepared by a group with the pleasant do-gooder name of Environmental Consultants, Inc. What the power company didn't reveal - and the DPUC didn't seem to know or care - was that ECI was a subsidiary of Asplundh Tree Experts, the largest utility tree contractor in the world. That company made - still makes - an awful lot of money every year cutting trees for CL&P and many other power companies. Uhh...conflict of interest, anyone?

You could say CL&P put one over on the state.

So can you guess what ECI recommended? Correct: Trees, they said, were the largest causes of outages, so the solution would be to do a lot more tree trimming and removal. In the years to come, CL&P went wild with chain saws, spending tens upon tens of millions of dollars - all billed to ratepayers. After which, guess what? Catastrophic power interruptions continued, and trees remained the largest cause of outages.

But why?

Because while preventive tree trimming works for the easy stuff - the stray rotted limb that drops onto a power line, or relatively small storms that don't blanket the entire service area with widespread outages - that's about it. As was detailed in a definitive New York State Public Service Commission study, such tree cutting does little to help with a hurricane, tornado, blizzard, ice storm or freak pre-Halloween snowstorm in which heavy, wet snow lands on still-leafy branches. In such events, especially when strong winds blow, limbs and whole trees fall and fly from well outside the area that any reasonable tree maintenance program would cover. In catastrophic conditions, all that expensive tree work doesn't do much.

CL&P still performs a program of regular tree maintenance around the state. Check the town-by-town statistics from the latest catastrophic storm. I'll bet the towns that had street trees trimmed and removed in 2011 as part of that program didn't fare significantly better than towns that haven't seen a CL&P chain saw in several years.

So in trying to figure out how to avoid a repeat of Irene and Alfred, please don't miss the full story. It's simple, and perhaps satisfying, to think that dealing with the trees would cover the problem. But it's wrong.

By the way, the tree huggers do have a point. It may be true, as some say, that there are more trees in the state now than in the 18th century, but that's another half-truth. Just where are our 21st-century trees? Most are in forests and woods, not where we most need them: in front of our houses, where they clean our air (it has to swallow a lot more pollutants than 18th-century air) and lower our energy costs. That's right: trees keep our energy costs down. Remove trees from our streets and you'd leave those streets and our houses unshielded from wind in winter, so we'd need more heat, and unshaded from the sun in summer, so we'd have to crank up the AC. (Whether in town or country, anyone who walks, jogs, runs or bikes in summer learns quickly to stick to the shady side of the road. Trees make a huge difference.)

Keeping trees among us is a lot more than a matter of aesthetics: Without street trees, we'd feel the difference. And fuel and electric bills would go even higher than today.

No, we have to look elsewhere for the fix, especially since it's clear that when an Irene or an Alfred hits, butchering or clear-cutting trees doesn't do the trick. For less than extreme events, a sensible amount of maintenance by qualified tree workers should be performed. But it's time to look very seriously into other remedies, like

strengthening overhead distribution wires and, in some areas, going underground. Read on for just a bit more.

If you check the statistics, you'll find that extra-strength "spacer cable" goes down far less often than the kind of ordinary wire that makes up the vast bulk of CL&P's distribution system. I won't overstate: Spacer cable isn't unbreakable. Under the worst storm conditions it can fail. But it does stand up to falling limbs far better than what's up there now. Spacer cable costs somewhat more initially, but other power companies, both municipal and private, say it pays for itself very quickly in lower maintenance and repair costs, fewer outages for residents and less damage to businesses that otherwise would be hurt by losing power for extended periods.

In fact, CL&P has installed spacer cable in some new installations and rewiring situations around the state.

Why did CL&P spring for spacer cable? Because it works. Why don't they use more of it? Because periodic tree cutting, as maintenance, is charged immediately to ratepayers; replacement of wire, poles and the equipment atop the poles, as capital investment, must be depreciated over a number of years. The company has to put out the cash upfront and wait to get it reimbursed, and that hurts this year's bottom line, thus next year's stock price and - worst of all - executive compensation. No wonder they'd rather cut trees than improve the hardware.

So when we're debating how to make our electric service more reliable, we should consider stronger wires. And stronger poles (steel, concrete and various composites all offer some arguments). And - yes - going below ground.

Common wisdom dismisses putting wires underground as "too expensive." But that easy wave of the hand is based on very old information. We need to update to Undergrounding 2.0. Current technology makes burying cables far cheaper and safer than in granddad's day, and bundling electric lines with television, internet and telephone spreads the costs. Developers all over Connecticut do just that in new construction. Some areas have a program of gradual replacement of overhead utility lines, calling for undergrounding so many miles per year until everything - or everything except in the most sparsely populated areas - is below ground.

Don't just take the per-mile cost of undergrounding and stop there. You have to subtract the savings over the life of the stuff and factor in the worth to the public of increased reliability of utility service. In fact, all the statistics and arguments offered by CL&P, on undergrounding and everything else, should be taken with a pile of salt and questioned with real competence and seriousness.

For Connecticut, doing it right will be a struggle, of course. As someone said the other day, CL&P seems to have more lobbyists and lawyers than linemen. In the Capitol, they're already gearing up. Elected officials and others charged with dealing with the problem will need rare integrity and even rarer guts.

Thanks for reading. Good luck to us all.