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PSC Advises Caution During Winter Storm *Urges proper use of generators during power outages*

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Jan. 21, 2016) – In anticipation of possible electric outages during a coming winter storm, the Kentucky Public Service Commission (PSC) is urging residents who lose power to exercise caution when using portable generators or clearing storm debris.

A major storm is expected to bring heavy snow across much of Kentucky, with significant ice accumulations also possible in the southern part of the state. The wintry precipitation, accompanied by strong winds, could bring down trees, limbs and power lines.

The PSC is reminding Kentucky residents to stay away from all downed lines. Downed lines should be reported to the local utility company. If the lines are sparking, on fire or otherwise creating an emergency, call 911.

Customers who lose power should follow proper safety precautions if they use portable generators, PSC Chairman Jim Gardner said.

“As we have learned from previous storms, improper use of portable generators can be extremely dangerous, especially during cold weather,” Gardner said. “Many Kentuckians have lost their lives, and many others have been hospitalized, as the result of being poisoned by carbon monoxide emitted by portable generators that were not used correctly.”

To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Generators should only be operated outside in well-ventilated areas and never in a garage, basement or breezeway.
- Do not operate generators near windows, doors or in other areas where exhaust fumes could be drawn into a home or other occupied structure.
- Do not use charcoal grills, gas grills or other open-flame devices indoors for heating or cooking.

To prevent fires, generators should never be refueled while they are running. Refuel only after the generator has been turned off and allowed to cool.

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The PSC also is reminding electric customers who use a portable generator of electric safety guidelines that will protect them and those working to restore power. Keys to safe operation of generators include:

- Make sure a generator is properly sized for the load you will place on it. Remember that starting an electric motor, such as a refrigerator or air conditioner compressor, requires more electricity than the amount needed to keep it running. **DO NOT OVERLOAD YOUR GENERATOR.**

- Use only three-prong, grounded extension cords, properly rated for the load, to connect appliances to generators.

- **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO FEED POWER INTO YOUR HOME BY ADAPTING AN EXTENSION CORD TO CONNECT A GENERATOR TO A WALL OUTLET. THIS CAN CAUSE A FIRE.**

- **DO NOT CONNECT A GENERATOR TO INSIDE WIRING IN ANY WAY UNLESS YOUR HOME OR BUSINESS IS EQUIPPED WITH A TRANSFER SWITCH THAT PREVENTS POWER FROM FLOWING BACK INTO (BACKFEEDING) THE WIRES THAT SUPPLY YOUR ELECTRICITY.**

Backfeeding poses a severe danger to workers attempting to restore electrical service. They can be severely injured or killed by power flowing back into lines which they assume are not carrying electricity. Also, if the line to your home or business becomes grounded, backfeeding can permanently damage your generator.

Customers who lose power should contact their utility company immediately. Most utilities in Kentucky have systems that use customer reports to help identify the location of the problem and determine what repairs are needed.

“It is important that every customer report an outage,” Gardner said. “But repeated calls simply tie up the utility’s phone system. Call at once, but call only once.”

Customers who lose power also should check electric connections and meters for damage. Damaged connections or meters must be repaired before power can be restored to a home or business.

Falling or sagging power lines may have damaged the connections between the utility company’s overhead line and a customer’s electric system. The connections are usually in the form of a masthead – a conduit connected to the service line – or, in older homes, an eyebolt which holds the line in place and an insulated line leading to the meter. In some cases, the meter or meter base may also be damaged.

Once power is restored, damaged connections or meters could pose an electrical or fire hazard if not repaired or if repaired improperly.

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“It is critical that damaged connections be repaired by a qualified professional and inspected before power is restored,” PSC Chairman Gardner said. “In past outages, fires and severe damage have been caused by damaged or improperly repaired service connections.”

Repairing a service connection or meter base is the responsibility of the individual customer. The meter base is the square or rectangular box on which the meter itself is mounted. It belongs to the property owner. The meter itself – the circular, glass-enclosed portion that attaches to the meter base - is the property of the utility company.

Customers with damaged connections or meters should take the following steps:

- Notify the utility company that the service connection, meter base and/or meter is damaged. The utility can then make sure that the line is not energized until repairs are completed.
- In the event that only the meter itself is damaged, contact the utility to have it repaired or replaced and your service restored.
- Contact an electrician to repair the meter base or service connection. The repair work can be done prior to power being restored in an area, thus eliminating any additional delays.
- The electrician will obtain the proper meter base from the utility. Some utilities impose no charge for the meter base, but the customer will bear the installation cost.
- Have the repairs inspected by a state-certified inspector working for your local government. The electrician should be able to help arrange the inspection.
- Notify the utility when the repairs are complete and have been approved. A utility technician will install a new meter and restore the power.
- Keep all repair records and contact your property insurer.

Residents **SHOULD NOT** attempt to remove any branches, limbs or trees that have fallen across service connections or other utility lines. Notify the utility to arrange for the debris to be removed.

“The travel difficulties and cold weather certainly make utility disruptions during winter storms more dangerous and unpleasant than would otherwise be,” Gardner said. “But we urge people to be patient and to take proper precautions to protect their health and safety while they wait for power to be restored.”

The PSC is an independent agency attached for administrative purposes to the Energy and Environment Cabinet. It regulates more than 1,500 gas, water, sewer, electric and telecommunication utilities operating in Kentucky and has approximately 85 employees.

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