

FROM THE CONSUMERS COUNCIL OF MISSOURI
December 2006

Before we are all brainwashed by high paid AmerenUE executives into thinking they did a “Great Job” in restoring power to thousands of customers, let’s review the facts.

- ...Most of the outages occurred on Thursday night or in the early morning hours of Friday, December 1st.
- ...There was little or no power restoration over the weekend based on Ameren’s own numbers on the internet.
- ...AmerenUE claimed crews from other locations couldn’t get here quickly because of impassable roads.
- ...150,000 customers still without service on Monday, December 4th.

For the most part, the public seemed willing to accept these explanations in the first couple of days, but when the outages continued day after day, patience grew thin. The message greeting folks with outages never changed, and it got pretty tiresome. It went something like this:

“Due to the large number of outages, estimated restoration times are not available. Customers are encouraged to plan for a long outage, and we apologize for any inconvenience.”

And then the full page ads appeared claiming 7000 crews were at work repairing outages as quickly as possible, but still thousands continued to suffer in the cold and dark.

Questions have been raised in several articles in the Post Dispatch and in letters to the editor. What kind of supervision was given to these crews to most effectively utilize their services? Where were they sent? Why were no trucks to be seen in areas with large swaths of outages? Did they give any consideration to high rise apartments often housing elderly folks forced to leave their homes because of no elevators, dark stairways, no water or plumbing?

And what truth is there to the statement that they were alerting crews ahead of the storm that their services might be needed? If that were the case, why did an AmerenUE spokesperson say this might be policy they would adopt in the future? And what about the rumors that crews were told to stay home on the weekend so that the company could avoid paying overtime wages?

These are some of the questions the Missouri Public Service Commission needs to ask when it investigates AmerenUE’s handling of the last two outages. It’s not enough to check into the tree trimming schedule, already acknowledged to be years behind. AmerenUE must be required to share its emergency plans with its customers and not be allowed to run a recording for days that tells its customers to prepare for a long outage. The PSC must demand that the company provide safe and reliable service and not accept the company’s view that it did a “Great Job”.

AmerenUE is seeking an increase in rates, and the Consumers Council has intervened in opposition to this request on behalf of residential customers. As part of the process, the PSC will hold public hearings in a variety of locations in the company’s service area. That’s the time for people to tell the PSC what kind of service they received in these recent outages and what kind of service should be provided. AmerenUE should not be rewarded with higher rates for shoddy maintenance that results in excessive costs for its customers.