

Q. 2013-2014 General Rate Application, Company Evidence

As a result of recent severe weather events, including Hurricane Igor and Tropical Storm Leslie, has Newfoundland Power reviewed its vegetation management practices? If not, why not? If yes, what changes in practices have been implemented?

A. Newfoundland Power has not carried out a formal review of its vegetation management practices as a result of Hurricane Igor or Tropical Storm Leslie. However, Newfoundland Power's experience in responding to system damage and restoring power following both storms will inform its judgment in relation to the ongoing implementation of its vegetation management practices and policies.¹

Both storms caused major damage to electrical system infrastructure and lengthy outages for customers.² The impact of the storms on the electrical system was largely a consequence of their timing. Both storms occurred in September, when trees were at maximum foliage. The combination of heavy rain and high winds caused trees to uproot or break off at the base, and caused large branches to break and fall on power lines.³ Most of the tree-related damage occurred on distribution lines in heavily treed urban areas where the Company's vegetation management efforts consist mainly of tree trimming.

In the densely populated urban areas of the Northeast Avalon, implementation of Newfoundland Power's vegetation management practices and policies is influenced by customers' willingness to have their ornamental trees trimmed. This is becoming a bigger issue in, for example, the City of St. John's, where trees are now maturing in areas where municipal requirements for back-lot construction of electrical infrastructure were imposed in the early 1970s.

Based on recent field experience, it appears that, following Hurricane Igor and Tropical Storm Leslie, customers are now more willing than in the past to have their trees trimmed more aggressively. This appears to be reflected as well in an increase in customer requests for tree trimming.⁴ Newfoundland Power's forecast of vegetation management costs for 2012 reflects both its recent experience of severe weather damage and a change in customer attitudes towards tree trimming.

¹ For detailed information with respect to Newfoundland Power's vegetation management practices, see the response to Request for Information PUB-NP-045.

² Hurricane Igor caused power outages to 106,000 customers, for a total of 111 million outage minutes (Hydro excluded). Tropical Storm Leslie caused power outages to 66,361 customers for a total of 45.2 million outage minutes (Hydro excluded).

³ Hurricane Igor had winds up to 170 km/hr and Tropical Storm Leslie had winds in excess of 130 km/hr. Newfoundland Power typically experiences such winds in winter months when there is no foliage on deciduous trees.

⁴ In 2011, Newfoundland Power commenced a television advertising campaign focused on safe practices when cutting trees near power lines. This campaign also supports public awareness of the hazards associated with trees in proximity to energized lines.

1 The sale of 40% of joint use support structures to Bell Aliant in 2011 reduced
2 Newfoundland Power's overall distribution system vegetation management
3 responsibilities. It was anticipated that Newfoundland Power's vegetation management
4 costs related to distribution poles would be reduced by approximately \$400,000 per year
5 as a direct result of the pole sale.⁵
6

7 In August 2012, Newfoundland Power increased its 2012 forecast of vegetation
8 management costs to \$1,725,000. Including an estimated \$400,000 for vegetation
9 management in areas where joint use support structures are now owned by Bell Aliant,
10 total distribution-related vegetation management costs for 2012 are now forecast at
11 approximately \$2,125,000. This is an increase of approximately 32% over 2011 costs.
12 The majority of the additional forecast cost represents distribution tree trimming work.
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14 Newfoundland Power anticipates a similar level of total vegetation management costs in
15 2013 and 2014.
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17 The forecast increase in Newfoundland Power's vegetation management costs is not
18 exclusively a response to Hurricane Igor and Tropical Storm Leslie. However, combined
19 with a recent increase in tree trimming requests from customers, and the effect of
20 changing customer attitudes towards tree trimming near power lines, the recent severe
21 weather is having a direct impact on Newfoundland Power's vegetation management
22 costs.

⁵ See *Application to Re-open Pole Sale Application, Exhibit 10, Note 5*.