

1 STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
2 PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION AND  
3 NEW HAMPSHIRE HOMELAND SECURITY  
4 & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

5  
6 April 21, 2009 - 7:03 p.m.  
7 New London Town Offices  
8 375 Main Street  
9 New London, New Hampshire

10 RE: DECEMBER 2008 ICE STORM REVIEW  
11 Hearing to receive public statements.

12  
13 PRESENT: Chairman Thomas B. Getz, Presiding (NHPUC)  
14 Commissioner Graham J. Morrison (NHPUC)  
15 Commissioner Clifton C. Below (NHPUC)  
16 Asst. Director Kathy Doult (HS&EM)

17 ALSO PRESENT: Reptg. the New Hampshire PUC Staff:  
18 Randall Knepper, Director - Safety Division  
19 Michael Sisto - Consumer Affairs Division

20 Reptg. Residential Ratepayers:  
21 Kenneth E. Traum, Asst. Consumer Advocate  
22 Office of Consumer Advocate

23 Reptg. NH Homeland Security & Emergency Mgt.:  
24 James C. Van Dongen, Public Information Off.

25 Court Reporter: Steven E. Patnaude, LCR No. 52

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24

I N D E X

PAGE NO.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY:

Jessie Levine	10
Selectman Mark Kaplan	12, 15

## 1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 CHAIRMAN GETZ: Well, good evening,  
3 everyone. I'm going to open this public statement hearing  
4 with respect to the December 2008 ice storm. There's a  
5 couple of people who are on their way, Commissioner Below  
6 and Assistant Director Douth from Emergency Management.  
7 But they have heard my introductory remarks before, so I  
8 think we can move ahead without them.

9 My name is Tom Getz. I'm the Chairman  
10 of the Public Utilities Commission, on my left is  
11 Commissioner Graham Morrison. In the front row is Jim Van  
12 Dongen from Emergency Management. And, also from our  
13 Consumer Affairs Division, in the front, is Mike Sisto,  
14 and from the Consumer Advocate is Ken Traum.

15 The public statement hearing this  
16 evening is a joint effort by the Public Utilities  
17 Commission and Emergency Management as part of our after  
18 action review of the ice storm, which will review the  
19 preparedness and response both of public utilities and  
20 State government to the ice storm that began on the  
21 evening of December 11, affected approximately 60 percent  
22 of New Hampshire customers at its peak, and resulted in  
23 some customers going without service for as long as two  
24 weeks. In very general terms, an after action review is  
{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1 focused on analyzing what happened, why it happened, and  
2 how we could be better prepared in the future.

3 In order to effectively analyze what  
4 happened, we have begun by systematically gathering data,  
5 and that effort started during the ice storm with the  
6 records and notes kept by the various individuals involved  
7 in responding to the ice storm. In addition, the Public  
8 Utilities Commission has submitted over 400 requests for  
9 information and requests for documents to the various  
10 utilities, and received answers from the utilities. And,  
11 the questions and answers are available on our website at  
12 [www.puc.nh.gov](http://www.puc.nh.gov). On that website, you can also see  
13 information and reports that have been filed by the  
14 utilities themselves, which will be part of our review  
15 process. We've also posted a comment form on our website  
16 for public input, that asks specific questions about the  
17 ice storm. And, we've posted over 150 of those forms so  
18 far as well.

19 The hearing tonight, and the nine others  
20 that have been scheduled around the state, are another  
21 part of the information-gathering effort. And, we expect  
22 that hearing your experiences during the ice storm and  
23 your recommendations for corrective measures will help us  
24 both in identifying issues and deciding on specific

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1 courses of action. Your analysis of what went wrong and  
2 what went right, and your recommendations about how things  
3 can be changed for the better, are critical inputs to the  
4 process.

5 And, I'll note also, in addition to this  
6 effort, that the Division of Homeland Security & Emergency  
7 Management have been taking a number of steps since the  
8 ice storm. And, Emergency Management has held a series of  
9 meetings with local public safety and community officials  
10 around the state. And, Emergency Management has also  
11 initiated a review process for State agencies. And,  
12 Assistant Director Doutt will describe that shortly.

13 One other effort that will occur this  
14 spring concerns the issue of undergrounding utility lines.  
15 Chairman Naida Kaen, of the House Science, Technology &  
16 Energy Committee, will be holding an informational session  
17 in her committee to better understand the potential costs  
18 and benefits of undergrounding utility services, and she  
19 will also be taking a look at issues related to utilities  
20 instituting automated outage management systems.

21 As we collect what is, obviously, a  
22 large amount of information, we will be analyzing the data  
23 to identify issues that need attention and remediation.  
24 And, while it's not our intention to prejudge anything, I  
{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1 think there is no serious debate that communications on  
2 many levels must be improved. And, that is why the Public  
3 Utilities Commission Safety Division Director,  
4 Mr. Knepper, is also facilitating a review of utility  
5 communications practices. This effort is underway, and  
6 will include communications to the PUC, to the State  
7 Emergency Management, to local Emergency Management  
8 Directors, and to the public generally. And, the goal of  
9 this effort is to identify model practices that should be  
10 adopted by all utilities in advance of next winter.

11 At the same time, there are other issues  
12 that require a closer look before we can come to any  
13 definitive conclusions. In general terms, we will be  
14 looking at whether the utilities were reasonably prepared  
15 and whether they responded reasonably. But, within that  
16 framework, we will be looking at particular issues, which  
17 include, among other things, the effect of tree-trimming  
18 on customer outages, the status of mutual aid arrangements  
19 among utilities, protocols for prioritizing restoration,  
20 and decisions on allocating work crews. Depending on what  
21 emerges, the Public Utilities Commission can proceed in a  
22 number of directions, including change protocols for the  
23 utilities, instituting rulemakings, and instituting formal  
24 adjudicative proceedings to address specific issues.

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1                   To assist us in our review, both because  
2 of the sheer amount of data that must be sorted and  
3 analyzed, and because there may be certain subjects that  
4 require specialized expertise, we have engaged a  
5 consultant to assistance us in this undertaking.

6                   Now, as I noted earlier, we have not  
7 reached any specific conclusions at this point, and that  
8 is because our job is to take an objective look at all of  
9 the facts, but I can assure you we will follow the  
10 information we receive wherever it leads. And, we have a  
11 couple of goals in mind through the process. First, is we  
12 intend to issue a report in September that will set forth  
13 the results of the after action review, including  
14 recommendations for specific proceedings that may be  
15 required as a follow-up. And, another is to make sure  
16 that the utilities have improved their planning and  
17 response protocols, especially as it concerns  
18 communications, for next winter.

19                   So, with those introductory remarks, I  
20 will turn to Assistant Director Douth from Emergency  
21 Management.

22                   ASST. DIRECTOR DOUTH: Thank you,  
23 Commissioners Getz. And, I apologize for the disruption  
24 of coming in a few minutes late. As the Commissioner

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1       said, we, at Homeland Security & Emergency Management,  
2       have undertaken a huge effort to also collect data on  
3       various response issues relative to the December ice  
4       storm. As you are aware, the storm impacted the whole  
5       State of New Hampshire. And, we received a Presidential  
6       Disaster Declaration because of that. We've reached out  
7       to our customers. In fact, this is my second trip to New  
8       London. The local responders and the EMDs, State  
9       agencies, and other responding organizations, the news  
10      media, through Jim Van Dongen, who is here with us, and  
11      several business sector groups requesting their after  
12      action reports, their input, and other information to help  
13      us assess the massive response and to develop an  
14      improvement plan for future responses.

15                               And, I'd like to say at this time,  
16      publicly I'd like to thank Jessie and her team. I think  
17      you have some really creative individuals, and they did a  
18      great job during this particular disaster. In fact, we  
19      think that some of the things that your team did are model  
20      practices, and we're taking them to the Emergency  
21      Conference this summer and bringing them up, so other  
22      towns can learn if they have some of the resources that  
23      you have within this town, and it worked so very, very  
24      well.

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1                   The emergency response to the ice storm  
2                   was a massive operation at all levels. At the State EOC,  
3                   we dealt with the largest acquisition and distribution of  
4                   resources, such as water, MREs, shelter equipment, and  
5                   generators for community infrastructure in our memory, as  
6                   we tried to fill the requests from towns and anticipate  
7                   future needs. Fifty-nine (59) shelters were stood up in  
8                   the towns and regions across the state, housing over 1,500  
9                   people early on in the incident. At the same time, we had  
10                  had a planning cell that was dealing with sheltering even  
11                  more people, up to 10,000, to include people with medical  
12                  and functional needs. We also, for the first time, had 17  
13                  pet-friendly shelters throughout the state. And, that in  
14                  itself is a very good thing. We know that people, many  
15                  people will not evacuate if they cannot bring their pets  
16                  with them.

17                  However, with all of this, we shouldn't  
18                  forget that we also had four fatalities that were related  
19                  to the storm, and over 200 injuries, almost all related to  
20                  carbon monoxide poisoning. And, throughout this evening,  
21                  if there are any of you who feel uncomfortable stating  
22                  what you need to state in this public setting and want to  
23                  speak to me afterwards, I will remain for a few minutes  
24                  and be able to you. Thank you very much.

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1                   CHAIRMAN GETZ: Thank you. So, if  
2 there's anyone who would like to speak tonight, make a  
3 public statement?

4                   MS. LEVINE: Okay. Thank you. Jessie  
5 Levine. I'm the Town Administrator in New London. And, I  
6 appreciate your comments. We did have a great team. And,  
7 despite the troubles, the storm event certainly united us.  
8 And, we're working on improving from there. But  
9 Commissioner Getz and I have already spoken and Sue  
10 Blothenburg and I have already spoken. Our prime -- The  
11 biggest difficulty we had was communication with PSNH.  
12 And, I'm sure you heard that at your other hearings. I  
13 know that this is not a new item. I appreciate that  
14 you're setting some protocols in place.

15                   Certainly, Sue did her best to  
16 communicate with us. It was the level of information that  
17 we received that we didn't have anything to pass onto the  
18 people who were contacting us, coming to the shelter, you  
19 know, just wanted some kind of accurate information. And,  
20 there was a caller, I think he was a fire chief from the  
21 Seacoast, during one of the state daily teleconferences,  
22 who said "Even if they had a truck, one truck in town,  
23 that would give people the hope that, you know, there was  
24 an entourage behind them." I think that that, even though

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1       it may not have been, you know, an effective use of  
2       resources, I think there is some truth to that. That  
3       people felt that there wasn't even any hope, because we  
4       didn't have anything to really tell them, and there wasn't  
5       a sign that progress was being made here. And, you know,  
6       this, to New London residents, here is what mattered. It  
7       really didn't matter what was going on in Peterborough.  
8       And, it didn't matter, you know, I think people knew that,  
9       in the '98 ice storm, I wasn't here, but Mark Kaplan, my  
10      Selectman, was here, I think people knew that at that  
11      point New London was really one of the focal points in the  
12      state, and so all the eyes were here. And, in this ice  
13      storm, you know, there were 200 communities going through  
14      it, so it was a little more of trying to share.

15                    But the communication with the utilities  
16      is really the biggest issue. We also lost cable. And,  
17      so, the reliance on the Web EOC, you know, within 24 hours  
18      we didn't have that access as well, and that was an issue,  
19      which we discussed at the hearing in, whenever that was,  
20      in March.

21                    So, thank you for coming here tonight.  
22      I'm sorry to relocate everybody and put you through that,  
23      but we did double book Whipple Hall. But this is a nice  
24      cozy space for this discussion anyway. So, thanks.

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1                   CHAIRMAN GETZ: Thank you, Jessie.

2                   SELECTMAN KAPLAN: Thank you. I'm Mark  
3 Kaplan. I'm a Selectman in town. And, again, I want to  
4 thank you for coming here and listening to us. As you are  
5 well aware, this past ice storm was not the first ice  
6 storm that New London has faced. And, having gone through  
7 it twice, my estimation is it's bound to happen again.  
8 And, while people talk about the emergencies and the  
9 communications, and I think that's all to the good, and we  
10 should be better prepared. There's no question.

11                   But I want to address my attention to  
12 how can everybody be better prepared to handle an ice  
13 storm. Because I believe that, whatever the climate  
14 change is taking place, for whatever reason, every five or  
15 ten years this is going to happen in this area in New  
16 Hampshire. We have trees, and the trees seem to be the  
17 major problem. And, I was very interested to hear you say  
18 that you were going to do a cost/benefit analysis, and  
19 that you were interested in doing the tree cutting.

20                   What I would like to see you do is to  
21 charge Public Service with getting out the data. For  
22 example, they have said that the 14 day outage cost  
23 something like \$70 million. Okay. Let us just take an  
24 extreme example. Supposing no tree, no branch ever fell

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1 on any line. They should be able to tell you that "well,  
2 if we just went around and fixed the wires, it might only  
3 have been two days or three days or one day." But just  
4 think of the amount of money that would have been saved,  
5 and how much less of a problem. Because, if people are  
6 only out of power for a day or two, they somehow get by.  
7 It's when they're out for day after day after day that  
8 things really go wrong, and now you really need all kinds  
9 of help and all kinds of management, emergency stuff.  
10 People who might be able to get by one day, can't get by  
11 four days, and because they're ill and they're this or  
12 that or the next thing.

13 So, I think getting ready and trying to  
14 do that is vital. But I know you can't do it alone. They  
15 can't do it alone, you can't do it alone, and it's  
16 going to take cooperation. And, it may take the  
17 Legislature to allow greater tree cutting than there was  
18 before. You know, but think about, if no tree ever fell,  
19 and if you charge them to find out what would have  
20 happened if no tree ever fell on a line, you would find  
21 out a huge, huge difference. And, they can do that. They  
22 have the facts, they have the figures, they can get it out  
23 for you. And, with cooperation, I think that you can do a  
24 lot to save.

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1                   For example, PUC may say "well, why  
2           don't we just charge everybody who has a line 25 cents  
3           more, 50 cents more a month." It's not a lot of money, 50  
4           cents more a month is only a few dollars a year. But  
5           think, they have almost 500,000 customers, 50 cents a  
6           month, you know, is a lot of money. And, if this storm  
7           only -- if this type of storm only happens once every five  
8           or ten years, they can cut down an awful lot of trees, so  
9           that, in the fifth year or the tenth year, you know, it's  
10          just an ordinary storm. They go out and fix some lines,  
11          and everybody goes on about their business. Anyway, I  
12          give it to you for food for thought. And, I somehow  
13          recognize this young man over here. I've seen him before  
14          and I can't quite place him. What is your name?

15                   CMSR. BELOW: You know me. Clifton  
16          Below.

17                   SELECTMAN KAPLAN: Now I remember you.  
18          Exactly. Okay, now I know who you are. Good to see you  
19          again.

20                   CMSR. BELOW: And, good to see you.

21                   CHAIRMAN GETZ: Yes, let's keep that  
22          conversation off the record, I think.

23                   Okay. Is there anyone else who would  
24          like to speak this evening?

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1 (No verbal response)

2 CHAIRMAN GETZ: Okay. Well, --

3 SELECTMAN KAPLAN: Oh, I have one thing  
4 to add. Yes. It suddenly occurred to me. There are, in  
5 terms of cutting trees down, there are some people who are  
6 going to say to you "This tree in my front yard has been  
7 there for 80 years. And, I grew up with this tree. And,  
8 I don't want you to cut this tree down." And, you're  
9 going to say "Well, wait a minute. Wait a minute. PUC is  
10 going to come in and they're going to say "it will hit the  
11 lines." Well, it's okay. You have a choice. We'll put  
12 in two guy wires, and the tree won't fall on the lines,  
13 and you don't have to cut the tree down."

14 In other words, I think that, if there's  
15 some cooperation between the various input here, you can  
16 really accomplish an awful lot of good, and it wouldn't  
17 cost everybody an awful lot of money. Everybody pays a  
18 little bit.

19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN GETZ: Thank you. All right.  
21 Then, if there's no one else, then we will close the  
22 hearing. And, then, you know, please, if you're  
23 interested in following up, there's a lot of information  
24 that is going to be online in the meantime, and then we'll

{December Ice Storm Hearing @ New London 04-21-09}

1 issue our report in September. So, thank you, everyone.

2 SELECTMAN KAPLAN: Thank you.

3 (Whereupon the hearing ended at 7:20

4 p.m.)

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

