

# Coronavirus (COVID 19): Key Messages

*(Updated 04-10-2020)*

## Top Line Messages

**Protecting the energy grid and ensuring a safe and reliable supply of electricity are the top priorities of the electric power industry. In order to do this, investor-owned electric companies, public power utilities, electric cooperatives, and independent power producers and suppliers are working to ensure that their employees and their families are healthy and safe.**

**Planning for and operating during a health emergency, such as a pandemic, is unique from other business continuity planning because it requires businesses to prepare to operate with a significantly smaller workforce, a threatened supply chain, and limited support services for an extended period of time.**

- The business continuity and pandemic plans developed by electric companies, public power utilities, electric cooperatives, and independent power producers and suppliers are designed to protect the people working for them and to ensure energy operations and infrastructure are supported properly.

**The electric power industry is closely coordinating with their government partners through the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC) to ensure that organizations have the resources they need to continue providing electricity to customers throughout any disruptions being caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).**

## Business Continuity Planning

**The electric power industry has a strong track record of preparing for many kinds of emergencies that could impact the ability to generate and/or deliver electricity to the customers and the communities we serve.**

- This business continuity planning includes preparing for events such as storms, earthquakes, and other natural disasters; cyber and physical attacks; and “high absenteeism” events that typically involve health emergencies and that could severely limit the number of employees who are able to report to work.
- Coordination through the ESCC has proven effective in responding to major weather events in recent years. Industry and government are using the same structure to provide reliable energy services in the weeks and months ahead.

**Electric companies, public power utilities, electric cooperatives, and independent power producers and suppliers focus on maintaining the availability of key personnel—such as power plant operators, lineworkers, and call center representatives—during extreme events, including a pandemic.**

## Mission-Essential Workforce

**There is a subset of highly skilled energy workers that is unable to work remotely and that is mission-essential during this extraordinary time. While we understand the current limitations of COVID-19 testing, there is a critical need for a targeted approach—endorsed by and coordinated among federal, state, and local partners—that ensures testing of these workers.**

- Keeping a limited pool of highly skilled workers available to operate control centers and generation facilities is a top priority. Access to testing will help isolate healthy operators so they can remain available. Based on an analysis by the ESCC, the nuclear sector, and the natural gas distribution segment of the oil and natural gas subsector, the mission-essential portion of the energy workforce that needs priority COVID-19 testing should be identified based on factors that include, but are not limited to: workers' functional connections to maintaining reliability; the amount of lead time required to train these personnel; the limited pool of people with these qualifications; and the risks to regional reliability if this workforce is severely impacted.
- Both the [Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\)](#) and the [ESCC have developed guidelines](#) to help state and local officials identify these mission-essential workers.
- Electric power industry stakeholders sent a [joint letter to the national organizations representing state and local government leaders](#) seeking support for mission-essential workers who serve on our frontlines and who need priority access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing.

## Industry-Government and Cross-Sector Coordination

**The ESCC serves as the principal liaison between the federal government and the electric power industry, with the mission of coordinating efforts to prepare for, and respond to, national-level disasters or threats to critical infrastructure. The ESCC includes electric power industry CEOs and trade association leaders representing all segments of the industry.**

- The ESCC holds coronavirus coordination calls twice a week with senior leadership from the Department of Energy, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to ensure that industry and government are working together to resolve any challenges that may arise during the health emergency.

**The ESCC quickly mobilized and established strategic working groups dedicated to identifying and solving for short-, medium-, and long-term issues facing the industry during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

- These working groups, or “tiger teams,” are focused on issue spotting and on developing tools and resources that organizations can use to address vital issues including control center continuity; power plant continuity; access to restricted/quarantined areas; mutual assistance; and challenges with the supply chain.

**The ESCC also quickly began to identify lessons being learned in real time from companies operating in pandemic hot spots.**

- Since the pandemic hit Europe earlier than the United States, the ESCC engaged with electric companies in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom to develop a better understanding of how the pandemic and social distancing policies impacted employees and energy grid operations.
- In the United States, the ESCC has been identifying and socializing lessons being learned in states being heavily impacted by the pandemic.

The ESCC has developed a COVID-19 Resource Guide [linked here](#) and available at [electricitysubsector.org](http://electricitysubsector.org).

- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring energy grid reliability in the current public health emergency. Rather, this document was designed to support electric power industry leaders in making informed localized decisions in response to this evolving global pandemic.
- The guide will evolve as more is learned about appropriate mitigation strategies.

### Potential Impacts to Mutual Assistance Networks

**Given that this pandemic could extend for many months, it is possible—and in some parts of the country perhaps even likely—that weather-related or other types of outages could occur during the same time period.**

- During non-health emergencies, such as severe storms, electric companies, public power utilities, electric cooperatives, and independent power producers and suppliers often can speed power restoration by bringing in additional skilled workers from organizations and contractors outside the area affected by the emergency. This practice is known as mutual assistance or mutual aid, and it is a hallmark of the electric power industry. However, during a pandemic, mutual assistance either may not be available or may be severely limited.
- Another factor that the electric power industry considers in its planning is the availability of equipment and materials for restoration. The electric power industry depends on many types of businesses to supply equipment and materials used in maintaining and restoring its infrastructure. A pandemic could affect all types of businesses, including the manufacturing and transportation industries, and restoration times may be impacted.
- The ESCC has a dedicated team that is analyzing how processes and procedures may need to be modified to enable sending workers to respond outside of their own distribution system given the known health risks. In fact, there is an entire section of the ESCC [Resource Guide](#) devoted to highlighting mutual assistance considerations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

April 10, 2020



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