

# Caution: Blackouts Ahead...

Consider this a warning: The experts responsible for maintaining reliability on our electric grid flatly predict that we are risking catastrophic power outages in New Jersey if we don't upgrade the system soon.

It is almost hard to believe. We are so accustomed to the lights snapping on when we flick a switch that it seems like a birthright.

The truth is that our transmission grid, like some of our crumbling bridges, needs attention. We can ignore the warnings. We can look the other way. And we can pretend the experts don't really know what they're talking about.

But play this out for a moment. What exactly will happen in New Jersey if we sit on our hands?

The most urgent problem lies in northern New Jersey, where a line built starting in 1926 is straining to carry voltage between Warren and Essex counties. That stretch of the Susquehanna-Roseland line will start overheating and breaking down, according to the experts, unless changes are made.

What could happen then? For the answer, turn to Valley Forge, PA, the headquarters of an organization called PJM, where experts manage the regional grid stretching from Chicago to Newark.

"The metal in the conductors may become brittle, rendering it useless," says Paul McGlynn, PJM's transmission planner. "In addition, the line may break and fall to the ground causing a potentially dangerous situation...In short, overloading transmission lines may cause permanent damage to transmission infrastructure and catastrophic power outages."

When lines threaten to overload, planners first trim back electricity imports, forcing local

prices skyward. They beg consumers to turn off appliances. They reduce voltage, dimming our lights and shrinking our TV pictures. Finally, they force rolling blackouts, as California did in 2000-2001. Flick your switch then, and your house may stay dark.

All this strain, of course, increases the risk of an uncontrolled blackout. The worst one, in 2003, cost the national economy \$4 billion to \$10 billion and contributed to 11 deaths. A smaller one at the Jersey shore that summer stranded vacationers on Ferris wheels and left

180,000 without power for two days. Food rotted in restaurants. Traffic lights went out.

Some hope we can answer this challenge with energy efficiency and local wind and solar power. At PSEG, we are making huge investments in those solutions, doing more than anyone else in New Jersey. But the hard fact is it won't be enough to solve this pressing problem.

PSE&G stands ready to spend \$750 million to upgrade that line, creating hundreds of good jobs and

keeping a lid on electricity prices.

The latest estimate is that these overloads will begin in 2012. Experts are updating the data now, and the drop in demand due to this recession may buy us an extra year. But we'll still need that upgrade.

It's time now to face that reality. We've had our warning.

*What's your view? Please let us know at [Opinion@PSEG.com](mailto:Opinion@PSEG.com)*



***...Unless power lines  
built decades ago are  
upgraded soon.***



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*We make things work for you.*