

Area officials hope Edison improvements pay off

BY TIM CARVELL
STAFF WRITER

-It took \$160 million and a year of work, but Detroit Edison has been slowly rebuilding its power systems to prevent a recurrence of the July 1991 power outages that swept Southeastern Michigan following a heavy summer storm.

As part of its system overhaul, the power company has already installed 2,300 miles of electrical cable, primarily in Oakland County, and a telephone response

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system that can field up to 40,000 calls an hour. By the end of this year, the project will have cost Detroit Edison \$235 million.

The changes were designed both to cut down on the number and scope of power outages and to increase the efficiency with which outages are remedied, said Detroit Edison spokesman Scott Simons.

"We have the most state-of-

the-art system in the United States," Simons said. "The only phone system that can handle more calls is the one used by the Home Shopping Club."

The Michigan Public Service Commission helped Detroit Edison design the new electrical and communication systems in November 1991, following their investigation of the outages stemming from the July 7 storm which left some homes without power for up to a week. Jim Padgett, su-

pervisor of electric operations for the MPSC, said the new telephone network would prove crucial to Detroit Edison's ability to deal with storms.

"(Telephone communication) is critical from the standpoint that your customer base, in the first few hours of a storm, is your information base," Padgett said.

Local officials who had to deal with Detroit Edison during the 1991 storms expressed guarded optimism about the new techno-

logies.

"I definitely believe it will help," said Steve VanDelt, Southfield city engineer. "I hope so, anyway. We shall see."

"One of the problems we've had with Detroit Edison is lines going down during electrical storms, and our manpower, the fire and police departments, being used to guard them to a point that we find extreme," said Tom Markus, Birmingham city manager. "To the extent that (the new system) can

alleviate that problem, I applaud their efforts."

While Padgett conceded that the system overhaul couldn't eliminate outages, he did note that Detroit Edison has followed all of the Michigan Public Service Commission's recommendations to date.

"Our overall assessment is that they made a commitment in November 1991 and, in general, they've met or exceeded most of the goals they've agreed to."



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