

Edison

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had a phone answering system that either didn't provide human contact, provided recorded "excuses" or even misled them as to when power would be restored, and displayed an attitude that was "unacceptable."

"There is a perceived lack of concern (by Edison)," said Hills Deputy Fire Chief Pete Baldwin. "Since 1991 (when Edison promised to improve service), we continue to experience problems with service even when there is no storm."

Answers not offered

Many residents said they expected problems from the storms, which generated winds of 60-80 mph that blew down power lines from July 13-16, but they wanted and did not receive honest answers about the outages.

"When we call, please be honest, don't fabricate," said Shirley

Allen of Franklin, whose husband depends on an electrically powered passive breathing aid.

"We can take it," said Hills Deputy Fire Chief Pete Baldwin. "We can take it," said Hills Deputy Fire Chief Pete Baldwin. "We can take it," said Hills Deputy Fire Chief Pete Baldwin.

At Simmons of Royal Oak said Edison crews in from Indiana and Kentucky during the 100-degree days told him some of the equipment they were repairing was from the 1940s.

"We demand to know when or what Edison is going to do," Simmons said. "And we don't want some grand display, no dog and pony shows."

Over four days, there were three storms that knocked down trees and power lines in the area, leaving up to 760,000 customers with-

out power, Edison had said. But many residents questioned why power went out during normal weather.

"We moved here recently from Columbus, Ohio," said Geneva Houston of Farmington Hills. "We've also lived in St. Louis and some smaller cities and we've never experienced anything like this."

Hills City Manager Bill Costick read a letter from a Hills resident who had lived in Lafayette, Ind., Los Angeles and Chicago and had seen more outages in the last two years in Farmington Hills than in the other cities combined over his 53 years.

Like the Third World

Gwen McKenna of Bloomfield Hills said she'd had power outages "on stormy days, rainy days and sunny days."

"This is like living in the Third World," she said, adding that she had lived in Senegal, Africa, and had not experienced as much

power outage. State Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, said that the area's growth and the increased use of power, on such items as air conditioning, are something Edison must recognize and adjust to.

Beyond complaints, residents had many suggestions. Most said the company's automated telephone system must be improved so that they can get accurate, updated information on the extent of any outage and the best estimate of when service will be restored.

Many suggested that the company must invest more money in equipment and personnel while not passing that cost along to customers. There were suggestions that the company should provide contingencies for keeping food cold, such as dry ice, provide better security from fallen lines and old poles, compensate businesses and residents for lost power when it was the company's fault or even a financial penalty to the company

if its actions or inaction result in a power loss.

Businessmen said not only were Edison's actions costing them, as in the case of meat market owner Ed Fisher of Birmingham, but had information about the restoration also cost them money.

"We have generators on reserve," said Greg Carney of Lela Systems in Livonia. "But when they told us power would be back in four hours, we didn't order them."

Carney said when power was not restored, his company had to go to great expense to get generators from Grand Rapids.

Residents with medical problems and others who waited out the outage in air-conditioned hotel rooms also complained of the expense.

'Edison does care'

But Earley, who attended the hearing along with several Edison officials, said the company cares

about its customers and takes the criticism seriously.

"Because of the extreme heat and because we had storms over several days, we had to revise restoration estimates," Earley said. "That left the impression that Detroit Edison didn't care. That couldn't be further from the truth."

Crews worked 16-hour shifts or more in 100-degree heat to try and restore power, he said, adding that the company brought in crews from five states and would have had more except that power outages in Cleveland and Akron, Ohio, had required extra crews as well.

Strand said the PSC will compile the information and come up with a plan to "get some of the bugs out of this system."

Monday, a Farmington Hills citizens' committee that was begun after the 1991 power outage will hear public comments beginning at 7:30 p.m. in city council chambers.

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