

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**



Public Roundtable - Power Outage Emergency Planning and Response and Recent  
Significant Power Outage Incidents

Testimony of  
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Before the  
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety

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John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Good afternoon, Chairperson Pinto, Councilmembers present, and the staff of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. My name is Clint Osborn, and I am the Director of the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA).

Thank you for hosting this roundtable, and for providing me with the opportunity to speak to how the District responds to power outages when they impact residents, visitors, government, and the private sector.

Over the last 75 years, HSEMA's mission has been to prevent, protect against, respond to, mitigate, and recover from threats and hazards in the District. During significant utility disruptions, HSEMA has three main responsibilities:

- provide public notification of the incident based on information from the utility and other partners;
- serve as the coordinating point between the utility and District government agencies as the utility works to restore service;
- coordinate multi-agency response and recovery efforts for the community.

While HSEMA routinely collaborates with Pepco and is in contact with Pepco during power outages, it is important to note that HSEMA's role in responding to power outages is distinct from Pepco's, and the same applies for our other utility partners.

HSEMA's focus is on the impact utility disruptions have on government services, communities, and businesses. We work to minimize utility disruption's impact to our ability to deliver government services to the public, monitor the status of critical infrastructure, and ensure the safety of District residents and visitors. Our utility partners are responsible for investigating the cause, implementing solutions, and mitigating future disruption.

To give you a better idea of how this behind-the-scenes coordination works, I'd like to walk you through a timeline of the District's response to the West End power outage this past February. This outage resulted from a fire that occurred in the early morning hours of Friday, February 21, 2025.

It affected more than 1,000 Pepco customers, and permanent power was restored by Pepco by 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, February 23.

At 4:52 a.m. on February 21, HSEMA was notified of an active vault fire at the intersection of 21<sup>st</sup> and M Streets NW. At 5:15 a.m., the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) reported traffic signal power outages at nearby intersections. Two minutes later, at 5:17 a.m., HSEMA sent out an AlertDC notification about fire department activity in the area. By 6:11 a.m., Pepco was on the scene. However, Pepco could not provide a damage assessment to HSEMA until 1:03 p.m.

Once we received Pepco's damage assessment, we coordinated with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to assist residents. At 5:15 p.m. DHS began transporting clients of The Ashton, which had lost power, to a nearby Salvation Army center. HSEMA also coordinated extensively with the Department of Aging and Community Living (DAACL) and the Mayor's Office of Community Relations and Services (MOCRS) to support our most vulnerable residents.

On Saturday, February 22 at 11:25 AM, HSEMA met onsite with Pepco's government affairs and external affairs teams for an update and to align public messaging. At 1:45 p.m., HSEMA also convened an interagency emergency coordination call with District government agencies and Pepco. These calls are a standard part of complex incident response. They allow agencies and partners to share information, coordinate ongoing operations, and identify any unmet needs. HSEMA staff continued to meet regularly with Pepco and responding agencies until power was fully restored.

While operations continued in the impacted neighborhood, HSEMA continued to send information to the public so that residents were aware of ongoing events and could plan accordingly. During the West End outage, four public AlertDC notifications were sent: one on February 21 about fire department activity, two on February 22 about road closures due to utility repairs, and one on February 23 announcing the restoration of power and the reopening of closed roadways.

When assessing the impact of a power outage, HSEMA receives information from Pepco on the number of Pepco *customers* who have lost power. However, this number doesn't always reflect

the number of *residents* without power. In dense neighborhoods like the West End, one customer – like a large apartment building – can represent many residents. Depending on a building’s age and type, there may be a single electrical meter to serve many residents or a meter for each apartment. There is also wide variation in building uses, occupancy, availability of emergency backup generator power, and ability to accept generator power during these incidents. We work closely with Pepco and partner agencies as they identify and provide outreach and support to impacted communities during outages.

As HSEMA and the District respond to utility outages, we consistently look for opportunities to improve our internal processes, to increase efficiency, and streamline coordination. For example, when an outage occurred in the Golden Triangle area this July, HSEMA scheduled coordination calls with Pepco and partner agencies earlier and more frequently to increase information sharing. Throughout that outage and the extensive repair work to follow, HSEMA held daily coordination calls to receive updates from Pepco, coordinated the work District agencies were doing to support Pepco and impacted residents, and aligned outreach and messaging. Throughout the incident, the Department of Public Works (DPW) relocated vehicles in work areas, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) removed trees and provided traffic control, and my team at HSEMA stayed in constant contact with Pepco until the work was complete.

Power outages and utility disruptions are just one example that highlights the importance of HSEMA’s coordination role. No matter the cause of an incident, HSEMA works 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to track incidents, assess impacts to residents and visitors, and anticipate the District’s needs. We rely on expert-crafted internal plans and procedures which we regularly test, update, and reinforce through training.

Power outages and other incidents can be very disruptive for our community. As recent incidents across the country have shown, government cannot respond alone. In addition to continued collaboration with utility partners like Pepco, HSEMA collaborates with residents, businesses, and local community groups to increase preparedness and resilience across the District. Just last month, I joined Director Richard Jackson from the District Department of Energy and Environment and

volunteer organization leaders at Arena Stage to celebrate National Preparedness Month with a discussion on the importance of family and business preparedness.

The nationwide increase in extreme disasters has shown time and again that resilient households and communities recover far more quickly and require less government support than those who are unprepared. To support this, HSEMA maintains [ready.dc.gov](http://ready.dc.gov), a website that includes information on how to build an emergency kit, create a plan, stay informed, and connect with neighbors. It also educates the community on the types of emergencies the District may face. We also strongly encourage all residents and visitors in the District to sign up for AlertDC for free, real time updates about utility outages and other emergencies.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.