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SERVICE QUALITY IN OHIO'S RESTRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT

In almost any discussion about restructuring the electric utility industry to introduce competition, sooner or later someone may express concerns about service quality, safety and reliability. To address such concerns, many states are developing comprehensive service standards.

Ohio is no exception. The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) has issued Electric Safety & Service Standards (ESSS) (www.puc.state.oh.us) that apply to all investor-owned electric distribution companies and transmission owners in Ohio. These standards "are intended to promote safe and reliable service to consumers and the public, and to provide minimum standards for uniform and reasonable practices."

Standards address reliability, quality of service

Even in a restructured electric industry, certain parts of electric service – electricity delivery (transmission and distribution) – remain regulated. Only the generation portion of electric service has been opened to competition.

Customers can rest assured that they will continue to receive the same safe, reliable and quality service they received in the past. This is because the PUCO, which continues to regulate electricity delivery, has issued its ESSS. These standards identify a number of factors and services – such as metering, system reliability, deposits, payment schedules, disconnection procedures and a host of other measures – for monitoring and measurement.

Statewide standards

The standards identified by the PUCO's ESSS order apply to all investor-owned utilities across the state. Specific targets or indices, however, may vary from company to company or even from locality to locality within the service area of a particular company. Targets may be tied to local historical performance levels and local conditions.

Variables, data sources, method of calculation and frequency of evaluation (quarterly, semi-annually or annually) are spelled out for each activity.

Service standard ownership

At AEP, each standard has been assigned to a specific business unit for "ownership." This business unit is responsible for seeing that the measure is being addressed, monitored and evaluated.

Historical service standards

Due to the introduction of competition to the electricity supply industry in the state, Ohio's service standards as outlined in the ESSS order generally are more stringent and more comprehensive than previous service standards, which tended to measure only factors related to service outages.

Service standards in energy supply

Only Ohio's distribution companies and transmission owners are bound by the standards established by the PUCO's ESSS order. However, while competitive service providers are not bound by the ESSS, they still must be certified to conduct business in the state.

To review Ohio's Electric Safety & Service Standards, visit the PUCO's web site at www.puc.state.oh.us.