

Report on Collaborative Research for Hurricane Hardening

Provided by

The Public Utility Research Center
University of Florida

To the

Utility Sponsor Steering Committee

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I. Introduction

The Florida Public Service Commission (FPSC) issued Order No. PSC-06-00351-PAA-EI on April 25, 2006 (Order 06-0351) directing each investor-owned electric utility (IOU) to establish a plan that increases collaborative research to further the development of storm resilient electric utility infrastructure and technologies that reduce storm restoration costs and outages to customers. This order directed IOUs to solicit participation from municipal electric utilities and rural electric cooperatives in addition to available educational and research organizations. As a means of accomplishing this task, the IOUs joined with the municipal electric utilities and rural electric cooperatives in the state (collectively referred to as the Project Sponsors) to form a Steering Committee of representatives from each utility and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the University of Florida's Public Utility Research Center (PURC).

PURC manages the work flow and communications, develops work plans, serves as a subject matter expert, conducts research, facilitates the hiring of experts, coordinates with research vendors, advises the Project Sponsors, and provides reports for Project activities. The collaborative research has focused on undergrounding, vegetation management, hurricane-wind speeds at granular levels, and improved materials for distribution facilities.

This report provides an update on the activities of the Steering Committee since the previous report dated February 2012.

II. Undergrounding

The collaborative research on undergrounding has been focused on understanding the existing research on the economics and effects of hardening strategies, including undergrounding, so that

informed decisions can be made about undergrounding policies and specific undergrounding projects.

The collaborative has refined the computer model developed by Quanta Technologies and there has been a collective effort to learn more about the function and functionality of the computer code. PURC and the Project Sponsors have worked to fill information gaps for model inputs and significant efforts have been invested in the area of forensics data collection. Since the state has not been affected by any hurricanes since the database software was completed, there is currently no data. Therefore, future efforts to refine the undergrounding model will occur when such data becomes available.

In addition, PURC has worked with doctoral and master's candidates in the University of Florida Department of Civil and Coastal Engineering to assess some of the inter-relationships between wind speed and other environmental factors on utility equipment damage. PURC has also been contacted by engineering researchers at other universities with an interest in the model, though no additional relationships have been established. The researchers that contact PURC all cite the model as the only non-proprietary model of its kind.

The research discussed in last year's report on the relationship between wind speed and rainfall is still under review by the engineering press. Further results of this and related research can likely be used to further refine the model.

III. Wind Data Collection

The Project Sponsors entered into a wind monitoring agreement with WeatherFlow, Inc. Currently, WeatherFlow's Florida wind monitoring network includes 50 permanent wind monitoring stations around the coast of Florida. The wind, temperature, and barometric pressure data being collected at these stations has been made available to the Project Sponsors.

There have been no major impacts from hurricanes since the wind monitoring network was established. Once such an event does occur and wind data is captured, it is expected that forensic investigations of utilities' infrastructure failure will be conducted and overlaid with wind observations to correlate failure modes to wind speed and turbulence characteristics. Project Sponsors and PURC will analyze such data at that time.

IV. Public Outreach

In last year's report we discussed the impact of Hurricane Irene on greater interest in storm preparedness. PURC researchers discussed the collaborative effort in Florida with the engineering departments of the state regulators in Pennsylvania and Maryland. In addition, PURC researchers testified on the collaborative effort in a special session before the office of the Governor of Connecticut. While all of the regulators and policymakers showed great interest in the genesis of the collaborative effort, and the results of that effort, they have not, at this point, shown further interest in participating in the research effort. However, the impact of Hurricane Sandy has sparked interest in the research in the states of New York and New Jersey, and

representatives of regulatory and consumer organizations in both states have contacted PURC regarding the research and Florida's collaborative effort.

In August, PURC Director of Energy Studies Ted Kury participated in a teleseminar for state utility regulators sponsored by the National Regulatory Research Institute. During the seminar, he joined other participants in discussing the costs and benefits of relocating power lines underground. He also discussed the state's response to the 2004-05 hurricane seasons and shared lessons from the collaborative experience. In March of 2013, the *Wall Street Journal* will be publishing a special section on pressing energy issues where Kury will be contributing an essay on the costs and benefits of undergrounding.

V. Conclusion

In response to the FPSC's Order 06-0351, IOUs, municipal electric utilities, and rural electric cooperatives joined together and retained PURC to coordinate research on electric infrastructure hardening. The steering committee has taken steps to extend the research collaboration MOU so that the industry will be in a position to focus its research efforts on undergrounding research, granular wind research and vegetation management when significant storm activity affects the state.