



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES DEPARTMENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND CABLE

REGULATORY BULLETIN

November 17, 2021

Massachusetts is experiencing more frequent and more extreme weather events. As a result, in addition to the strengthening of Massachusetts' network of utility poles, wires, cables, and attachments against storms, Massachusetts communities will increasingly rely on utility pole owners, pole attachment owners, and first responders to work together to both prepare for and recover from downed poles, wires, and related equipment. The Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable ("DTC") and the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities ("DPU") issue this Regulatory Bulletin as a reminder of stakeholders' obligations to prepare for and respond to weather-related outages and downed wires across the Commonwealth, and to encourage stakeholders to work together to mitigate any resulting damage.

The DTC and the DPU ("Departments") remind owners of utility poles, piers, fixtures supporting wires, conduit, and cross arms or other appliances for the support of wires or cables of their obligation to mark each such item with their name or initials. G.L. c. 166, § 31. Similarly, the owners of wires attached to a pole or structure owned by another must also mark said pole or structure with the name or initials of the owner of the wire or of the person maintaining or operating the wire. G.L. c. 166, § 36. These requirements help first responders and repair personnel know the nature of the equipment they encounter in an emergency and whom to contact about fallen equipment.

Electric distribution companies must help the communities in which they operate prepare for weather-related downed poles and wires by, among other responsibilities, meeting with state and local officials annually to ensure effective communications and cooperation between the companies and local public safety officials in the event of weather emergencies. 220 C.M.R. § 19.03. The Departments remind electric distribution companies that some state and municipal agencies provide telecommunications service in Massachusetts and, as a result, attach wires to utility poles.

The Departments further remind all parties that utility poles often house infrastructure from multiple services. Therefore, while restoring service after an outage, all efforts should be made to be mindful of the impact restoration activities will have on other services attached to affected poles. The Departments encourage electric distribution companies to communicate as soon as possible with attachers when the companies receive notice of downed wires or poles affecting their attached equipment and to work cooperatively with attachers to maintain attachers' services when possible.

In the event of downed wires or equipment, the Departments expect that public officials, including municipal officials and first responders, will immediately contact each of the parties whose name appears on the utility pole or other downed fixture. Electric distribution companies are required to maintain a priority phone number to be used for such calls. D.P.U. 11-85-A/11-119-A (2012) at 51.

Massachusetts consumers and businesses rely on the services provided via utility poles and attachments, and interruptions can have a substantial impact on our homes, businesses, and essential services. The Departments encourage pole owners, attachers, and public officials to work cooperatively to help minimize unnecessary service interruptions and keep Massachusetts served.

Thank you for your attention, and please contact us with any questions at the Department of Telecommunications and Cable, attention Lindsay DeRoche (617) 305-3580 lindsay.deroche@mass.gov; or the Department of Public Utilities, attention Sandra Merrick (617) 519-1760 sandra.merrick@mass.gov.

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