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OFGEM ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION CUSTOMER SERVICE REWARD SCHEME 2007

Submission by CE Electric UK

Priority Customer Care Initiatives

Submission

“Community Care”

At CE Electric UK, we try hard to meet the needs of all our customers and we appreciate that some have particular needs. Our approach is to work with partners to:

- identify as many customers as possible with particular needs;
- understand their needs better;
- communicate with them appropriately; and
- respond to their needs as effectively as possible.

70,000 priority customers

It lists around 37,000 customers of NEDL (up by 12,000 from a year ago), of whom 6,300 depend on electricity for medical or other equipment. We believe that NEDL, which has one customer in 40 on its register, may have achieved the highest success rate in the country for reaching out to and registering priority customers.

YEDL now has nearly 33,000 customers on its register (up by 15,000 in the last year), of whom 3,100 are electricity-dependent.

The register also includes customers who have hearing or sight difficulties.

Understanding the needs of vulnerable customers

All staff in our Customer Relations Centre (CRC) are trained in how to deal with calls from priority register customers. To help CRC staff empathise more effectively with them, we have arranged training from the WRVS. All staff are being reminded of our customer service code of practice through a new, electronic, internal publication.

Research carried out last year identified that our staff would benefit from more knowledge about electricity-dependent customers. We worked with health authorities and charities to produce a briefing paper for our staff covering oxygen concentrators, nebulisers, sleep apnoea monitors, kidney dialysis equipment, medical ventilators and stairlifts.

Offering vulnerable customers information in a choice of formats

Our research showed that 72% of electricity-dependent customers would appreciate information about preparing for an interruption in power. We therefore launched a campaign to give advice on this to all vulnerable customers.

We wrote to local authorities, parish councils and wardens of sheltered housing schemes. The advice included 20,000 Preparing for Winter leaflets and posters that highlighted our emergency phone numbers. We issued press releases to all local newspapers and arranged competitions in many of them for Winter Warmer packs worth £55. These contained an all-in-one radio and torch, a fleece blanket, thermal socks, a

hat, mittens and an insulated mug.

We also created a dedicated Preparing for Winter area on our website, prominently signposted from the home page, with downloadable versions of the leaflet in seven languages. It is also available in audio, Braille and large print.

The leaflet is part of our priority customers’ welcome pack, which has details of a priority 24/7 telephone number. To further reassure vulnerable customers, the pack tells them how they can create a security password, if they wish.

Responding to vulnerable customers’ needs as effectively as possible during power interruptions, working in partnership with other organisations

NEDL’s priority customer register has been integrated with our fault management system since 1996 and YEDL’s since 2003. It automatically identifies registered customers affected by a supply interruption, saving time previously taken for a manual check.

This reflects our holistic approach to meeting the needs of vulnerable customers in planned, as well as unplanned, interruptions. We aim to speak to all registered customers identified by the system before any planned interruption and, where appropriate, provide them with generators.

During unplanned interruptions, registered customers can call the priority number. This by-passes our automated answering systems, used in major supply interruptions, so they can speak to a customer service adviser, who will address their problems and, wherever possible, call them back to check their supply has been restored. Last year we made 88,000 such calls, some of which were to customers on the register. We also provide generators from our 50-strong pool.

Welfare visits from around 80 specially trained staff, known as customer ambassadors, are also arranged. We have two customer support vehicles, ready to be mobilised wherever required.

In addition, we draw on assistance from partners at such times.

Downloadable leaflets

Dedicated phone line

An integrated first

Holistic approach

Winter Warmer packs

Customer Excellence

88,000 call-backs

Customer support vehicles

Learning from best practice identified in last year’s discretionary reward scheme, we have arranged for the WRVS to provide hot meals, drinks and telephone advice for customers during major incidents. Community groups have also been asked if they would like to provide assistance on such occasions.

All parish councils in our area have a dedicated telephone number to contact us during a major interruption. They can get the latest information about any interruption and its likely length. Feedback shows this has been greatly welcomed. We have given grants to selected parish councils, where restoration times can be lengthy, so the community can prepare for an emergency, perhaps by modifying buildings to become refuge centres or buying equipment.

Plans in action

The January storms, when 96,000 customers were off supply, showed our plans deliver what they promise. Our fault management system rapidly identified 127 customers on the register as being off supply. We called them to assess their needs and provide appropriate support.

Twelve customers and a nursing home were offered generators, while eight had welfare visits from customer ambassadors delivering Winter Warmer packs. We also asked all local councils and parish councils if they knew of any vulnerable customers not on our register.

Feedback and the future

Like our “Equal Access” initiative, “Community Care” is monitored at our weekly customer service progress meetings and is an integral part of our Customer Excellence programme.

In the coming year we will develop the programme in the light of feedback from Ofgem’s judging panel, working with our partners and other stakeholders. There are areas where we can further improve our quality of service, particularly to customers with special needs. We shall continue to build on our achievements by developing new initiatives that enhance the experience of all our customers, whatever their needs.

Proactive programme

“Community Care” is a proactive programme for our most vulnerable customers to:

- update and expand the register of priority customers;
- understand their needs better;
- offer them information in a choice of formats; and
- respond to their needs as effectively as possible, particularly by improving services during power interruptions.

WRVS training

Best practice

It has been developed to reflect best practice from last year’s discretionary reward scheme and research among 500 electricity-dependent customers on our register, 25 of whom had experienced a loss of supply. Charities, including Help the Aged, Age Concern, the British Lung Foundation and the National Kidney Federation, also contributed to the study.

Updating and expanding the register

We record new entries the day we receive them and we only remove entries if authorised by the customer. We contact all customers annually to check their details.

We promote the register in our codes of practice document (available in seven different languages) and our website. In the first three months of 2007 there were 16,000 visits to the website. Of these, one in 60 was to the ‘special needs’ section, where customers can apply to go on the register.

The 1,099 parish councils in our area have been asked for names of people who would benefit from being on the register. We also mentioned the register in letters sent last year to 86,000 customers who had been without supply for more than three hours or over a meal time.

Priority Customer Care Initiatives

Stakeholder Support Document

Angela Currie, Head of Emergency Services, WRVS

“Like several other electricity distributors, YEDL and NEDL have entered into a partnership with us. This means that they can call on our volunteers to telephone vulnerable customers, at times of prolonged power cuts, and, where appropriate, make welfare visits to them.

“With this partnership a new initiative has been agreed, to arrange regular training and awareness days for their Customer Relations Centre staff, so they can gain from the knowledge and perspective of our volunteers.”

John Docherty, Chief Officer Corporate Development, Wear Valley District Council

“We had a major problem in February when 8,000 homes in the Crook area lost their gas supply, some of them for up to a week. It was the biggest such incident in the UK since the war.

“To respond to the crisis, 5,000 convector heaters were distributed to the most vulnerable customers but this overloaded the local electricity circuits and caused supply interruptions.

“NEDL’s people were extremely responsive and supportive throughout and worked very closely with the council, Northern Gas Networks and other agencies. They brought in eight extra generators, repaired circuits as quickly as possible and attended our emergency planning meetings. Their contribution was well above the call of duty.”

Paul Robinson, Commercial Manager, Roche Health Limited

“We have a 54-bed nursing and residential care home at Mirfield, West Yorkshire, which lost its electricity supply in the January storms. The emergency lights lasted for a few hours until the batteries started to run down. Yorkshire Electricity provided us with a generator for the lights and routine power. Shortly afterwards, they gave us a second generator to power a passenger lift. These met our needs very well and we appreciated their efficient response.”

	2005	2006	2007
Details of priority customers kept up to date and accurate.	✓	✓	✓
Register publicised in code of practice and ‘special needs’ section of website.	✓	✓	✓
Work with suppliers to improve daily data flows including details of medical equipment.	✓	✓	✓
New entries put on register the same day.	✓	✓	✓
Weekly improvement meetings attended by senior management.	✓	✓	✓
Customer service staff trained in responding to enquiries about register and how to deal with calls from customers on register.		✓	✓
All customers on register sent priority pack with dedicated telephone number.		✓	✓
Aim to speak to all priority customers ahead of pre-arranged interruptions.		✓	✓
Letters encouraging customers to register.		✓	✓
Contact programme with 1,099 parish councils.		✓	✓
Dedicated phone number for parish councils.		✓	✓
Grants to parish councils for emergency preparations.		✓	✓
Fully integrated priority services register with fault management system.		✓	✓
Welfare visits by customer ambassadors.		✓	✓
Market research on services to registered customers.		✓	✓
Proactive contact with customers off supply.		✓	✓
Customers can apply to go on to the priority register through the website.			✓
WRVS to train staff and help in emergencies.			✓
Briefing paper for staff about medical equipment.			✓
Information campaign for all customers on preparing for power interruptions.			✓
20,000 Preparing for Winter leaflets distributed with downloadable versions in different languages and formats.			✓
Winter Warmer packs.			✓
Pool of 50 generators for pre-arranged or unplanned interruptions.			✓
Two customer support vehicles to be mobilised where required.			✓
Partners, including community groups, to assist during major incidents.			✓