

Priority Customer Care

We are a caring and responsible company and realise that power cuts are difficult for everybody but especially so for those who are the most vulnerable in our society. For some time we have worked to the industry criteria for vulnerable and special needs customers. This year, however, we wanted to look at the bigger picture – by doing something for those customers who are not normally identified as vulnerable in the traditional sense and by developing our own wider definition of priority services to go above and beyond our licence obligations. We set up a working group and **Project Beacon** was born.

Our objectives were to improve and expand our service for priority customers and to look at those customers not previously identified as vulnerable. We wanted to challenge ourselves to find innovative ways of helping these people and other customers who find power cuts particularly difficult. We started by asking ourselves a series of questions.

Our new Priority Services helpline

0800 028 4581

Who should be our priority customers?

- Customers who rely on electricity for medical equipment, have a disability, are chronically ill, vulnerable or have communication or learning difficulties.
- Temporary vulnerable customers – EDF Energy Networks identified these customers as a new group. If we are told about customers with a transient illness or injury they can be added to our Priority Service Register (PSR) for however long they need extra support and we will keep in regular contact with them.

We soon realised that there were various categories of vulnerability within these criteria.

“We know about those who have obvious special needs. We need to seek those customers who may not always be so apparent”

Mary Preece - Customer Relations Manager

The PSR is only as good as the information on it - so how do we ensure that it is up to date?

This year we have successfully completed the process of updating our existing PSR.

We wrote to more than 45,000 customers asking if they still needed to be on our PSR and to gather more information on their needs. The PSR will be refreshed annually.

All these customers were then given a dedicated emergency telephone number - 0800 028 45 81. We sent them a large print card (Braille on the back) with the PSR telephone number along with a fact sheet on how to cope during a power cut.

This number covers all three of our networks for emergency and dangerous electrical situations.

This line takes priority over our normal emergency calls.

What do our vulnerable customers need from us?

We realised that we would need help! So who better to ask than those who know best - the customer and those stakeholders who have a unique insight into their needs (see letter on page 3).

We surveyed a cross section of customers from our updated PSR (see page 3) a continuation of the ‘Voice of the Customer’ research (see our 2006 submission)

We then identified those organisations who represent and work with vulnerable customers, bringing them together to share their knowledge and experience. On 23 January 2007 we held our first stakeholder seminar (see our Communications submission 2007).

Leader of Project Beacon, Matt Rudling opened the seminar by asking: **“How do we really start to target improved services for the most vulnerable and communicate with them? I don’t know the answer and that’s why you are here today.”**

The day included discussion and feedback on key topics (see letter on page 3). A total of 300 forms were completed and we have already started to implement a number of suggestions.

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(continued from page one)

- ❖ Providing heating to vulnerable customers during power cuts – we are now working with a hire company to deliver, connect and collect calor gas heaters for those most in need.
- ❖ Contacting customers the day before a planned shutdown to offer help and advice.
- ❖ Producing a pictorial information sheet for those with limited literacy and for those whose first language is not English to ensure they know how to contact us.
- ❖ Providing a text and fax option for those with communication difficulties.

How do we identify and communicate with customers who are difficult to reach?

By working in partnership with stakeholders including:

- ❖ **talking newspapers:** Chatterbox in Norwich ran articles promoting our PSR. 80 customers contacted us to be added to our PSR and 34 organisations now broadcast items on their tapes
- ❖ **hospital radio:** Ashford Hospital Broadcasting Service has produced an audiotape to be used on other stations promoting the PSR

- ❖ **WRVS:** Through a long-established and successful partnership we are able to distribute our PSR fact sheet in WRVS hospital shops and lunch clubs
- ❖ **EDF Energy Network employees:** We gave all 5,000 of our employees a booklet and application form to pass on to anyone who might benefit from PSR services; our field teams have already asked for more forms. For one month our company suggestion scheme, "Let's Try It", focused on improvements for vulnerable customers

How do we meet our vulnerable customers' needs?

Partner initiatives – working together to ensure staff are trained to help vulnerable customers

- » Mencap trained staff to communicate effectively with customers with learning disabilities
- » Mencap has helped create communications in Easy Read format
- » RNID provided Type Talk training to 24 of our employees – there is now a trained operative working on every call centre shift
- » We have a partnership with Ceres Power to develop gas powered fuel cells for vulnerable customers

Organisational initiatives

- » We created storm roles for contacting all customers, particularly those on our PSR
- » We now have a new role,

PSR co-ordinator, to seek alternative ways of reaching those vulnerable customers who were not previously aware of our register

Communication initiatives

- » We have set up a dedicated telephone line for PSR customers
- » All PSR customers were given a dedicated telephone number in large print and in Braille
- » PSR customers are offered help by the WRVS or the customer support vehicle.
- » Regular call backs are made to priority customers with updates on power cuts.
- » Accessible literature: fact sheets are available in Braille, Moon and audio (see Communications submission)

What if the customer's first language is not English or they have limited literacy? How do they contact us in an emergency?

- » Our 'language line' provides a real time interpretation service
- » We produced a pictorial fact sheet showing the telephone number in easy-to-follow diagrams (see page 3). This is being trialled in libraries in London and in WRVS hospital shops. This guides them through different scenarios with easy to understand drawings and gives our emergency telephone number.

We also realise that there are other people in our community who could be vulnerable for many other reasons: the old, the very young and those who just find life difficult. As part of our company culture of caring more for all our customers, we have developed and implemented coaching and training enabling our people to empathise and reassure customers on an individual basis.

What about the future?

At our seminar on 23 January, 2007, Paul Cuttill said: "EDF Energy is lobbying for a single national PSR which would be linked to the unique identity of every meter, tying the register entry to an address irrespective of the occupants' choice of energy supplier. Suppliers

currently have to maintain separate registers, which causes complications and potential confusion to customers and network operators."

We have engaged with Ofgem and other DNOs to create a single PSR. Ofgem has shown full support and agreed to hold a multi-utility seminar to take the initiative forward.

KEY

- Fig one Results from one of the customer survey questions
- Fig two Part of the letter sent to organisations we wanted to attend our seminar
- Fig three Pictorial factsheet for non-English speakers and those with limited literacy skills

Comments received on feedback forms about our new dedicated telephone number



Fig. one

Part of the invitation letter to stakeholders for the seminar on 23 January 2007 from Paul Cuttill

As Chief Operating Officer for EDF Energy Networks I would like to invite you to our first Priority Services Workshop to help find ways of improving our service to our vulnerable customers during emergency situations.

EDF Energy Networks owns and maintains the electricity network in London, the East and South East of England. This means we are responsible for all the overhead lines, underground cables and substations. Therefore if anybody in these areas has a power cut we are the company responsible and the people to contact to get it back.

We want to provide a safe and reliable supply of electricity but, however hard we try, power cuts will still happen.

We know how difficult it is for anybody during a power cut but recognise how especially worrying it must be for those who are reliant on electricity for medical equipment or have other special needs. Vulnerable customers such as these often ask if we can offer them any extra help during power cuts.

Well, yes, we can if we know who they are!

For some time we have kept a Priority Services Register which offers additional help during power cuts to customers with special needs and communication difficulties. But we now want to enhance this service and a great way to do this is with help and advice from you and your organisation. We are writing to you as we recognise that you have the expertise and knowledge to advise us on how we develop this service.

Therefore I would like to invite you, and a representative from your organisation, to a seminar on 23 January 2007 at the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, London, to discuss these issues.

We're keen to have an interactive meeting and your input is vital to the success of the day. The issues we will be discussing will include:

- How can we reach those people who would benefit by joining the register?
- What can we do to help during a power cut?
- What is the best way to communicate with your members?

We're sure that you feel as we do that we must make every effort to reach those people who need our help most and look forward to seeing you there.

Fig. two

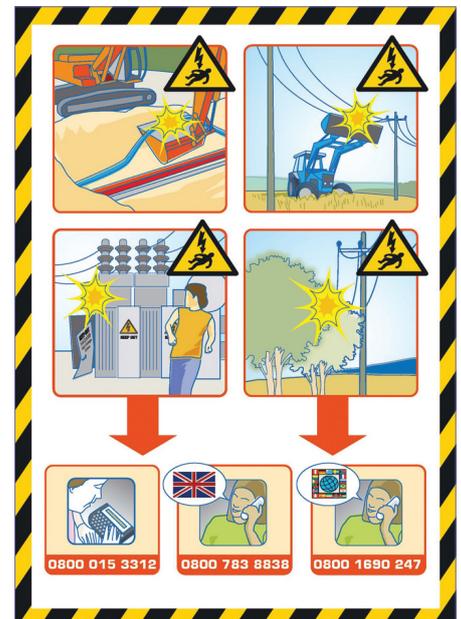
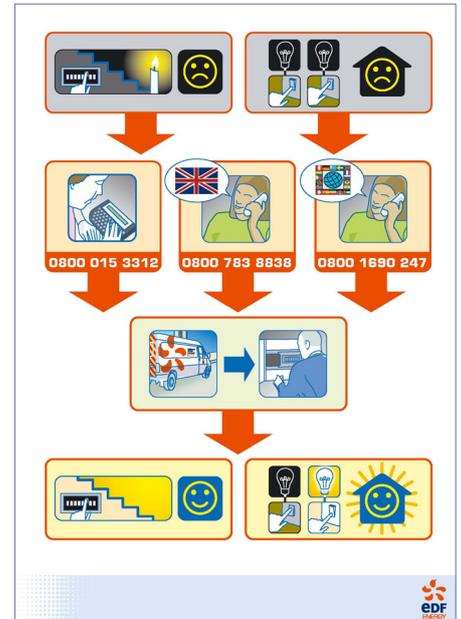


Fig. three