

**“We will lead the industry in protecting vulnerable customers from the adverse effects of power cuts.”** Vincent de Rivaz, CEO, EDF Energy

Following this on-the-record commitment, we have gone one step further than any other energy company and accepted that many customers, not just those on our Priority Services Register (PSR), could become vulnerable for a period of time and maybe just for the duration of a power cut.

By listening to our customers, through telephone calls via our contact centres or feedback via our community partnership we learnt that there is no single solution for vulnerable customers and during power cuts some one can become “short-term vulnerable”. At any point in their lives somebody could become a temporarily vulnerable person perhaps for a day, a week or longer. It may be due to ill health, a new baby, a specific situation or even the time of day or time of year.

### Caring for all

#### Challenges and commitments

Our challenge this year was to improve our customer care for Priority Service Customers and commit to a long term strategy to give help and support to all customers.

***So we listened to all our customers and responded to their needs by approaching the BRITISH RED CROSS (BRC)***

In partnership with



NEW

**British Red Cross:** Establishing an industry first, EDF Energy Networks formed a partnership with British Red Cross in August 2008 to help vulnerable customers collaboratively during lengthy power cuts, or in response to emergency calls.

The BRC emblem is immediately recognisable and trusted. We think all customers would recognise and trust the organisation and be comforted with their presence.

They were keen to work alongside EDF Energy Networks in helping people who are without electricity. They bring practical help, support and comfort to all our

customers, who without power can all be classed as vulnerable, along with providing real time information in conjunction with our Contact Centre.

#### So what does the British Red Cross offer?

- Emergency response units who can be deployed at any time on any day across all our three network areas with vehicles and volunteers in strategic places.
- Immediate practical and emotional help to customers in a power cut.
- Ability to transport customers on essential medical equipment to a place of safety.
- Up to date power cut information.
- Work with Primary Care Trusts to pinpoint vulnerable customers who are not on our PSR.
- Transfer any perishable medical supplies held at GP surgeries/nursing homes or by individuals.
- Multi-lingual phrase books to converse with those whose first language is not English.
- Provide a liaison officer in our strategic team during periods of exceptional demand such as a storm situation.
- Volunteers who are checked and approved by the Criminal Records Bureau and trained to give first aid, emotional support and basic network information.
- Torches, telephones, batteries along with other equipment supplied by us.

We are very proud to have the BRC working alongside us caring and helping our customers during difficult times. This partnership and the benefits it brings work well with our social commitments leading up to 2012 and is now embedded into our everyday business.

We like to be innovators in caring for our vulnerable customers and this partnership goes one step further to include all our customers; we are sure this is the way of the future.

#### We lead and others follow

We are always keen to share our experiences and knowledge with other organisations who face similar challenges.

***Anglian Water and Thames Water are keen to understand how this service can benefit their customers and have approached us for feedback and advice.***

#### And that's not all...

We haven't been complacent and have also been exploring other ways of improving our service along with developing our past initiatives which are fully embedded into our business.

#### Continuing to listen to customers' needs

**Home visits:** We are trialling a face-to-face customer feedback initiative to gather comments and ideas directly from vulnerable customers on a regular basis.

This involves:

- visiting care homes and sheltered accommodation where residents are on the PSR
- visiting individuals in their home

We've learnt a lot and have already introduced new initiatives around planned shutdowns. This is just a beginning and we will develop this initiative so that the voice of the customer will shape the future of our customer service.

**Reacting to need:** We appreciate the needs of some customers are greater than others and we also know some people on our register may not need to be on there. So in partnership with the software provider of our Fault Management System we are in the process of modifying the system to identify those customers most at need with a traffic light system.

- Red: critical/life threatening
- Amber: disabilities
- Green: under review/awaiting response

Our customer-facing staff can use this system to ensure they respond to customers' needs and update our records appropriately.

This idea could easily be adopted by others as the technology is widely used in the industry.

**Safety after power cuts:** Not only do we call customers with updates during power cuts but we also call them back when power is restored. When one customer pointed out this woke them up and they noticed the smell of gas (from a pilot light going out during power outage and not relighting) we knew we could improve post-power cut safety. We are now building safety reminders into our established call-back procedures.

UPDATE

**Community partnership work**

**Challenges and commitments**

As well as having our trusted door-to-door service partner BRC providing the personal and emotional support, we continue to research technologies that can help customers meet the tangible need for energy and heat during power cuts.

**Initiatives**

ONGOING

**Heater hire:** As an extension to our partnership with the British Red Cross, we hire heaters for vulnerable customers who need electricity for their primary source of heat during power cuts.

NEW

**Using technology to improve the customer experience:** We are installing a new telephony system which will bring real benefits for priority customers. One example of this is the ability to identify their priority status by recognising their telephone number when they ring us. The system then automatically prioritises their call even if they do not call through on the priority line.

With their permission (currently being sought), we will also be able to proactively contact PSR customers by sending SMS text or automated voice messages if a fault occurs in their area, providing immediate peace of mind when the power goes off.

**Impact on priority customers**

British Red Cross volunteers have called on 9,000 homes since the start of our partnership last August including vulnerable people, families with babies, care and nursing homes. The comments from these people demonstrate how significant this help was in helping them cope with the challenges posed by power cuts (see evidence page).

In the past 12 months 87 households have benefited from the heater hire service.

The BRC are now distributing post paid feedback cards encouraging customers to tell us what they think of the service and asking for suggestions on how we could improve this service.



**Initiatives to improve the Priority Service Register**

**Challenges and commitments**

Although we have put great effort into publicising our register we know we can't have captured every customer in our area who would benefit from being on it.

We continue to act proactively to update our database and the next letter to all PSR customers will be sent this May/June. Frustratingly though we can't share information with other organisations who come into regular contact with vulnerable customers.

So the focus of our PSR improvement activity in 2008 and 2009 has been in the area of partnerships.

**Initiatives**

NEW

**Finding new PSR customers in partnership with British Red Cross:** BRC volunteers meet hundreds of vulnerable customers during site and home visits along with their home-from-hospital transport scheme and encourage them to join our register by handing out the forms and leaflets.

NEW

**Suffolk Home Shield:** Home Shield was established in 2005 to allow staff from a range of organisations to use one simple referral form to help vulnerable customers access a host of support services. A tick box for our PSR is being added and this vital form will be rolled out late June 2009, following staff training. We hope to encourage this system into other areas.

NEW

**Live Safe:** 750,000 copies distributed across the East and London last year reaching in excess of 2 million readers. Included in this useful information and safety paper was a form to join our PSR.

UPDATE

**Leading the way:** EDF Energy Networks met with the Information Commissioner and Ofgem to discuss the concept of a UK-wide database for priority customers. We were told this was not possible due to the Data Protection Act, but we should work to improve the data flows within the industry.

We are in the process of doing this and discussions have taken place with two suppliers as well as Ofgem on how best to proceed. We see this work as key to the continued drive to improve the quality of data held on the most vulnerable while ensuring customers only ever need to notify the industry once to be on a register.

UPDATE

**Talking Newspapers:** We continue to support Talking Newspapers and a senior manager, Matt Rudling, is speaking at their Eastern Region AGM. Their 5,000 listeners have been encouraged to be prepared for winter and consider registering their details on our PSR.

UPDATE

**Hospital radio:** We will be continuing to support hospital radio with a new updated message to include news on the partnership with BRC.

NEW

**Hertfordshire County Council "Ready For Anything booklet":** More than 6,000 copies were distributed through their Social Care contacts with details of our Priority Services Register. It is now on their web site and over 200 have already been downloaded.

UPDATE

**PSR-dedicated phone number:** This number is treated as a priority call, going straight to a skilled person, not an automated message. There have been 983 callers in the past year.

ONGOING

**Parish Councils:** Our management team continue to attend and support local councils by attending meetings and distributing information including PSR leaflets.

**Impact on priority customers**

We are confident we will encourage vulnerable customers to join our PSR with our varied range of initiatives.

In the past 12 months we have seen a 0.6% net increase in the size of our PSR. These additional customers will now benefit from the enhanced service we provide to vulnerable customers during power cuts, including, where necessary:

- British Red Cross visits.
- Free telephones not requiring mains electricity.
- The option of updates via text or automated telephone call back.
- Regular call backs to keep vulnerable customers updated during power cuts (8,291 such calls in the past year).

There have been 8,675 instances where we have provided PSR customers with extra help.

ONGOING

**Lessons learnt:** Not to be complacent and never to stop looking for wonderful new partnerships such as BRC and Homeshield.

**External recognition**

Since our last submission, our work with priority customers has been awarded the Customer Care Initiative of the Year award at the Achievement in Utilities Awards, despite many water and energy supply companies competing for this highly sought after accolade.

Period	Aug 08 – March 09
Number of call outs	83
Properties affected	12,412
Doors knocked	9,443 (inc. 4 care/nursing homes)
Welfare checks following event (phone calls)	54
Customer helped (drinks/information/ revisit/ phone call)	2,157

Table showing details of assistance provided by BRC during power cuts.

Business Reply Plus  
 Licence Number  
 RRBC-ALUY-AJEH

EDF Energy Networks  
 Loraine Parris  
 Fore Hamlet  
 Ipswich  
 IP3 8AA

Feedback cards given to customers by BRC and EDF Energy

In partnership with

EDF Energy Networks is working in partnership with the British Red Cross to support you during power cuts. To help us build on and improve this service, please can you take a few minutes to complete this form.

Date of power cut: \_\_\_\_\_ Town/Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

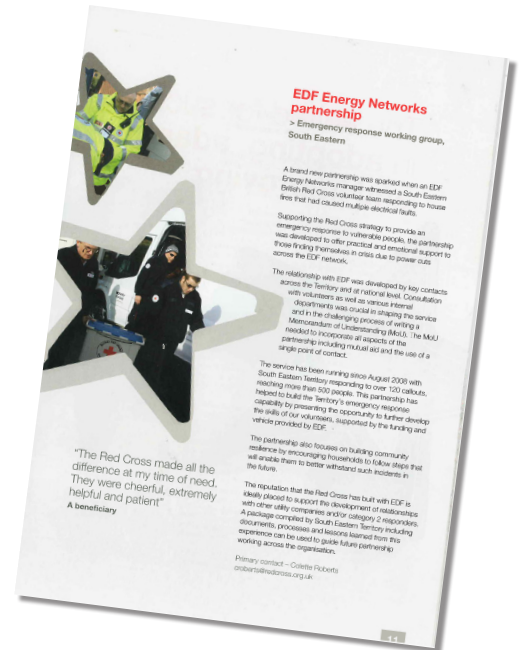
Was it helpful having the British Red Cross on site? Yes  No

What did you find most useful? \_\_\_\_\_

Your comments/suggestions \_\_\_\_\_

If you want to speak to us please give your name and contact details:  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

For further information visit: [www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk) or [www.edfenergy.com](http://www.edfenergy.com)



BRC is so happy with this partnership that it was shortlisted for their internal awards programme.



BRC in action

**British Red Cross National Assembly, Manchester 2009**

Extract from speech by volunteer Matt Brooks, about his view of the immediate and long-term benefits for the vulnerable once they are known to the BRC

**How it started:** After some local trials in East Anglia, the partnership was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2008, extending across 11 counties and London.

**Concerns:** Initially there was mixed feelings and concerns amongst, staff and volunteers quickly suppressed after my first incident:

On arrival we were briefed 200+ houses – No electricity for past 18hrs – No gas for past 6hrs...

After handing out gallons of hot water, soup and HOT Baby food we set out to complete a house-to-house, assessment to identify any vulnerable people their needs and any issues people may need support with.

This could range from simply lighting a candle for someone who suffers with Parkinson's Disease, sourcing oxygen tanks for someone who has an electric oxygen concentrator, to a friendly reassuring chat...

This simple act made a huge difference and was a comfort to many of the householders especially people living on their own with no family or friends. We got bucket loads of positive feedback wherever we went.

**Reflection & benefits:** Behind each front door lies the unknown, a person, a loved one maybe, somebody's life. That is who we are there for. *That is what we do best, in some cases we may identify a suffering vulnerable person with many immediate and/or complex needs they may not have the knowledge that help and support is out there... and this initial contact via the power failure, may change this person's life by getting the help and support they rightly need and deserve...*

**The future:** Lots of other utility companies and organisations are watching this new partnership very closely, with the thought of rolling out similar projects all over the UK.

**"This has been the most worthwhile work I have done in 40 years with the Red Cross, and have now postponed my retirement"**

Mrs Charlesworth, the daughter of an elderly customer, called in to our Contact Centre to say:

**"A huge thank you for the service we provided to her father as she has been worried about him and she was so happy that we sent to Red Cross out to him."**