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News Memo

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AUB ASSISTS ICED-IN KENTUCKY; REMINDS RESIDENTS TO BE PREPARED FOR WINTER'S SURPRISES

ATHENS, Tenn. –While legions of McMinn County residents Sunday no doubt were preparing to watch the Super Bowl, a four-man crew from Athens Utilities Board (AUB) was preparing equipment to travel to Kentucky for long hours of power restoration work.

Ice storms that hit northwest Tennessee and much of Kentucky a week ago left hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses without electricity as trees crumpled under the weight of ice, crashing through power lines and pummeling power distribution systems.

Many of those affected are beginning their second frigid week without electricity. In response, AUB offered assistance to other TVA power distributors in the ravaged region.

AUB General Manager Eric Newberry called the crews in on Sunday afternoon after receiving assistance requests through the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association.

“This could happen to us just as easily as to our neighbors to the north and west,” Newberry said.

“Remember the blizzard of '93? If that happened again, we'd be the ones calling out for help, because ice and snow storms of that magnitude and of the extent that hit last week are unforgiving to power distribution systems. Repairing the extensive damage and restoring power in hazardous winter conditions takes every available truck and team member,” he said.

Furthermore, power restoration can take more time than expected. That's when preparation by each individual household is crucial.

Recalling the 1993 storm that blanketed East Tennessee in up to two feet of snow, AUB spokesman Wayne Scarbrough said that everyone should be prepared for surprises that winter can bring.

“In the event of a devastating ice or snow storm, power companies work around the clock to restore service. But it is slow, dangerous work. Sometimes the extent of the damage can mean several days—even weeks—without power despite the utility's best efforts.

“Last week's ice storm in northwest Tennessee and Kentucky is a reminder that preparation for the unexpected is paramount for every home,” Scarbrough said.

AUB suggests that residents stock up on basic necessities beyond bread and milk that can be stored away long before they are needed, such as:

- Plenty of candles, minimum four to five dozen
- Candlestick holders
- Matches and disposable lighters
- Flashlights; battery-powered lanterns
- Extra batteries in a variety of sizes and types
- Battery-powered space heaters or a portable kerosene space heater with ample backup fuel
- At least one battery-powered radio
- Canned goods and dry food mixes
- Paper plates, cups, and plastic utensils
- Water repellent tarps, in case frozen pipes require quick work to stop an inside leak
- Extra blankets
- First-aid kit
- Fire extinguisher (candles and portable space heaters can increase fire risk)

Scarborough urged residents to be cautious when using space heaters and to ensure they are not placed near flammable material such as curtains or furniture.

He also suggested that residents pack an emergency bag with clothes and blankets as well. “You never know how long a power outage may last or when it may begin,” he said.

“The 1993 blizzard hit well after dark. You don’t want to be stumbling around at 3 a.m. trying to pack a bag,” he said.

“Pack a bag to last you a couple of days and remember to include personal hygiene items as well as medicines and vitamins if needed,” Scarborough suggested.

Newberry said that AUB’s offer to assist neighboring TVA distributors with equipment and manpower includes provisions for the local utility to be reimbursed by the affected power companies.

“AUB will be reimbursed by the utility systems that requested emergency assistance for the cost incurred to send our crews and equipment,” he explained.

“Right now, our focus is on helping them restore power safely and as quickly as possible.”