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Power Company Mismanagement Responsible For Most Power Outages

For 40 years I have been attempting to educate electric utility companies in Texas about the virtues of placing their distribution lines underground to avoid power outages caused by wind and falling trees.

In many modern nations such as Italy and England it is virtually impossible to find ugly above-ground distribution lines, whereas in backward parts of the United States such as Texas, tens of thousands of miles of ugly and vulnerable power lines fragment the landscape.

Had the Texas Public Utility Commission heeded my advice 40 years ago and required that all new power lines be placed underground and then required that at least 2 1/2 % of existing power lines be undergrounded on an annual basis, hurricane Rita would have caused little disruption of power and saved billions of dollars in economic damages.

Our community of Waterwood in San Jacinto County, Texas was hard hit by "Rita", but not one of the many trees that fell touched our power lines because the developer was intelligent enough 30 years ago to place them underground.

Unfortunately, we are served by SHECO, which my many months of study and investigation reveal to be one of the most incompetently managed power companies in America and thus we will be without power for perhaps days or weeks longer than necessary.

Instead of spending around \$20,000 more per mile to build distribution lines underground, SHECO insists on building huge, vulnerable multi-million dollar transmission lines to nowhere, to service not even one new customer, rather than spend the money insuring service to customers by undergrounding the most vulnerable distribution lines.

Ignorance and incompetence do not rest solely on SHECO. The culpability for the outages being experienced across E. Texas can be traced to mismanagement on the part of the Texas Public Utility Commission, whose leaders rubber stamp even the most insane and illogical requests of SHECO and other backward power companies.

Most recently the PUC Commissioners gave SHECO permission to build a multi-million dollar 138 KV transmission line in violation of their own rules handed to them by the Texas Legislature and in contempt of the many hundreds of pages of evidence and expert testimony which showed irrefutable proof that SHECO's plan was a total boondoggle to waste millions of dollars for no legitimate reason. An economic analysis indicates a cost of \$13,400 per household that would allegedly receive improved service if the line to nowhere is built. (Testimony and evidence can be found at the PUC Texas website under Docket 29705)

In violation of the legislative intent, the PUC Commissioners have arrogantly agreed to allow SHECO to divide a community, expose elderly people to harmful EMF radiation, seriously damage America's first "green" family cemetery, a Native American sacred ceremonial site, a State Archaeological Landmark, a Texas Parks and Wildlife Trail, threatened and endangered species habitat, a Texas Forest Service Aesthetic Management Zone – Special or Unique Area, The Holy Trinity Wilderness Cathedral, three Natural Area Preservation Association preserves, including America's only formally designated Beaver Sanctuary, a Perpetual Forest Preserve, and a threatened forest ecosystem on The Westernmost Longleaf Pine Preserve.

Had SHECO and other power companies in Texas heeded my advice of the last several decades, over a million Texans would not have lost power and their lives, health and welfare would not have been compromised.

More importantly, had power companies begun promoting energy conservation, rather than energy waste, thousands of miles of power lines would not have been needed in the first place. Merely converting incandescent bulbs to fluorescent on a widespread basis would make many transmission lines obsolete. Outlawing the further production of energy inefficient motors, air conditioners and appliances along with a program to encourage their replacement with energy efficient products would further reduce the demand for power.

The most lemming-like behavior of SHECO and other power companies is that they are actually contributing to more and more powerful hurricanes by contributing to global warming. The burning of fossil fuel to generate excessive electricity, combined with the wholesale destruction of millions of acres of insulating forest cover across America for power line right-of-ways, are helping to insure that millions of Americans will be seriously impacted by an increase in Category 4 and 5 hurricanes in the future.

It is high time for the Texas Governor to fire the PUC Commissioners who were ultimately responsible for the blatant mismanagement of our vulnerable above-ground power grid. Like the Director of FEMA, whose only qualification was in breeding Arabian horses, it is sadly obvious that our Texas PUC Commissioners are unqualified to direct the proper development of our power grid and should resign in the event Governor Perry does not have the guts to fire them and replace them with qualified conservation minded men and women who will neither rubber stamp unnecessary, costly, and vulnerable transmission lines nor violate their fiduciary responsibilities to the citizens of Texas.

The Governor of Texas and other states adversely affected by hurricanes should declare an immediate moratorium on new construction of above-ground power lines and ask their legislatures to pass emergency laws requiring that the systematic undergrounding of the existing power grid begin. We can no longer afford to allow the "penny wise and pound foolish" managers of big power to continue to impose long outdated technology on our citizens.

George H. Russell

George H. Russell, an outspoken opponent of the death penalty, is a resident of Huntsville, Texas, known worldwide as "The City of Death."

He is founder of The Patriot Network, and author of its 35+ web sites located at www.patriotnetwork.org, as well as founder of The Universal Ethician Church, an interfaith ministry with a worldwide following via the church's 275+ web sites located at www.salvationnetwork.org.

Russell, 60, is an educational video producer, environmental activist, historic preservation specialist, photographer, art and antique collector, philanthropist, American patriot and ethician.

Additional biographical information may be found in Who's Who in America, through Internet searches, and in other publications. Images of Mr. Russell suitable for downloading for publication may be found at www.salvationnetwork.org.