

Excerpt from EWEB¹ Pipeline²

Lessons from the Blackout

EWEB electrical system very reliable, but age, growth and new technology spur need for capital spending

The massive outage that hit the North-eastern United States on Aug. 14, 2003 was a wakeup call for the entire nation about the risks of an aging and overworked electric power system. ...

One of the lessons we can learn is the need for utilities to maintain and upgrade their electric system "infrastructure"—the network of generating plants, transmission lines, poles, wires, substations and other facilities that are designed to keep power on; get it back on quickly when there is an outage; and minimize surges and other fluctuations in power that can disrupt sensitive electronic equipment.

Most utilities across the country see an increasing need for capital investments to maintain reliability. ...

One area of concern is the vast network of 23,000 power poles that EWEB owns or maintains. About 60 percent of the mostly-wooden poles are at least 30 years old. ... Weather and decay can weaken poles over time so that they no longer are strong enough to safely support lines and equipment.

"The system is getting older. It's still working well now, but we want to deal with our aging system before it's too late, before reliability starts to slip," says Ken Beeson, a senior resource planner for EWEB.

¹Eugene Water & Electric Board is Oregon's largest customer-owned utility.

²Pipeline is a biannual customer newsletter produced by EWEB's Public Affairs department, www.eweb.org