

On July 9, 2023, Governor Scott declared a state of emergency arising from a series of severe rainstorms that inflicted catastrophic flood damage throughout Vermont. Since then, he has repeatedly called for “all hands-on deck” to aid in the response and recovery. In that spirit, I am reaching out to Vermont’s regulated utility community with this ask: How can you help Vermont build back better and smarter?

The effects of climate change are at hand. With that in mind, building back better and smarter in the context of energy has to mean building greater resiliency into the structures that house our people and activities. It also has to mean seeking out and taking the sensible, measured opportunities that present themselves to build back in ways that seize gains on energy efficiency, beneficial electrification, and emissions reductions.

As Vermont companies imbued with a public service mission, I am urging you to leverage your relationships and deploy solutions within your respective service territories that will bring forward-looking flood relief to Vermonters who are digging out and need a more resilient energy future that is efficient and minimizes their carbon footprint. To this end, the Department hereby establishes the following policy guidance for the duration of the recovery from the flood devastation of 2023:

1. If existing law, regulations, or PUC orders pose a bar to responding to this call to action, please raise such issues with the Department so we can work with you to find a path forward, whether via a gubernatorial executive order, a petition to the PUC, or a legislative fix.
2. The Department urgently encourages all Vermont utilities under Title 30 regulatory jurisdiction to seek out ways to deploy their personnel, expertise, equipment, and reasonably available funds to assist customers with designing and procuring cost-effective energy infrastructure and appliances in their homes and businesses that will result in efficiency gains and emissions reductions. In short, many of your customers are down to studs in their flood-damaged homes and business and need your help now to learn about options that will deliver such gains.
3. In the wake of Tropical Storm Irene, many of you developed practices and expertise in supporting Vermont’s successful recovery. Please review any institutional playbooks and memory you have; look for ways to apply or adapt those lessons and moves to what Vermont faces now.
4. If you have access to federal funding such as ARPA, BIL, or IRA, please review your planned program needs to ensure that this is still the best use for such funding and look for opportunities to leverage these resources to assist Vermonters – particularly low- and middle-income folks -- with build-back measures that will result in efficiency gains and emissions reductions. In doing this review, please ask questions and give some thought to how these funding sources could be used to complement FEMA recovery funding, while guarding against displacing FEMA recovery funding.
5. Please clearly track the costs you incur in delivering this emergency work to support the flood recovery effort. This information will be needed later to address and resolve reimbursement issues. While the funding sources for such reimbursement are not settled at this time, the Department is committed to advocating vigorously for such funding via channels such as federal funding bills, FEMA, DOE, and the state utility regulatory process.

6. The Department invites good will contributions of labor and materials to the flood recovery effort.

7. The Department will make available its resources (data, maps, and outreach resources) to help with identifying areas where your interventions could help.

8. The Department encourages any suggestions, innovations, insights, or refinement of the strategies and principles touched on in this message that you believe could be helpful.

In closing, thank you for the many contributions so many of you have already dug deep to bring to the table to help Vermonters during this crisis. Bluntly, I am asking you to dig deeper still – Vermont needs you!

Kind regards. JET

June E. Tierney
Commissioner
Vermont Department of Public Service