
From: Tierney, June

Sent: Friday, April 10, 2020 4:32 PM

Subject: COVID-19 Emergency: PSD Call To Action

Importance: High

Good afternoon, all –

Earlier today, Governor Scott extended the “Stay-Home-Stay-Safe” Executive Order until midnight on May 15. Continuing to stay home is essential for the continued protection of public health and safety during the COVID-19 emergency. Vermonters are saving lives and maximizing our health care resources by complying with Governor Scott’s order to stay home.

Many Vermonters have coped with the staying home by turning to the internet to ward off or minimize the damaging impacts on their lives and livelihoods from the COVID-19 emergency. For these Vermonters, the internet has been the indispensable emergency infrastructure response that enables home schooling, telemedicine, telework, and remote delivery of social services.

But for too many Vermonters, there is no internet infrastructure to restore or replace their access to what they have lost as they do their part by staying home to protect themselves and all of us. For these Vermonters, the COVID-19 emergency has meant losing or being ousted from the established, every day infrastructure by which they customarily access to their schools, their places of employment, their hospitals, their doctors, and field offices where they apply for and receive safety-net social services. So, today’s stay home-stay-safe extension also means an extension of their struggle to meet their essential needs as the COVID-19 emergency continues.

Governor Scott regularly calls on us to remember that we are all in this together, and that we will get through this emergency by holding our center, together. In this spirit, the Department of Public Service today is asking all of you, as companies imbued with a public service mission, to leverage your relationships and deploy solutions within your respective service territories that will bring connectivity now to Vermonters who need it now. To this end, I am laying out for your consideration the following policy guide posts for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency as declared by Governor Scott:

1. The Department hereby strongly and urgently encourages all Vermont utilities under Title 30 regulatory jurisdiction to deploy their personnel, expertise, equipment, and reasonably available funds to construct and launch necessary infrastructure to temporarily deliver connectivity solutions to Vermonters who lack internet access whether within their homes or in proximity to their homes.

2. In the spirit of the FCC's Keep America Connected challenge, the Department respectfully and urgently requests that Internet Service Providers do all they can to partner with Vermont's utilities to temporarily support the delivery of connectivity solutions to Vermonters who lack internet access whether within their homes or in proximity to their homes.

3. The Department urgently encourages you to expedite the completion of permanent projects already in your construction cues that would expand connectivity, such as cable line extensions, macro cell deployments, or work on substation upgrades.

4. The Department asks that you clearly track the costs you incur in delivering this temporary emergency support to effect internet access. 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 stimulus bills, FEMA, and the state utility regulatory process.

5. The Department invites good will contributions of labor and materials as well.

6. The Department asks that you maintain clear and simple documentation of the emergency connectivity aid projects you undertake, taking care to describe how the project meets an emergency need or a bona fide utility need such as (1) home schooling, telemedicine, telework, and remote delivery of social services; (2) utility system reliability, resilience, or least-cost service; (3) connectivity support for innovative grid management or utility service innovations.

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

8. The Department is committed to advocating for swift emergency permitting review before the Public Utility Commission when needed to clear the way for temporary deployment of necessary connectivity infrastructure, such as poles in excess of 49-feet in height, or adding antenna height, or attaching connectivity equipment (e.g., antennas, radio transmitters, etc.) to existing solar generation projects.

9. The Department reminds you that all work done pursuant to this call to action must be done consistent with good social distancing practices. And no work should be done that would reduce or impair a utility's ability to continue performing its core utility service functions.

10. The Department welcomes any suggestions, innovations, insights or refinement of proposals that you believe could be helpful.

In closing, thank you for the many contributions and initiatives 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 even

deeper to do even more for our brave little state.

Please keep well and safe. Vermont needs you.

Kind regards, JET



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Commissioner

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