

Media Advisory

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PSC to hold Havre listening session on Hi-Line power outage response

NorthWestern Energy customers encouraged to attend and share their experience

What: Public meeting on NorthWestern Energy response to Hi-Line power outage response
When: Monday, October 30, 12:00-2:00 pm
Where: Havre City Hall Complex: 520 4th St, Havre MT, 59501

Havre, Mont. -The Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) is encouraging NorthWestern Energy customers who were impacted by wide-spread power outages across the Hi-Line earlier this month to share their experience at a public listening session attended by representatives from the company.

The meeting will take place on Monday, October 30, 12:00-2:00 pm at the Havre City Hall Complex, 520 4th St, Havre, MT 59501

The event will focus on identifying opportunities for NorthWestern to improve its incident response and communication with customers during outage events in the future. Community members will have an opportunity to ask questions directly of NorthWestern officials, as well as to share their perspective on the utility's efforts to restore power during one of the worst power outages in recent memory.

"One of the consequences of working from Helena is that when an event like this occurs you lack the contextual knowledge that is needed to truly understand what happened. I'm eager to hear from those who were actually on the ground during this ordeal," said Vice-chairman Travis Kavulla, R-Great Falls, who represents North Central Montana.

Curt Pohl, vice president, Distribution, for NorthWestern Energy, thanked the Public Service Commission for the opportunity to visit with and gather input from customers.

“The storm in early October across the Hi-Line was one of the most extreme weather events NorthWestern has experienced in years and the system damage we incurred was significant,” said Pohl. “I am proud of the folks that worked countless hours to restore power in very wet and cold conditions. The restoration effort was nothing short of extraordinary given the amount of damage and the conditions in which crews worked. I am also very proud to serve the communities along the Hi-Line. Thank you to all the customers that showed patience and gave us so much support throughout the restoration effort.”

Heavy snows and winds knocked out power to as many as 9,500 customers on Oct. 2-3 in a 90 mile stretch from Havre to Malta. Some customers east of Havre were left without electricity for a week or more as Northwestern crews worked to replace or repair roughly 2,000 poles and miles of downed power lines.

Monday’s listening session will include a brief presentation from Northwestern representatives on the company’s restoration efforts, followed by public comment, and questions from PSC commissioners and staff.

Kavulla said he hopes the meeting will serve as a learning experience for everyone involved. “This meeting is about looking at what worked, what didn’t, and how things can be improved in the future,” he said.

Questions regarding the meeting should be directed to Chris Puyear, communications director, christopher.puyear@mt.gov, 406-431-2499.

Those who are unable to attend the meeting, but would still like to submit comments to the PSC regarding the Hi-Line outage can do so by emailing PSC_UtilityComment@mt.gov or calling (406) 444-6150. Concerns can also be directed to Vice-chairman Travis Kavulla at TKavulla@mt.gov or (406) 444-6166.

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