

# Energy Emergency Response and Preparedness Planning with Rural Electric Cooperatives: A Coordination Brief for State Energy Officials

*Based on the 2022 Fractured Freeze Exercise*







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## Executive Summary

On February 23-24, 2022, the National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO) and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), with support from the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security, and Emergency Response (DOE CESER), hosted *Fractured Freeze*, an energy emergency exercise with concurrent significant regional emergencies. The exercise objectives were 1) to examine the electric cooperative mutual assistance network and interoperability with State Energy Office plans in a multi-hazard, multi-region scenario; and 2) to build and strengthen relationships between electric cooperatives and state energy officials.

Interactions between State Energy Offices and rural electric cooperative statewide storm response coordinators (Statewides) have been extremely limited. *Fractured Freeze* was the first exercise to focus on coordination between these two groups during energy emergencies. A number of new relationships were formed and opportunities for collaboration identified. As a result of the exercise, participating State Energy Offices and Statewides from seven states were introduced and can continue to expand coordination in energy emergency response, mitigation, and resilience, based on an understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities, and mutual interest in energy security.

This document provides an overview of Electric Cooperative "Statewide" organization, highlights the potential benefits of State Energy Office-Cooperative coordination during the emergency response, and identifies areas for State Energy Offices to engage their cooperative counterparts.



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## Rural Electric Cooperative “Statewides” Coordination Brief for State Energy Officials

### Overview of Electric Cooperative Statewides

In states with numerous rural electric cooperatives, the cooperatives have come together to form statewide electric cooperative organizations, commonly known as “Statewides.” There are 39 Statewide organizations. NRECA maintains [a list](#) of all the Statewides along with the appropriate contact information. Some general functions of Statewides include:

- Providing support and coordination during natural disasters and any widespread outages, including serving as the focal point for requesting, receiving and sending mutual assistance to and from other states.
- Providing support and resources in safety training and compliance.
- Providing communications and public relations support for rural electric cooperatives during disasters. This helps to ensure that a unified message is being shared with all impacted service areas and alleviates some of the pressure for cooperatives responding to an event.
- Advocating for legislative and regulatory action at the statehouse and relevant state agencies.

### Statewide Storm Coordinators

When a single cooperative responding to an emergency event exceeds its response resources (personnel, equipment or both), they request assistance from the Statewide. The main point of contact within a Statewide for this kind of support is the Statewide Storm Coordinator, who assists their member cooperatives with obtaining and deploying additional crews and equipment needed to respond to disasters. Leading up to and during disasters, the coordinators hold daily conference calls to plan for response and recovery. Impacted Statewides will initiate the call with other Statewides to share needs and determine resources available (such as crews, personnel, and equipment). During disasters, Statewides often help with lodging concerns, interstate travel, and resource acquisition, including power, at staging areas. Statewides generally do not pre-stage crews because they are reliant on emergency declarations to move across state borders.

Statewide storm coordinators meet annually to discuss lessons learned from prior responses and to plan improvements in communications and coordination around natural disasters for the coming year.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The statewide storm coordinator is typically part of the executive staff of the statewide organization.



# Collaborative Opportunities for State Energy Security and Emergency Response

State Energy Offices and Statewide Storm Coordinators both play important roles in responding to energy emergencies and mitigating risks. Facilitating engagement between State Energy Offices and Statewides and the individual cooperatives they represent prior to and during energy emergencies can help to ensure a swift and efficient response. Pre-established relationships can streamline the communications process and make coordination easier when responding to a disaster. Coordination on the regional level is particularly important as interstate responses bring additional challenges, with which State Energy Offices are uniquely qualified to assist.

As *Fractured Freeze* highlighted, state and regional exercises can also be opportunities for the two groups to collaborate and learn from one another. There are several opportunities for State Energy Offices and Statewides to engage around energy security planning, regional and state agency coordination, waiver acquisition, and situational awareness. These opportunities are summarized in a checklist below.

## State Energy Security Planning

Planning is the most integral part of preparedness, resilience, and mitigation. In most states, State Energy Offices lead the development of State Energy Security Plans (SESP) and coordinate with consumer- and investor-owned utilities, as well as state public utility commissions. SESP include information on the threat landscape, risks, and mitigation strategies in the energy sector. Statewides can serve as valuable partners for both emergency response and resilience planning, as they provide a unique perspective on the operations and structures of consumer-owned utilities.

- State Energy Offices should include their Statewides and local cooperatives in energy security planning efforts, particularly when updating SESP.
- State Energy Offices should consider integration of cooperative emergency response plans within the State Energy Security Plan, energy emergency response plans, ESF-12 annexes, and other relevant plans as appropriate.
  - An example of a relevant cooperative plan: [Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives Emergency Work Plan](#)
- State Energy Offices and Statewides should consider having regular engagement and discussion to foster formal relationships, formalize unique planning insights, and increase coordination on efforts of mutual interest, such as grid resilience funding and federal hazard mitigation grants.
- State Energy Offices should consider exploring with Statewides the ability to leverage resources from their member cooperatives to enhance state energy security planning (such as location and details on critical facilities served or resilience project prioritization).



## Safety and Security

State Energy Offices can provide support when there are public safety or security concerns impacting mutual aid response crews. State Energy Offices with Emergency Support Function 12 – Energy (ESF-12) responsibilities and seats in the State Emergency Operations Centers (SEOC) can formally coordinate with other Emergency Support Functions including– Public Safety and Security (ESF-13) representatives to elevate public safety or security concerns identified by Statewides and acquire relevant resources. For example, it might be possible for ESF-12 to help facilitate electric cooperative requests for police protection of equipment or escorts for crew safety.

One example shared by a statewide at *Fractured Freeze* referenced an instance where community residents with firearms prevented responding mutual aid crews from traveling to a neighboring county as they wanted their power restored first. In addition to the obvious danger posed to the crews, vulnerable populations or critical facilities prioritized for restoration assistance might also be at risk as delays to power restoration can mean life or death. ESF-12 and ESF-13 can elevate these types of situations to appropriate local, state, and federal officials to deescalate situations and provide law enforcement assistance, if needed.

## Waivers

State Energy Offices can help coordinate and elevate statewide needs for regional Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulatory waivers and exemptions. State Energy Offices should engage with their statewide counterparts to have a better understanding of what emergency declarations might be needed for cooperatives to successfully respond and what environmental or interstate travel waivers might be needed to alleviate workforce, supply chain, and equipment shortages for responding cooperatives.

## Travel Logistics and Fuel Procurement

State Energy Offices can utilize their existing relationships with other state agencies to assist Statewides and accelerate response efforts. Prior to an emergency, State Energy Offices can facilitate introductions to State Departments of Transportation (DoT)—which often serve as or support Emergency Support Function 1 – Transportation Services (ESF-1)—to establish formal relationships to expedite emergency communications. Typically, Statewides work with ESF-12 which serve as the go between to ESF-1. During emergencies, State Energy Offices could work with Statewides and state DoTs to:

- Provide travel logistics assistance and information, including:
  - Alternative travel routes in instances of road closures or blockages;
  - Wind assessments and travel restrictions for travelling crews and fuel tankers;
  - Information on fuel supplies and backup generator hook-up capabilities of gas stations along those routes;
- Coordinate deployment of state resources, equipment, and supplies (e.g., snowplows, salt, sand, woodchips, and property for asset-staging) in support for cooperative travel;
- Identify, procure, and/or set aside local fuel resources for responders, such as from agricultural distributors; and
- Support Statewides with business reentry permitting in impacted areas.

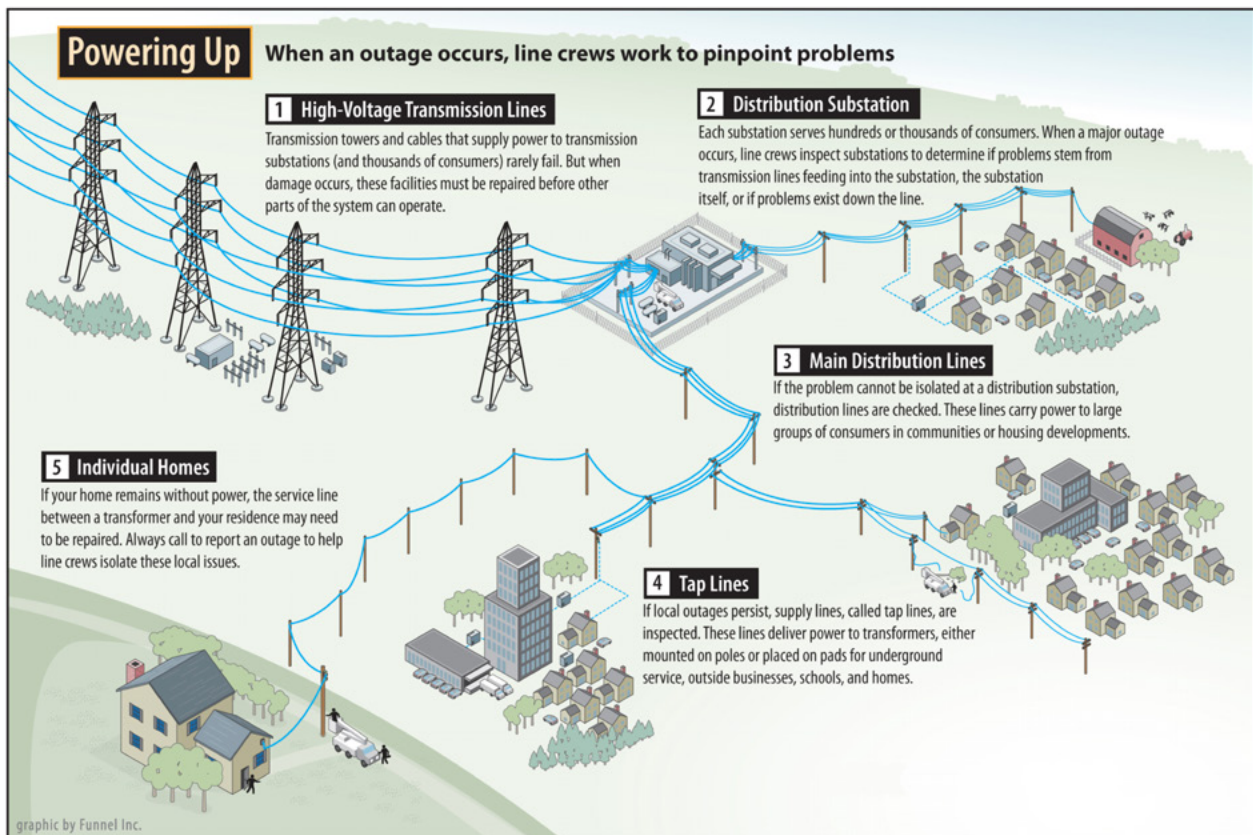


## Public Messaging and Communications

Public messaging and communication, while often challenging, present several opportunities for State Energy Offices and cooperatives to support one another. Some of the communication and coordination efforts include helping the public better understand the restoration process without the technical details.

Cooperatives have priority lists of customers and restoration orders tend to be dependent on the nature and location of the outage event. Restoration crews usually prioritize based on effectiveness of a restoration effort (i.e., the greatest number of customers and critical facilities that can be restored with the least amount of effort) along with the level and location of damage to infrastructure. States can share updates on how this process works along with other relevant commentary such as tips on fuel conservation or details on power outage duration. As a result, customers might be better prepared regarding outage length and proactive measures being taken by the state and restoration crews.

Figure 1: Rural Electric Cooperative Restoration Graphic



When electricity goes out, most of us expect power will be restored within a few hours. But when a major storm causes widespread damage, longer outages may result. Co-op line crews work long, hard hours to restore service safely to the greatest number of consumers in the shortest time possible. Here's what's going on if you find yourself in the dark.

Source: NRECA



*Fractured Freeze* attendees stressed the importance of cooperatives proactively contacting customers who have applied for priority restoration so that these customers will be prepared for potential service interruptions and can relocate in advance of an extended outage if needed. Individual cooperatives can determine if they want to develop these priority lists or not. Cooperatives can also help ensure that the messaging being put out by State Energy Offices and other state agencies, including the Governor, matches the magnitude of an event.

Rural electric cooperatives need to work to improve their communications pathways with state agencies about restoration efforts, especially when restoration is completed. Not knowing the status of restoration efforts can be a challenge for state agencies when they need to communicate with other states in the region, the federal government, and the general public. As a whole, Statewides find it challenging communicating with multiple state agencies during an event. *Fractured Freeze* attendees noted that the State Energy Office could serve as a valuable communications intermediary between the state, the federal government, the Statewides, and the responding utilities.

In addition, restoration efforts can be enhanced by more informed local officials. State energy officials can help to ensure unified communications are being shared on multiple levels. Improving coordination between cooperatives, State Energy Offices, and local and state Emergency Management Agencies may reduce some of the risk of inappropriate information being shared or confusion from businesses or the public. Coordinated messaging should be amplified by both state and local Public Information Officers and steps should be taken to minimize gaps in communication and help the public feel more confident in response efforts. This can be a challenge depending on what resources are actually available and how significant the event is.

Overall, unified messaging needs to be communicated frequently, from a place of authority, and broadcasted consistently to reach as many relevant audiences as possible.





# Rural Electric Cooperative Coordination Checklist for State Energy Offices

Some of the following functions and actions may not be used in every state. It is critical to establish relationships and expectations on roles and responsibilities prior to an emergency.

## Pre-Event

**State Energy Offices can work cooperatively with Statewides prior to an emergency by:**

- ✓ Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and contact information
- ✓ Providing reviews of and input to Cooperative Emergency Response Plans
- ✓ Determining the triggers for outreach and communications
- ✓ Facilitating introductions to other state entities, including State Emergency Management Agencies and State Departments of Transportation
- ✓ Developing mutual communication and public messaging strategies
- ✓ Engaging with Utility Coordination Groups
- ✓ Participating in local, state, and regional energy emergency exercises
- ✓ Participating in Statewide energy emergency response debrief sessions
- ✓ Identifying additional ways the state can support mutual aid crews during emergencies
- ✓ Including Statewides in State hazard mitigation and resilience planning working groups
- ✓ Discussing prioritization for hazard mitigation and resilience investments
- ✓ Coordinating on hazard mitigation funding opportunities, including:
  - Determining what needs could be filled by grant funding and ways to coordinate future grant applications or funding opportunities
  - Identifying cost-share opportunities and projects of mutual interest.  
For example, State Energy Offices and Statewides can work together on:
    - Hazard Mitigation grant Program (HMGP) grant applications
    - Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) / Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grid resilience funding (Section 40101, 40124, etc.)
    - Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant applications

## During Event

**State Energy Offices can assist Statewides during energy emergencies by:**

- ✓ Contacting (or waiting to be contacted by) Statewides to determine if unmet needs or resource requests can be elevated to other state or federal agencies
- ✓ Listening to Statewides' daily conference calls on response and recovery updates
- ✓ Helping coordinate statewide requests for protective services and security with state ESF-13 representatives for law enforcement support and protective services for mutual aid crews and resources from out of state
- ✓ Coordinating with state DoTs to provide travel logistics assistance and information, including:
  - Alternative travel routes in instances of road closures
  - Wind assessments and travel restrictions for travelling crews and fuel tankers
  - Information on fuel supplies and backup generator hook-up capabilities of gas stations along travel routes
  - Coordinating deployment of state resources, equipment, and supplies (e.g., snowplows, salt, sand, woodchips, and property for asset-staging) in support for cooperative travel
  - Support Statewides with business reentry permitting in impacted areas

## Post-Event

- ✓ Set up a collaborative approach to After Action Reporting involving State Energy Offices and Statewides

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<https://www.naseo.org>



<https://www.electric.coop>