

DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM CODE TASK FORCE

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARIES OF RECOMMENDATIONS: DISCONNECTION AND RECONNECTION

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3.1 A DISTRIBUTOR'S BUSINESS PROCESS FOR DISCONNECTION

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Issue Statement

There are many reasons a distributor may need to disconnect a customer. However, the business process of notification and confirmation a distributor uses to disconnect varies according to circumstances. Distributors in the past have disconnected customers in an appropriate manner to maintain optimal safety and reduce negative customer impact. The issue is:

What should be a distributor's business process for disconnection.

Options

1. **Minimalist Approach:** A distributor uses its own discretion and methods to disconnect customers when required.
2. **Prescriptive Approach:** The DSC will specify the process for disconnect to be used for each circumstance.
3. **Modified Prescriptive Approach:** The DSC will require the distributor to indicate within its Condition of Service document the physical processes to be used for disconnection of customers. These processes should incorporate all necessary safety procedures and ensure that communication with the customer takes place to the greatest extent possible.

Background Information

Existing legislation (e.g., *Electricity Act, 1998*; *Energy Competition Act, 1998*) give a distributor authority to disconnect a customer, but also place certain customer notification requirements on the distributor.

Utilities have many reasons for disconnecting customers ranging from non-payment of electric bills to emergency system conditions. Physical aspects of disconnection are safety dependent and customer oriented. For example, a traffic accident with live wires down may cause a distributor to take immediate action, thereby disconnecting many customers without notification.

Other emergency conditions may allow for customer notification and a more controlled disconnection process. For example, disconnection may be at a customers' request for maintenance purposes. This disconnection may be completed under very controlled conditions.

A disconnection for reasons of non-payment or Electricity Safety Authority orders may be accomplished through several methods, depending on the situation. In these cases, customers

may be uncooperative or violent, thus requiring police presence and possibly a line crew to disconnect the service at the pole or transformer. Other cases may only require a customer serviceman to turn off the meter.

Implementation Issues

Most, if not all, distributors have procedures or business practices in place for various disconnection scenarios. Possible short comings may be in the documentation of such procedures. There should not be a significant effort required for distributors to document these practices in a Conditions of Service document.

Group Discussion

Many scenarios exist which require customer disconnection. The following lists the possibilities:

1. Emergency – involving public safety
2. Emergency – distribution system problems
3. Planned outage – Maintenance or otherwise
4. Non-Payment
5. Electric Safety Authority – orders

In all the above cases, notification to customers and appropriate authorities should be the first step. Notification should be to the most reasonable extent possible.

Legislation requires "reasonable notice" before disconnection. One source of an historic guideline for what is reasonable is the 1979 "Residential Guidelines for Credit Collection and Cut-off Practices of Public Utility Suppliers." This document states:

The supply of a public utility will not be shut off by reason of non-payment of bills until seven days after a disconnect notice has been given to the customer . . ." (section 6.(1)).

Although distributors will be operating in a new environment where money will be lost the longer a non-paying customer is connected and profits to shareholders is a motivating factor, seven day notice could be incorporated into existing business practices, when possible.

The actual physical disconnection may take place electrically on either the primary or the secondary side, depending on the circumstance. There are existing safety rules (i.e., EUSA) in place to govern all cases. Where possible, the effort to disconnect customer load in a controlled manner (at the panel) should be put forth. This should help reduce negative customer impact. A

process for physical disconnection is addressed in a separate SOR.

Recommendation

Option 3 is recommended, the Modified Prescriptive Approach.

1. A distributor may disconnect with out notification for the following reasons:
 - ♦ Emergencies
 - ♦ Hazardous situations
 - ♦ Threats to health or safety
 - ♦ Unplanned events
 - ♦ Legal directives
2. A distributor shall provide notification of disconnection in accordance with the *Energy Competition Act, 1998* and the Retail Settlements Code.
3. A distributor shall describe conditions under which it may disconnect a customer from its distribution system in its Conditions of Service document, and describe the notification process for each condition of disconnection.
4. In all cases, the disconnection and reconnection process should be designed with safety in mind.

Voter Summary

Unanimous.

Dissenting Opinions

None.

3.2 THE PHYSICAL ACT OF DISCONNECTION AND RECONNECTION

[FINALIZED: MARCH 6, 2000]

Issue Statement

There are many reasons a distributor may need to disconnect a customer and many circumstances that may dictate the physical process for disconnection and reconnection. The methods used should be effective and should maintain optimal safety to protect distributors, customers and the public. The issue is:

What physical process should a distributor use to disconnect or reconnect a customer?

Options

1. **Minimalist Approach:** A distributor uses its own discretion and methods to disconnect customers when required.
2. **Prescriptive Approach:** The DSC will specify the process for disconnect to be used for each circumstance.
3. **Modified Prescriptive Approach:** The DSC will require the distributor to indicate within its Condition of Service document the physical processes used for disconnection and reconnection of customers. These processes should incorporate all necessary safety procedures.

Background Information

Distributors may have many different physical processes for disconnection and reconnection of customers. However, the required outcome and safety issues should be similar among most distributors. These processes may include several methods, depending on requirements of the distributor, the customer or the Electrical Safety Authority (ESA). Some methods prescribed may not be appropriate for all distributors; installation practices across the province usually differ and may restrict some methods. In some situations, disconnection methods may be determined by situations arising from a customer's unwillingness to comply with the distributor or ESA requirements.

Implementation Issues

Most distributors have procedures in place but likely do not have any procedures documented. Some distributors may have made significant changes installation standards over the years. Thus, an overly prescriptive approach may not be appropriate or effective in some cases.

Summary of Discussion

Many variations of disconnection and reconnection exist, including:

- ◆ Installation and removal of Isolation Sleeves at the meter.
- ◆ Installation and removal of distributor padlock at the appropriate disconnect switch.
- ◆ Disconnection and reconnection of service at the point of supply or demarcation point.
- ◆ Removal and installation of all or a portion of a distributor's supply equipment.

There also may be requirements for customer presence during a reconnection as a safety hazard may exist within the customer premises (i.e., an article placed on the stove, and a burner left on.)

Recommendation

Option 3 is recommended, the Modified Prescriptive Approach.

The Conditions of Service document should address all possible physical methods of disconnection and reconnection that are used by each distributor. All methods prescribed in the document should consider safety as a primary requirement of any method used.

Voter Summary

Unanimous.

Dissenting Opinions

None.