



**State of Vermont
Public Service Board**

MEMORANDUM

To: Vermont Electric Distribution Utilities and Vermont Department of Public Service

From: Judith C. Whitney, Acting Clerk of the Board *jcw*

Re: Incidents of Threatening Behavior Directed at Distribution Utility Employees

Date: February 12, 2016

The Vermont Public Service Board ("Board") is aware of incidents over the past year in which customers apparently behaved in a threatening manner toward distribution utility employees and other representatives who came to their premises. The Board is interested in learning whether these are isolated incidents, which can be addressed on a case-by-case basis, or whether they reflect a more general problem that electric distribution utilities are now more frequently experiencing that potentially affects the safety of their employees and representatives.

The Board notes that the installation of smart grid and related technology by electric distribution utilities has provided utilities with the ability to take actions from a remote location that previously could be done only at or near a customer's premises. The Board also notes that Board rules require that a distribution utility representative go to a customer's premises in certain instances, most notably when service is disconnected for non-payment under Board Rule 3.306.¹

The Board seeks to obtain a better understanding of the magnitude of the problem of threatening behavior by customers. The Board is seeking answers from Vermont electric distribution utilities that have experienced such issues to the following questions:

1. Board Rule 3.306 provides in applicable part:

When service is disconnected at the premises of the ratepayer, which shall include disconnection at a pole at or near the premises of the ratepayer, the individual making the disconnection shall immediately inform a responsible adult on the premises that service has been disconnected, or if no responsible adult is then present, such individual shall leave on the premises in a conspicuous and secure place a notification advising that service has been disconnected and what the ratepayer has to do to have service restored.

1. In the past few years, have distribution utility employees or representatives dispatched to customer premises experienced customer behavior that caused them to believe they were at risk of physical violence? Please identify the number of such incidents and the number of customers involved in such incidents.

2. Have you had occasion to use law enforcement personnel to go to the premises of a customer? If so, on how many occasions has this happened over the past few years, and how many different customers were involved?

3. In general, has the presence of a company representative at the customer premises at the time of disconnection been useful in providing notification of disconnection to customers (who may not have paid attention to prior notices) and in facilitating bill payments, thereby reducing the number of extended service disconnections that would otherwise occur?

The Board asks that responses to these inquiries be submitted to the Board by April 1, 2016. The Board also invites the Department of Public Service to comment on these matters either by the same date or, upon reviewing the responses of distribution utilities, by April 21, 2016.