

IR 20-089 Investigation into the Effects of the COVID-19 Emergency on Utilities and Utility Customers

Monthly Report as of May 31, 2020

- 1) **Provide information regarding changes in payment behavior or patterns and account receivables levels since the declaration of the State of Emergency on March 13 and the Governor’s Emergency Order #3 issued on March 17. Such information should be provided for each utility rate class.**

Attached as Attachment 1 are account receivable balances by customer class for the months of March, April and May 2020. The Company has not determined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the account receivable balances.

- 2) **Provide the following data for each utility rate class:**
- **The number, and percentage, of customers who made partial or no payment in March, April, and May of 2019 and 2020.**
 - **The number, and percentage, of customers who made partial or no payment in March, April, and May of 2019 and 2020 and did not have an outstanding balance during the prior six months.**

Table 2a below provides the number and percentage of customers who made a partial or no payment. Table 2b provides the number and percentage of customers who made a partial or no payment and did not have an outstanding balance during the past six months. Please note, the information provided below does not include approximately 1,900 customers from the Company’s Large Power Billing (LPB) system as this information was not readily available. As a result, the commercial and industrial customer statistics are understated. The Company is working on a solution to include these accounts in future monthly reporting.

Table 2a. Number and Percentage of NH Customers Who Made a Partial or No Payment												
	2020						2019					
	Residential		Commercial		Industrial		Residential		Commercial		Industrial	
	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total
Jan	96,595	22.2%	7,963	11.7%	233	11.1%	100,972	23.2%	9,488	13.9%	303	14.4%
Feb	90,859	20.9%	7,224	10.6%	213	10.1%	95,443	21.9%	8,268	12.1%	246	11.7%
Mar	99,556	22.9%	8,572	12.6%	299	14.2%	100,664	23.1%	8,982	13.2%	318	15.1%
Apr	90,598	20.8%	11,152	16.3%	355	16.9%	98,337	22.6%	8,166	12.0%	257	12.2%
May	86,007	19.8%	8,969	13.1%	271	12.9%	98,856	22.7%	7,823	11.5%	283	13.4%

Table 2b. Number and Percentage of NH Customers Who Made a Partial or No Payment and Did Not Have an Outstanding Balance During the Prior Six Months 2b												
	2020						2019					
	Residential		Commercial		Industrial		Residential		Commercial		Industrial	
	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total	# of Customers	% of Total
Jan	11,805	2.7%	1,943	2.8%	51	2.4%	11,285	2.6%	2,555	3.7%	61	2.9%
Feb	10,223	2.3%	1,576	2.3%	38	1.8%	10,397	2.4%	1,892	2.8%	54	2.6%
Mar	12,295	2.8%	2,116	3.1%	79	3.8%	11,184	2.6%	1,998	2.9%	57	2.7%
Apr	11,488	2.6%	3,807	5.6%	121	5.7%	11,028	2.5%	1,893	2.8%	57	2.7%
May	11,037	2.5%	1,896	2.8%	47	2.2%	12,949	3.0%	1,773	2.6%	66	3.1%

3) Describe any programs or initiatives undertaken to assist customers specifically as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the State of Emergency, Emergency Order #3, and the related stay-at-home restrictions.

The following direct customer support programs and initiatives have been undertaken to assist customers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the State of Emergency, Emergency Order #3, and the related stay-at-home restrictions.

- Suspended: In March, when the state of emergency was declared by the Governor, Eversource suspended:
 - Shut offs for non-payment
 - Security deposits
 - Late fees
 - Delinquent balance notifications

- Reconnected residential customers without payment following disconnect prior to COVID-19.

- Weekly customer email updates: At the start of the state of emergency, Eversource distributed a weekly cadence of emails to customers with relevant information and updates on Eversource operations.

- Customer newsletter: The Eversource bill insert continues to emphasize:
 - The need for customers to maintain social distancing from Eversource field workers
 - Available payment plan options
 - Ways to pay

- LIHEAP: In May, Eversource distributed an email, and conducted an outbound call to residential customers making them aware of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) offered by the Federal government.

- Eversource Payment Plan: Eversource distributed a letter and email to customers with a \$75 past-due balance and/or over 35 days past-due encouraging them to take advantage of payment plans available to them.

- CARES Team: Eversource launched a CARES team of 20 customer service representatives in April, who provide information to business customers regarding stimulus funding available through the CARES act.

- Continued suspension of in-home and on-premise visits: Eversource continues to temporarily suspend any non-emergency work and appointments that require a technician to enter a home or come in close, physical contact with other individuals. The suspension began Thursday, March 19.

- Continued energy efficiency programs and initiatives: During the temporary suspension of on-premise services, Eversource continues accepting leads for all energy efficiency services, processing instant and mail-in rebates, on-line marketplace offerings, active demand response applications, non-direct install incentive projects, and small business customer webinars.
 - The Company also has been conducting virtual energy audits to assist in gauging potential savings for customers without physically entering the customer's premises.
- Continued work-from-home: To protect customers, Eversource employees continue to work from home with the exception of workers that monitor, maintain, and repair the electrical infrastructure. These employees continue to follow safe distancing guidelines, medical screening, and face covering protocols that were put in place in March.
- Employee safety communications: Adoption of an employee safety and health newsletter to ensure employee and customer protection.

4) Provide a detailed description of customer outreach undertaken to date.

The following customer outreach efforts have been undertaken to date:

- Outbound call campaign and email in May to residential customers promoting the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
- Distributed a letter and email to residential and small business customers during the weeks of June 8th and June 15th, that have a \$75 past-due balance and/or over 35 days past-due promoting Eversource payment plans available to them.
- Press release promoting payment plans last week of June.
- Social media posts statewide promoting Eversource payment plans and financial assistance.
- Eversource.com - timely information and updates on our pandemic response and customer assistance.
- Recorded messaging on our automated phone system for customers calling our Credit Contact Center reminding them of payment plans and 211 assistance.
- Weekly customer email updates: At the start of the state of emergency, Eversource distributed a weekly cadence of emails to customers with relevant information and updates on Eversource operations.
- Customer newsletter: The Eversource bill insert continues to emphasize:

- The need for customers to maintain social distancing from Eversource field workers
- Available payment plan options
- Ways to pay

5) Describe the Utility’s review and evaluation of best practices and successful initiatives undertaken in other states.

Eversource attends bi-weekly meetings with peer utilities sponsored by Edison Electric Institute (EEI). Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, many of these calls have been focused on COVID-19 and best practices in response to the pandemic. Initial meetings discussed COVID-19 actions to address the pandemic’s impact on customers that included suspending disconnect for nonpayment notices, disconnection of service, late payment and interest fees.

Eversource has discussed and/or adopted several key takeaways from our peer utilities and continues to review the progression of collections and resumption of credit practices as states emerge from their moratoriums and begin in a “new normal”. Provided below are high level summaries of best practices and initiatives undertaken by other peer utilities.

- On March 27, 2020, the Federal Government passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (“CARES”) to stimulate the economy during this pandemic. As stated in the response to question 3 above, Eversource created a dedicated team of 20 customer service representatives (“CSRs”) as a best practice finding adopted from a similar initiative at Xcel. This line is designed to help connect business customers and offer guidance on Federal and State level stimulus funding.
 - As federal assistance from the paycheck protection program became available, EEI member companies partnered with state economic development departments and small business administration offices and engaged in outbound, prioritized contacts to small businesses that were hardest hit.
- Utilities across the industry additionally discussed seeing an increase in COVID-19 related scams calls, text, or in-person visits. Eversource proactively sent out communications to its customer to increase awareness of potential scams via social media and email.
- As states and businesses are starting to re-open, EEI member companies are continuing customer outreach, offering new or expanded assistance programs, and encouraging customers to enroll in payment arrangements during the COVID “transition period” before normal credit and collection operations resume.

- Few companies have established a specific date for when disconnects will resume, but many have plans that emphasize extremely proactive customer outreach and engagement at levels well above normal during the “transition period” between business returning to normal and resuming actual disconnects. Some examples are the following:
 - i. EEI member companies continue to hire and train new call center agents remotely to support the proactive customer outreach currently underway and in preparation for resuming disconnects. For many companies, increased hiring and training in the spring is routine.
 - ii. When disconnects resume, some EEI member companies plan to issue disconnect notices in waves (rather than all at once) so that contact center staff and field service resources are not overwhelmed.
- EEI member companies are implementing proactive, layered customer outreach plans that complement prior customer assistance actions to ensure continued consistency in customer service and increase enrollment in available assistance options.
 - Utilities are reviewing SMB (small/medium business) forgiveness/incentive programs to assist customers impacted by COVID-19.
 - Matching programs are being implemented across companies that had not previously been offered.
 - Companies purchased “air-time” to encourage customers to seek assistance.
- Many state commission orders express the desire for electric companies to offer flexible payment arrangements; at least seven commissions have prescribed payment arrangement periods (e.g., plans of up to 12 months to pay off delinquent balances must be extended to customers) and one state is seeking a no-deposit repayment plan for up to 24 months, inclusive of industrial customers. Eversource was the first utility to offer its small business customers the longest utility payment plan of up to 12 months.

6) Describe whether the Utility has updated its sales forecasts in light of the pandemic and its effects on the economy.

Eversource has not updated or changed its sales forecast due to the continued uncertainty surrounding the duration of the ‘stay at home’ advisories and the closures of non-essential businesses, the uncertainty of the future sales impacts due to these mitigation initiatives and the small (less than 2 percent) impact on total sales observed to date. Sufficient time has not passed for the Company to discern how customer consumption patterns will be affected on a going forward basis and how to appropriately factor any changes into sales forecasts.

7) Describe any operational changes the Utility is making or planning to make in response to the effects of the pandemic, including changes in budgets or personnel.

Eversource has implemented Business Continuity Plans (“BCPs”), designed as part of its pandemic emergency response protocol, to cover work arrangements affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, the Company is implementing its BCPs, which include the ability to work remotely across the Company. At its peak period, the Eversource Energy enterprise had over 6,000 of approximately 8,000 employees teleworking and supporting the Company remotely, including the Call Centers. Eversource currently has 3,500 working remotely and 4,800 employees working in the field practicing social distancing and following safety and health protocols.

Eversource has established a cross-functional team to develop a responsible workplace re-entry plan. The plan will be a measured and tiered approach aligned with states’ reopening plans and will focus on limited, critical activities and projects which must be carried out on site. Enhanced restrictions and social distancing guidelines will remain in place in all facilities where re-entry is permitted.

To date, implementation of the BCPs has resulted in minimal disruption to the Company’s workforce and workplan execution. A description of work changes and associated impacts is set forth below:

Employee Work Sites

For those employees who continue to report to the work site, the Company has implemented work practice changes to assure employee safety. These changes include the implementation of social distancing measures; segregation of areas of the building to reduce exposure; and expansion of Personal Protective Equipment (“PPE”) for employees including hand sanitizer, face coverings and face shields. For field employees, work-practice changes include deploying a single worker in a vehicle; staggered shift times with work-related materials and equipment left on the trucks; no crew rotations; job-site reporting where applicable; and limited access to facilities (approval only).

To enable the 24x7 Control Centers to continue with daily operations, the Company has implemented changes such as equipping all employees who normally work in the Energy Park building (where the Control Centers are located) to work remotely so that Control Center personnel are isolated. Changes to work schedules involve the daily use of the primary and backup control center locations. In addition, medical screenings are performed on employees prior to the start of shift; daily cleanings are performed in the Control Centers on shift changes; and individual equipment has been provided for each operator. The Company has also developed a sequestering plan that can be implemented within 24 hours. The Company participates in conference calls with ISO-New England three times per week.

Storm Restoration

Since the pandemic started in early March, the Company has experienced two major storm events and has been able to execute the storm response while adhering to the adjusted work

practices. This is due to the fact that the Company conducts enterprise storm drills and business continuity exercises to practice for these exact situations. In the current circumstances, the Company is incorporating lessons learned from this pandemic into its BCPs. In addition to having the BCPs in place, the Company has been able to leverage technology to allow storm response to continue while employees work remotely. The Outage Management System (OMS) has allowed employees to monitor outages and crews from remote locations. Field employees are equipped with laptops and iPads with MiFi devices allowing for remote connectivity and communication.

Energy Efficiency

Initially, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Company's work on energy efficiency programs, requiring the temporary suspension of on-premise energy efficiency services, including energy efficiency assessments, incentives for direct-install services, and in-building evaluation activities, as well as any other in-person activity deemed to create an unnecessary risk of exposure. However, the Company has since been able to transition to virtual energy efficiency assessments to allow for some of the programs to continue. The utilities continue to assess the impact of the pandemic on the energy efficiency plans and budgets as part of the three-year planning process currently underway.

Service Disconnections and Late Payment Fees

Eversource implemented the suspension of service disconnection and late payment fees to assist customers who are financially impaired and is promoting programs available to customers to assist such as energy efficiency programs and energy savings tools, budget billing and payment assistance programs.

Other Ongoing Impacts and Costs

The Company's planning, work practice changes and use of available technology has allowed the Company to continue to execute its normal work plans including inspections, maintenance and other O&M related work. The Company is continuing to execute the annual work plan subject to the personal protection protocols put in place because it is critical at this time to maintain reliable service. The Company is not considering eliminating staff or modifying well-established best practices as a cost-saving measure because staff and work processes are necessary to maintain electric reliability, as well as employee and customer safety.

The Company is incurring incremental costs for PPE to keep employees safe while they work to operate the system, medical services such as taking the temperature of employees entering service centers, and to clean work facilities to prevent the spread of the virus. The Company is also incurring incremental costs to facilitate at-home or remote work arrangements in relation to computer hardware and technical support. Other costs are being incurred to maintain social distancing, including in the transportation area as a result of moving to a single person per vehicle. These transportation costs will flow through fleet clearing and

will have an impact in O&M and capital. The Company is closely monitoring and tracking costs to determine the impact to budgets.

Personnel

The Company has not made any changes to personnel as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and does not anticipate any changes to personnel in the future.

8) Describe any changes to capital projects and related planning budgets the Utility has made or is planning to make in response to the effects of the pandemic.

The Company does not expect a decrease in capital projects as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and no projects have been cancelled as of this date. The Company's capital work is designed and undertaken to assure the reliability and resiliency of the electric system, *i.e.*, the work is necessary to utility operations. The value of a reliable and resilient system is apparent under the current circumstance because outages are detrimental to customers and create work streams that require employees to address. At present, a broad range of medical, healthcare and public-safety systems, as well as to all other areas of the economy and New Hampshire residents sheltering at home, are relying on the Company's systems.

If the Company's planned capital work was delayed, the impacts would be near and long-term. It would take a substantial time period to bring the system back to a level of operating performance that currently exists – and even at the current level, there are challenges to maintain reliability for customers. As a result, reducing capital work would instigate a counter-productive cycle that simply costs more for customers, while undermining reliability in the interim.

To date, there has been minimal impact to the workforce, as both internal employees and contractors are reporting to job sites. There have been no major interruptions to the materials needed to support the execution of capital work projects. This includes reliability and asset replacement projects. In light of the current circumstances, any planned customer outages needed to complete construction projects will be rescheduled for later in the year. Customer-related work continues to occur while maintaining social distancing and the use of PPE. The Company's capital plan does not include "discretionary" projects, all projects that are planned are designed to keep the power on for customers.

Outside of operations, Eversource Energy is currently assessing its portfolio of projects, monitoring progress and will make decisions as necessary in areas like information technology and facilities. There are a limited number of IT projects that are expected to be affected as a result of process delays. Alternate plans are being developed as needed with minimal cost impacts identified to date.

9) Describe any supply chain disruptions the Utility is experiencing or expects may occur and the effects of such supply chain disruptions.

Eversource has received a small number of notifications from suppliers regarding increased lead times for equipment and materials due to COVID-19 related incidents at their manufacturing facilities. Eversource has also received some notifications from service providers (contractors, etc.) requesting direction from Eversource on plans for employee and worker safety and personal protective equipment requirements. These disruptions have the potential to impact the timing of project deliveries and the responsiveness of service providers. At this point in time, the Company does not expect any significant negative impacts from these disruptions and have implemented strategies to address them in a timely manner.

10) Describe whether the Utility and/or its parent company has adequate access to capital or has been negatively affected in accessing the capital markets or has been downgraded by any credit rating services.

The Company has not had any problems accessing the capital markets and as the markets have greatly improved over the last couple of months, the Company has not been negatively impacted. Presently, Eversource has a request for approval of a financing proposal pending before the Commission in Docket No. DE 20-072.

There have been no ratings changes for Eversource from any of the credit rating services.

11) Describe incremental costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic since the State of Emergency order, how the cost is calculated, cost to date, accounting treatment, impact on earnings, and proposed or planned rate treatment.

There are three categories of cost impacts that the Commission will need to consider in addressing the costs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These categories are: (1) increased working capital costs associated with customer accounts receivables that are not collected over an extended time period, particularly through any period where shut-offs are prohibited; (2) increased cost of customer accounts receivables that cannot be collected, such as the cost of bad-debt write-offs or other customer assistance programs; and (3) expenses incurred to conduct operations consistent with Center for Disease Control guidelines for safe operations, or other incremental cost associated with the shut-off moratorium and late-payment fees. The most immediate impact is the increase in working capital costs associated with carrying increasing amounts of customer accounts receivables that are not collected over an extended time period.

Customers with arrearages who do not pay or who may pay over an extended time period create a cost for the New Hampshire utilities that will transcend all other considerations. If amounts billed to customers are not collected from customers on a timely basis, then the

Company must rely on its short and long-term debt and equity resources to cover the shortfall in cash flow. Under current circumstances, the period between the issuance of customer bills and the utilities' receipt of payment will likely be extended substantially, even where customers are able to pay. As a result, cash working capital costs will increase both as a result of the need to rely on short and long-term capital resources to a greater extent than normal, and in terms of the cost of those resources.

In light of the expectation that customer arrearages and eventual bad-debt write-offs will be of a dimension not experienced in the past, the Commission should take steps to clear the path for work on customer initiatives by: (1) providing for the timely recovery of increasing cash working capital costs; and (2) establishing a regulatory asset for COVID-19 related costs, including delivery-related increases to bad-debt reserves which will subsequently manifest into bad debt write-offs, amounts associated with new arrearage forgiveness programs, waived fee revenue and expenses associated with the impact of COVID-19 on employees and utility operations, particularly through weather-related emergency events.

Establishing a regulatory asset for COVID-19 costs and allowing timely recovery of cash working capital costs will send a critical signal to the marketplace that the Commission will not allow the financial integrity of the New Hampshire utilities to be jeopardized, while all stakeholders work to extend significant and sustained assistance to customers. This will enable the Commission to defer consideration of the details of cost-recovery issues off to the future and to focus first on the development of needed customer assistance programs.

(a) Bad Debt Costs

For Eversource, bad debt costs (i.e., net charge-offs) are recovered through the Default Energy Service rate and the base distribution rate using allocations determined at the time of the Company's last rate case in 2009. With arrearages increasing to historic dimensions, the incremental level of delivery-related bad debt will need to be addressed through a deferral. The Commission should authorize the Company to create a regulatory asset to allow for the future consideration and recovery of delivery related bad debt above normal levels. These costs need to be measured over the entirety of the event and should be limited to the incremental impact associated with the COVID-19 pandemic through a reasonable means.

Bad debt expense is not recovered until accounts are shut off and written off. Therefore, bad debt write-offs will not occur until the Commission allows utility credit and collection processes to resume. In the interim, the immediate problem facing the Company is the increase in cash working capital requirements due to the increased lag in customers paying their bills. To mitigate the potentially significant increase in cash working capital cost compared to the amount currently recovered in base distribution rates and the cash working capital in the Default Energy Service rate, the Commission should work with the Company to identify options to monitor bad debt expense and update cash working capital impacts.

Through May 31, 2020, Eversource has seen deteriorating aging of receivables (35% increase in >60 days as of May 31, 2020 as compared to May 31, 2019, but no write-offs at this point in time.

(b) COVID-19 Emergency Response Costs

As noted above, Eversource is incurring incremental costs associated with employee protection processes and equipment, facilities cleaning, maintaining the workforce at remote locations, and other costs to work safely in providing an emergency response to the Governor's state of emergency. The Company has established accounting work orders in order to track all COVID-19 related expenses. Because these costs are outside the normal course of business and may continue for a significant time period, the Commission should authorize creation of a regulatory asset in relation to these expenses for later consideration by the Commission. The Company's expectation is that it would seek recovery of incremental COVID-19 emergency response costs to the extent such costs are shown to be incremental to costs already recovered in base rates, taking into account discrete cost reductions that may have occurred as a direct result of the pandemic, such as reduced travel and mileage expenses. Through May 31, 2020, Eversource has incurred about \$1M in response expenses.

(c) Waived Fee Revenue

Eversource typically charges fees to customers for various services and the fee revenue is built into distribution rates in a rate case. In light of the circumstances, Eversource is waiving those customer fees. Because it may be a significant time period before fees are charged, this should be an item that is deferred to the regulatory asset for later consideration by the Commission. These fees should include reconnection fees, late fees and other fees. Through May 31, 2020, Eversource estimates to be about \$800K behind budget on fee revenue which is being attributed to the COVID pandemic.