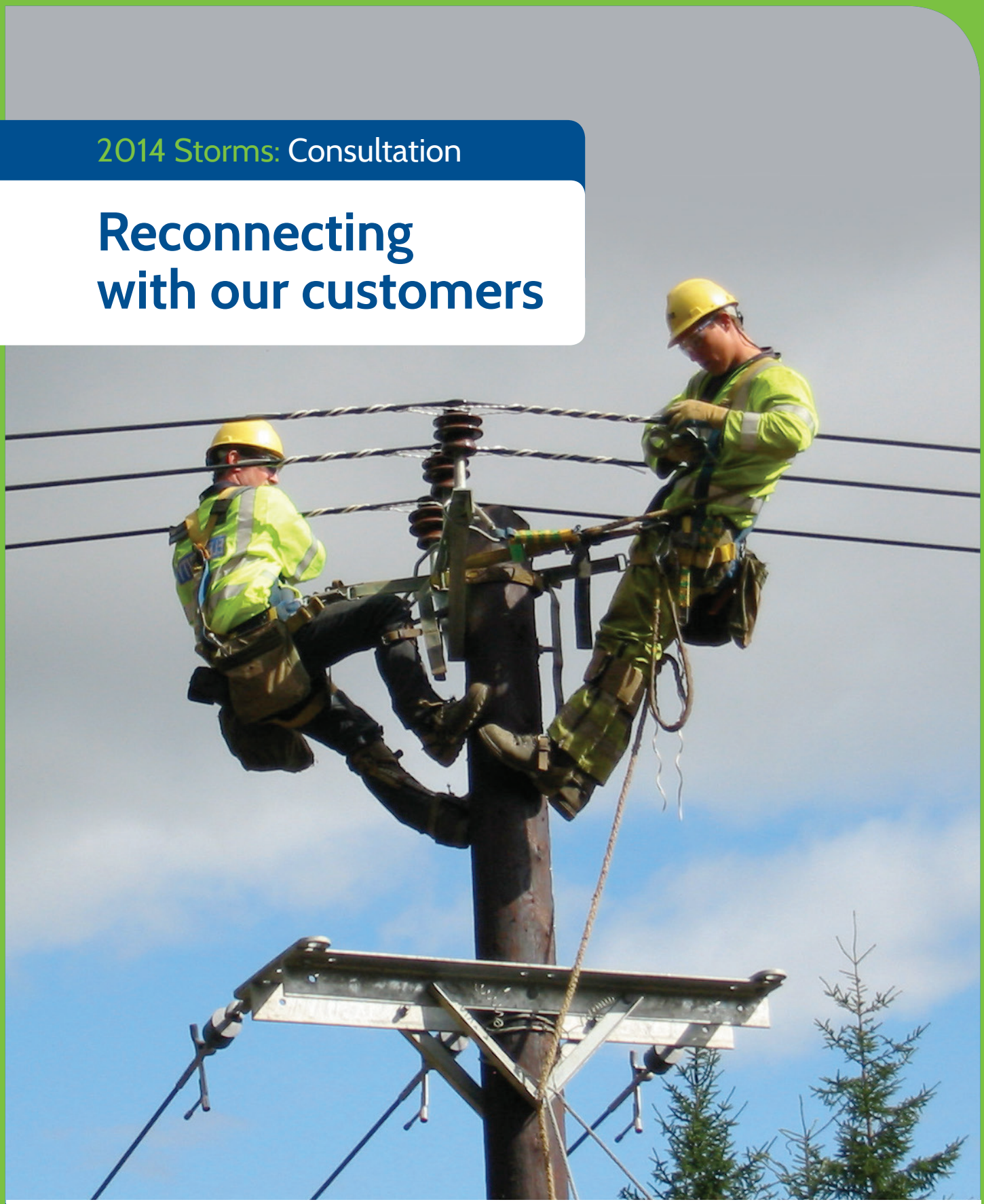
2014 Storms: Consultation

Reconnecting with our customers



Scottish and Southern Energy
Power Distribution

Introduction

During the winter of 2013/14 Britain suffered some of the worst weather conditions for over 100 years. Unfortunately, the very wet weather, gale force winds and flooding had a significant impact on our local electricity network, particularly in central southern England, most notably over Christmas but also during February 2014.

After the Christmas storm, we issued a consultation entitled **Network Resilience: Getting the lights back on Safely Following Extreme Weather**. This is our response to the feedback from that consultation.

Background

Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution (SSEPD) is the owner of two electricity distribution networks: Scottish Hydro Electric Power Distribution (SHEPD) in the north of Scotland and Southern Electric Power Distribution (SEPD) in the south of England. Electricity distribution networks transport electricity to customers' homes or business premises. We do not sell electricity to customers – that is the role of energy suppliers.

SEPD is the larger of our two distribution networks and delivers electricity supplies to over 2.9 million customers across central southern England. This covers a land area of 17,068km^2 with over 76,000km of circuits and 28,575 substations.

Our SEPD operational region ranges from rural communities in Dorset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire to towns and cities including Bournemouth, Oxford, Portsmouth, Reading, Southampton, Slough, Swindon and parts of west London. We also distribute electricity to and across the Isle of Wight.

If something unexpected causes a power cut, it's our job to fix it as quickly and as safely as possible. The better we are at doing our job, the less likely you are to notice us.

However, the severe weather conditions of winter 2013/14 were some of the most challenging working conditions SSEPD's workforce has ever faced, particularly in central southern England.

The very high wind speeds were accompanied by extensive, widespread flooding, large fallen trees, impassable roads and difficult ground conditions.

Our engineers and other colleagues worked long hours over the winter months to look after our customers and safely restore their electricity as quickly as we could. We are immensely grateful for the patience and understanding of our customers during this time.

However, this does not mean we should just blame the weather and move on. We asked for your views in order to learn the lessons from this winter and this is our response to your feedback.

Main Findings of the Storm Consultation

On 3 January we invited you to take part in a consultation because we wanted to hear what you thought we did well and what we could improve on. In total we received 411 responses feedback forms. Additionally, we commissioned an independent telephone survey involving 800 customers randomly selected in the SEPD area. This has also helped us to understand better what is really important to customers at times like this. Below is a snapshot of some of the findings:

Communication during a power cut

46% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the communication

50% were unsatisfied

Clarity and consistency of information

35% of respondents felt they received clear and consistent information

65% felt they had not

Resources

51% of respondents felt that SSEPD was well resourced

28% felt that more resource should have been available

12% didn't know

9% other

Overhead cables

49% of respondents felt that overhead cables should be moved underground

29% of respondents felt that overhead cables shouldn't be moved underground

11% didn't know

11% other

Compensation

64% of respondents believed that compensation payments were a fair reflection of inconvenience suffered

14% felt it should have been higher

12% felt nothing could compensate

Our Plans

The results of our consultation have proved to be invaluable in helping us to understand where we need to improve in the future. You can be assured we listened carefully and, based on customer feedback, our action plan is designed to ensure our electricity network is as safe and reliable as it can be. If the lights go out, we know customers want to know what is being done to fix the problem and how long it is going to take. In the next few pages we have set out our commitments to our customers during a storm:

1. Communicating with you during a power cut

a) When will my power be back on?

If your power goes off during normal weather conditions, we are putting systems in place to ensure information will be available to you within 30 minutes about when we aim to have the power back on. If your power goes off as a result of severe weather conditions, we will aim to have information available within an hour. This longer timescale is because our engineers will be dealing with complex faults and need to be able to fully assess the situation in order to give you an estimated restoration time.

b) Lengthy power cuts

During longer power cuts, our engineers may be tackling complex faults and difficult access issues, such as fallen trees or flooding. Therefore, if we expect you to be without power overnight, we will be able to inform you of this by 6pm so that you can make alternative arrangements. For customers who need special assistance, for example, they may need support for medical reasons, we will offer alternative accommodation.

c) Speaking to an adviser

The telephone messaging system you hear when you first call us is specific to your landline area, but we also have a team of call-handlers, available 24hrs a day, to speak to you about your situation. Once you have listened to the message for your area and selected to speak to an adviser, you will be quickly connected. On Christmas Eve 2013, we received over 111,000 calls, compared to our daily average of 1,000. In order to ensure that our customers are not kept waiting during such another event, we are training up an additional 100 call handlers and entering discussions with external service providers.

d) Improving our customer messaging services

During and following the recent severe weather events, some of the updates on our telephone system and text service were too generic. We will ensure that, in line with our commitment on restoration information, our updates are is specific to your local area and reviewed at least every two hours.

e) Extra ways to keep in touch

We will make ourselves available to answer your questions in the way best suited to you.

Therefore you can:

- **Phone us**
- **Send us a tweet**
- **Ask for text message updates**
- **Like us on Facebook**
- **Send us an email**
- **Download our free app: Power Track**
- **Speak to one of our community team in your area**

After contacting us, if you would like to be kept informed, we can take your details in order to keep you informed of progress via telephone updates or text messages.

f) Introduction of a new three- digit number

A single, nationwide number for you to phone in the event of a power cut is common sense and this is something we wholeheartedly support. We will continue to work with other network operators and relevant bodies to make this happen in as quick a time as possible.

2. Helping customers who need it most during a powercut

a) Working together to identify customers who need extra help

During a power cut, helping those who need it most is our priority. We would like to be able to ensure that no one in your community is left isolated or scared when the power goes off. We will continue to improve the accuracy of our Priority Service Register and promote this free service in as many ways as possible. This includes through the local media (newspapers and radio), parish councils, local resilience committees and, amongst other locations, doctors surgeries.

b) Broadening the definition of 'vulnerable'

A household may become vulnerable over time - the arrival of a new baby with heating and sterilising requirements or the onset of an illness requiring equipment such as dialysis - we will undertake significant effort to ensure these groups are aware of our services.

c) More visibility in the community

Due to the nature of a power cut, we believe it is vital that we have a presence in the communities who are most affected by a power cut. We will deploy more community advisers to knock on doors, identify our vulnerable customers, advise communities about the progress we're making in their area and help co-ordinate our deployment of welfare vans. Where we have been involved with local community and parish Emergency Resillience Planing Committees, these will be used to let local people know where the welfare vans are sited.

d) Implementing the findings of our Research Project

We are undertaking a research project in partnership with the Universities of Dundee and St Andrews to look at the past experiences of communities during prolonged power outages. In particular we are looking at vulnerable groups and how we can develop new forms of engagement and support for communities so that the 'wellbeing gap' during a power cut can be effectively addressed. This will be concluded and implemented by April 2018.

3. Tackling faults on our network

a) Reducing the number of power cuts

Our network is over 99% reliable; however we are proposing to reduce the number of faults on the network by 20% over the next 8 years (2015 – 23).In order to achieve this we are proposing to undertake four initiatives:

1. A programme of installing additional automated devices on our network that enables the system to isolate faults and quickly re-route electricity supplies through other, unaffected circuits.
2. A programme of moving overhead cables under ground in the Southern Electric Power Distribution network area to increase network resilience.
3. A programme of network reinforcement in the more remote and island areas of Scottish Hydro Electric Power Distribution, with a focus on locations that suffer more than three power cuts per year.
4. Doubling our investment in managing trees and shrubs around our lines, which were a major cause of powercuts, with a particular focus on the pockets that suffered the most this winter.

b) Reducing the duration of powercuts

We are proposing to reduce the duration of powercuts by 25%. This will be achieved through a variety of initiatives, including a programme of installing automated devices that enable the system to isolate faults and re-route electricity supplies, operational improvements and targeted network interventions.

c) Increasing the number of mobile generators

We will further build up our fleet of mobile generators and put in place more contracts to enable us. where appropriate, to reconnect customers to temporary power while our engineers work to repair the fault.

d) Smart phone fault reporter app

We're working on a new smart phone app called "Grid View Reporter". This will be free and we hope to have it launched before the start of winter 2014. The app will allow people to easily report a fault, such as a fallen line, which will enable us to view it in our system and get our staff to site more quickly and therefore reduce timescales to restore power and fix issues. We will continue to use this and other innovations to improve our service for customers.

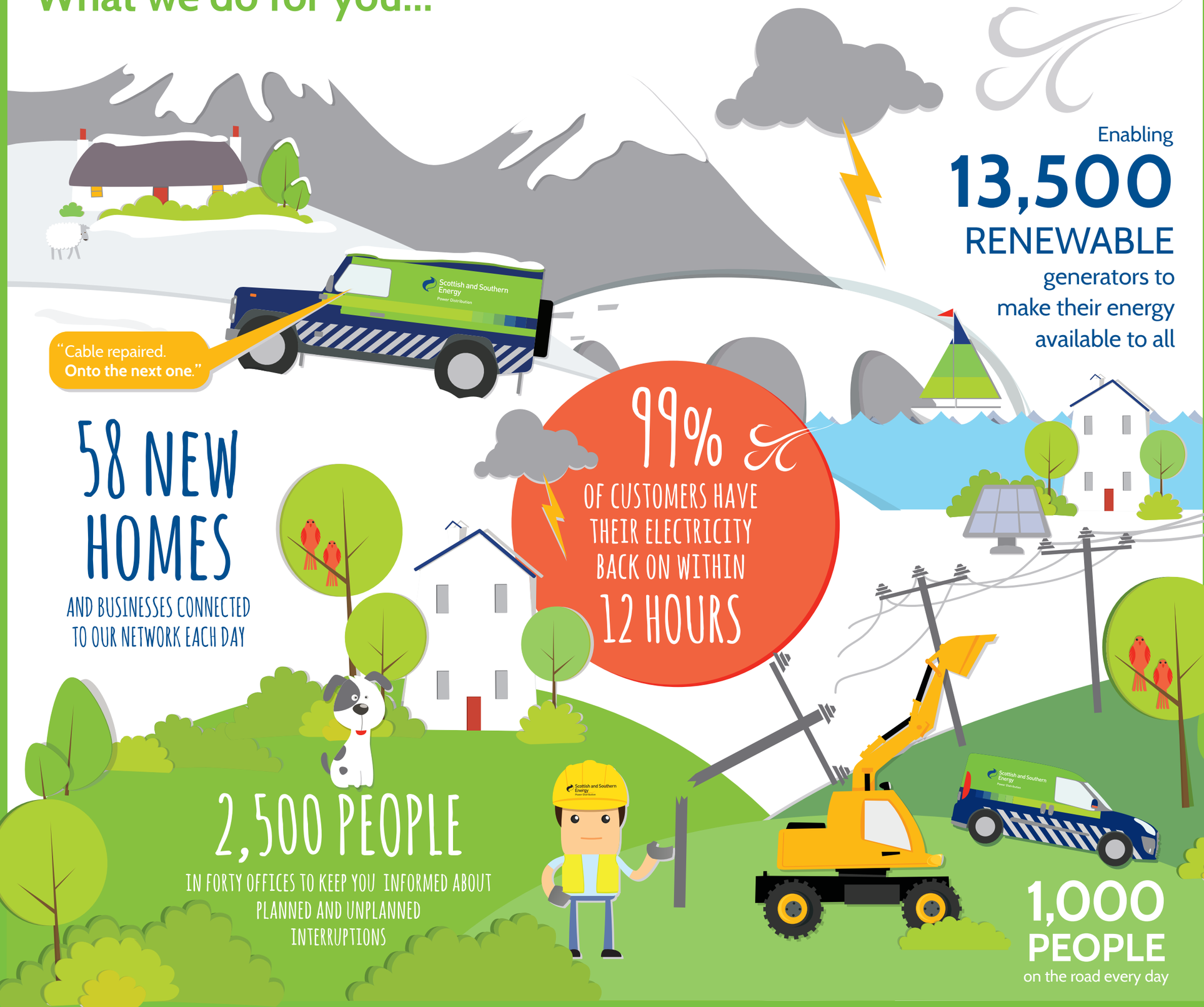
e) Maximising resources during and following adverse weather

We monitor the weather up to ten days in advance to ensure we have the optimum number of staff available to tackle any faults which may develop. For the Christmas storm, we mobilised four times as many staff than for a normal working day. In addition, we are taking part in plans to ensure that all network operators share their resources and work with contractors proactively, planning in advance of events as well as once the weather hits.

4. Compensating you for loss of electricity

Over Christmas, the level of compensation we offered to our customers who experienced a loss of supply exceeded our statutory levels because we recognised what an important time of year it was. Following feedback from customers and discussions with Ofgem, we will also more than double the compensation paid to customers during a severe weather event from £27 to £70 for the first 24 hours

What we do for you...



Enabling
13,500
RENEWABLE
generators to make their energy available to all

99%
OF CUSTOMERS HAVE THEIR ELECTRICITY BACK ON WITHIN
12 HOURS

58 NEW HOMES
AND BUSINESSES CONNECTED TO OUR NETWORK EACH DAY

2,500 PEOPLE
IN FORTY OFFICES TO KEEP YOU INFORMED ABOUT PLANNED AND UNPLANNED INTERRUPTIONS

1,000 PEOPLE
on the road every day

Let us know what you think

telephone:
0800 072 7282

@southernelecPD

or by text phone:
0800 316 5457

Southern Electric Power Distribution

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