

Ameren gives community behind-the-scenes look at storm damage repairs

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ALTON - During major storms - such as those sweeping through the Riverbend over the course of the month of May - damage may cause power to be cut from many homes.

To show the community what occurs following such significant damage, Ameren Illinois displayed both their mobile substation and storm trailers it brings to sites requiring assistance following severe storm damage - whether it be the ice and snow of winter or the straight-line winds and possible tornadoes of the spring and summer months.

Ameren Illinois operates eight such storm trailers with "critical supplies" enabling crews to "quickly and safely restore power after a storm." Each trailer is more than 50 ft. in length, and are sent before or after major storms to cities and towns within Ameren Illinois's 43,700 square mile service area within a few hours.

According to a release from Ameren Illinois, those trailers then begin to serve as mobile warehouses, providing Ameren Illinois crews with "convenient access to necessary supplies." Because of their size, the trailers are kept in large parking lots near damaged areas.

Each trailer holds as many as 217 items required for repairs, including bolts, fuses, connectors, wire, brackets and other hardware. An additional 100 cross arms for power poles are also kept underneath each trailer. Each bin within the trailer has a bar code, which is scanned when the item is removed from the trailer for field use. As the supply becomes low, replacements are sent as soon as possible from another trailer. Each trailer has enough equipment to supply as many as 400 linemen and restore power to hundred of customers. The value of the on board equipment is an estimated \$135,000.

Following storms, Ameren Illinois must check on the status of as many as 1.2 million electric customers and more than 816,000 natural gas customers.

That release states Ameren Illinois first keeps tabs on the weather and identifies possible severe weather before it arrives. If the weather is deemed severe enough, Ameren Illinois activates its Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which, after activation, is staffed around the clock to coordinate restoration and communication.

First, crews repair power to "critical infrastructure," then begins working on main lines - which can potentially restore power to "thousands of people" before working on lines helping hundreds and dozens of homes accordingly.

During that time, Ameren Illinois has issued safety tips including:

- Remember, it's hard to tell the difference between an electric line, a telephone line or a cable line. Treat any line as an energized and dangerous line.
- Stay away from anything a downed power line comes in contact with, including fences or trees.
- Never use or touch an electrical device that is in water or damp. Additionally, never enter a flooded basement.
- If you smell gas, leave fast and call Ameren Illinois at 1-800-755-5000 once you are outside of your home or business.

To cope with gas leaks, Ameren Illinois has a vapor extraction unit. That unit is used to pinpoint underground gas leaks. Ameren Illinois currently has two such units, which utilize vacuum-based technology and 18 probes and hoses to extract the gas.

"With the old method, it might take two or three trucks on site with gas co-workers working 24 hours," the release said. "Now, with the Vapor Extraction Unit, they can remove the gas in a quarter of the time in most cases."

The unit also features built-in safety features, including shutting off when gas is being removed at too high of concentrations. The unit is brought to the scene an average of 23 minutes following the call to Ameren Illinois.

In case severe weather has caused extreme damage and power will not be restored for some time, Ameren Illinois recommends its customers have a storm kit on hand for the immediate aftermath of bad weather. That kit should include the following:

- Drinking water: running water may not be available following a storm. Ameren Illinois recommends having one gallon per person per day, and also consider pets.
- First-Aid-Kit: should be stocked with basic pain relievers, antiseptic gel and antibiotics. Make sure to check expiration dates.
- Medicine: Ameren Illinois recommends keeping "at least a few days' worth" of critical medication in a storm kit.
- Sleeping bag: Ameren Illinois recommends keeping one sleeping bag or blanket per person.
- Cooler: To keep medicine, water and perishable food cold.
- Non-perishable food
- Flashlights/lanterns
- Lighters
- Emergency candles
- Paper plates and utensils
- Battery-powered alarm clock
- Battery-powered radio
- Manual can opener
- Hand sanitizer: to ensure sanitation even without running water
- Money: Ideally a few hundred dollars on hand
- List of emergency contacts: Smart phone may not be functioning.
- USB power cord: can charge smart phone from a computer, which does not necessarily require an outlet to do so.
- Duct tape: for making repairs, patching holes, sealing windows or temporarily stopping leaks.

"The bottom line: make sure your storm kit contains all the items you need to keep you and your family safe and comfortable for several days," the release stated.

