

Working hard or hardly working? Pepco strikes again

Maryland, Virginia and DC were hit hard last Friday night by a storm called a Derecho. It came straight at us with winds clocked at 70 miles per hour, lightning and rain, all which brought down branches and even whole trees. My house shook, the lights flickered, and then the power went out. I got out flashlight and immediately called Pepco. The initial message said crews were being assigned and I should have power restored by midnight. When I called the next 15 times, I got the same message each time: Crews would be assigned shortly.

Meanwhile, a million electric customers in the region were also without power, also not getting answers from their utilities. Intersections were dark and tempers were frayed—because not only was there no power, but record-breaking heat and humidity. I decamped to my local Cosi, which thankfully had power, coffee and free Wi-Fi. Pepco's website informed me that the more than 1000 customers in my section did not have an estimated restoration time. By Sunday, after Pepco finished surveying the damage, it announced a "global estimated restoration time" of Friday, July 6 at 11 pm (yes, a whole week later).

Now, Pepco has been running an ad campaign for the past several months. Here's a sample:

Notice the message: Pepco is working hard to improve its reliability.

But is Pepco doing enough? Is it reliable? After this fiasco, the answer seems to be no.

The commercial above makes claims that fly in the face of what happened on the ground. And what's more, taking a week to restore power (during a heat wave), seems to me to indicate

that Pepco is not working hard enough (or has enough crews, etc.).

Yesterday, Marc Fisher from the Washington Post called me because he had seen my previous blog posts on Pepco. He asked me what I would recommend that Pepco do, communications-wise. Should they not advertise? I am not sure what the answer is. I do know that a commercial like the one above does not ring true, and I will bet that the ad gets taken off the air. Perhaps the best course for Pepco is to invest its ad budget into infrastructure, and when it has made REAL, significant improvements, then have a PR campaign to inform its public about what exactly has been done. Just a thought.

Here's Marc Fisher's article, that ran today (I am quoted on the second page): For Pepco customers still without power, patience wears thin.

It seems that Pepco's work still continues, and continues and continues. It is a long way from being what I would consider a reliable company.