The New York City Council

Legislation Text

File #: Res 0202-2004, **Version:** *

Res. No. 202

Resolution strongly denouncing Con Edison for its failure to create and implement effective policies and procedures to identify and correct problems relating to voltage leaks from manhole covers and service boxes and calls upon the State of New York to require all utility companies to create effective protocols to address the issues pertaining to the safe transmission and distribution of electricity.

By Council Members Lopez, Baez, Barron, Gonzalez, Jackson, Monserrate, Nelson, Recchia, Sanders and Vann

Whereas, On Jan. 16, 2004 Jodie Lane, a graduate student at Columbia University's Teachers College, was killed by an electrified street level utility box while walking her dogs in the East Village; and

Whereas, On January 29, 2004 Con Edison reported that a wire that was not properly wrapped in electrical tape was the cause the uncontrolled voltage, although the company had previously attributed the voltage "leakage" to corrosion resulting from the use of salt to clear streets of snow; and

Whereas, Con Edison has approximately 250,000 transformer vaults, manholes and service boxes in the streets of New York City; and

Whereas, In testimony at a hearing of the Council's Committee on Transportation held on February 12, 2004, the President of Local 1-2 of the Utility Workers of America, a union representing Con Edison workers, alleged that the incident that resulted in Ms. Lane's death was indicative of problems that have arisen due to changes in Con Edison policies, such as a reduction of inspections of manholes from a one-year to a three-year cycle; and

Whereas, That same union representative alleges that Con Edison's management creates a work environment that discourages workers from doing quality maintenance work; and

Whereas, Representatives of Con Edison have publicly acknowledged that the utility has been receiving

complaints for years of stray voltage but claims to respond to each one and make repairs as needed; and

Whereas, In his testimony at the Committee on Transportation's hearing on February 12, Thomas Dunleavy, a member of the New York State Public Service Commission (PSC), testified that for many years the PSC has received semi-annual manhole safety reports from Con Edison but said that those reports did not previously identify a public safety hazard from "energized" manhole covers and service boxes but that Con Edison's procedures and reporting requirements "will need to be significantly strengthened"; and

Whereas, It was reported that in 1999 a carriage horse was electrocuted while crossing a Con Edison service box cover on East 59th Street; and

Whereas, At a meeting of Manhattan Community Board No. 3 held on January 27, 2004, Con Edison's Director of Manhattan Public Affairs and Financial Planning and Analysis for Con Edison was reported to have said that Con Edison received 109 calls in 2003 pertaining to shocked animals, which if correct, should have led Con Edison to undertake an aggressive inspection and correction program; and

Whereas, PSC Commissioner Dunleavy also testified that the PSC is also investigating discrepancies between the number of "shocks" reported by the public and the number reported by Con Edison; and

Whereas, The Public Service Commission should require public utilities that distribute electricity to have effective protocols in place for preventing, identifying, correcting and reporting on voltage leaks; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York strongly denounces Con Edison for its failure to create and implement effective policies and procedures to identify and correct problems relating to voltage leaks from manhole covers and service boxes and calls upon the State of New York to require all utility companies to create effective protocols to address the issues pertaining to the safe transmission and distribution of electricity.

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