

RP&L Crew Helps after Storm

9 workers put in long days to assist in restoring power to Chattanooga



Richmond Power & Light foreman Steve Sheckles, center, talks to Gary Forrester, right, of the electric utility that serves Chattanooga, Tenn. With Sheckles is RP&L truck driver Mark Sharits.

May 7, 2011

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — The days were long but the rewards were many for a crew of nine Richmond Power & Light workers that helped restore power to homes in the Chattanooga area.

The nine men left for Tennessee on April 27 and will return home this weekend after nine grueling days of work.

They are a part of a mutual aid contingent from Indiana summoned by the Indiana Municipal Electric Association (IMEA). When an EF-4 tornado, packing winds up to 190 mph, hit the Chattanooga area last month, it left miles of destruction and 13 fatalities.

Officials in Tennessee sent out a mutual aid call to IMEA, which passed it along to Indiana electric power companies.

RP&L officials allowed a crew to go to reset power poles, re-string lines, restore power and some semblance of sanity to the lives of thousands of residents.

“When we arrived,” said crew foreman Steve Sheckles of Centerville, “there were more than 119,000 people without electric power. It was total devastation. It looked like the area had been bombed.”

The RP&L employees worked shifts of 16 hours on, eight hours off. By Friday morning, there were fewer than 500 residents without power.

“We’ve worked hard. The guys have done a great job,” Sheckles said.

In all, a foreman, two truck drivers, four first class linemen and two journeymen linemen went to Tennessee.

Gene Steelman of Richmond is a first class lineman for RP&L.

“We’re tired, but we all feel real good,” Steelman said.

“There are a lot of sad stories down here. But we’ve worked well together. Everybody’s been safe, and we feel very good about what we’ve done.”

Some of the workers started home Friday; others will today.

Steeleman said the trip was a learning experience for all nine workers, including two apprentice linemen.



Richmond Power & Light workers set a power pole in an area just southeast of Chattanooga, Tenn. / Supplied photo
Richmond Power & Light workers set a power pole in an area just southeast of Chattanooga, Tenn.

At a Glance

- Nine workers from Richmond Power & Light went to Tennessee to help officials in the Chattanooga area restore power after a powerful tornado hit that • The workers included **Steve Sheckles, Mark Sharits, Gene Steelman, Jim Morris, Steve Glover, Dave Drudy, Donnie Pitcher, Brian Barrett and Dave Pegg.**
- They were paid for their work by officials in Tennessee, who will then be reimbursed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- The workers took four RP&L trucks. While in Tennessee, they were part of a group of about 1,200 other utility company workers who replaced 360 power transformers and 580 poles.
- They return home this weekend.

“Besides learning to deal with a disaster, we also learned to work under adverse conditions,” he said. “We appreciate RP&L, Steve Saum and Mike Elstro allowing us to come down here. It’s been our privilege to come down here.”

Saum is RP&L’s general manager. Elstro is the utility’s transmission and distribution superintendent.

“I think it’s a wonderful thing,” Elstro said. “These people (in Tennessee) are in desperate need, and if we can help, my men want to help.”



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