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Governor Doyle Issues Executive Order to Improve Energy Reliability

Governor Jim Doyle today announced that he has issued an Executive Order to help the state improve our electric transmission system to avoid emergencies in Wisconsin. The Executive Order directs the Public Service Commission and the Department of Natural Resources to streamline and better-coordinate their review and approval processes for siting and constructing transmission lines in Wisconsin. Doyle expects recommendations in three weeks on concrete steps to be taken to improve the system.

"We are not going to continue to hold our breath every time the weather heats up, or energy demand increases, or there are power fluctuations in other states," Governor Doyle said. "In Wisconsin, we're going to step up to the plate and do all we can to ensure a reliable, modern transmission system that Wisconsin's businesses and families can rely on."

Utilities applying to construct transmission lines, pipelines and power generation facilities must complete both a PSC certification process and a DNR permitting process before construction can commence. In the past, there have been complaints that the two different approval processes are not in sync and cause added and unnecessary delays to projects.

Doyle has directed PSC Chairperson Burnie Bridge and DNR Secretary Scott Hassett to examine their policies and procedures for review and approval of transmission facilities and to look for ways to increase cooperation between DNR and the PSC. He has directed them to report back to him in three weeks with ways to improve the system.

"The review process for building transmission facilities and meeting our energy needs should be streamlined and better coordinated," Doyle said. "But to say it should be made more efficient is not to say we should sacrifice our standards. Every application must continue to be carefully reviewed to ensure that projects are economically sound, protect the environment and have minimal impact on communities. And the process must preserve the same opportunities for public input."

The Governor explained that, after years of neglect, Wisconsin's electric infrastructure is seriously strained. "As demand increases, we are having trouble moving electricity from one area in the state to another," the Governor said. "Unless we make substantial improvements, Wisconsin's citizens will face increased risks of brownouts and blackouts in the years ahead."

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Additionally, the Governor has asked PSC Chairperson Bridge to report back to him on lessons learned from the Northeast power outage. Bridge's report will contain information on what happened in Wisconsin when the lights went out in the Northeast, and once the cause of the outage is determined, how to guard against that same situation in Wisconsin.

"The reliability and availability of energy is vital to our efforts to make Wisconsin competitive and help us attract and retain jobs," Governor Doyle said. "That is why earlier this year, I supported construction of an innovative new generation facility in Dane County. I have also signed legislation into law that encourages local communities throughout the state to host critical baseload power generation facilities. And I signed legislation to protect Wisconsin energy ratepayers by allowing the Public Service Commission to authorize the American Transmission Company to withdraw as a member of the Midwest Independent System Operator (MISO) if they determine that this action is in the public interest. But we can and must do more."

"Securing our energy future is a shared challenge, and a shared responsibility," the Governor said. "It is my sincere hope that we can move forward in an atmosphere of cooperation, Democrats and Republicans, working closely with private sector and with the community to find real solutions. Our goal is straightforward: to build and maintain a modern, reliable electric transmission grid for Wisconsin's citizens and our economy."

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