



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF
PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL ENGINEERS
AFL-CIO & CLC

8630 Fenton Street, Suite 400, Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-565-9016 • FAX 301-565-0018 • www.ifpte.org

June 21, 2005

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
United States Senate
SR-476
Washington, DC 20510-3204

Dear Senator Clinton

As President of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), AFL-CIO, CLC, I am writing to inform you of a grave situation that potentially threatens the public safety, economy and security of the Northeastern United States. In particular, I am writing to ask that you, in your position within the United States Congress representing a state that could be impacted, directly intervene in this matter.

As you may know, IFPTE is the nation's largest white-collar union, representing upwards of 80,000 workers. Among our membership are also 6,000 members in Canada, including over 1,000 licensed engineers and other professionals at Ontario's government-operated electricity transmission company, Hydro One. IFPTE's membership at Hydro One, consisting primarily of elite engineers, includes members who supported the Joint US/Canada Commission on the 2003 Blackout. These engineers are considered among the principal experts in North America on electrical blackouts and have alerted me to a grave situation that calls for immediate action on the part of the regional and international regulatory bodies.

On the afternoon of May 27, 2005 the electricity system in Ontario experienced what has been termed as a BLIP (Blackout In Progress) in which nearly 15% of the electricity capacity of the province was shut down in a fashion similar to the start of the cascading shutdowns that caused the horrendous and damaging blackout of August 14, 2003. According to the Ontario government, Hydro One management and the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) in Ontario, who are not mutually exclusive, the May 27th event resulted solely from operator error. However, according to IFPTE's members at Hydro One, who are not only strategically important employees at the company but are also recognized as industry experts, the principal factor of the May 27th event leading to the loss of 2,300 megawatts of power and voltage collapse was the result of the failure of two separate computerized protection systems that had been installed to prevent this very event.

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How serious of a threat was the May 27th event and how would it have impacted the United States? Both IFPTE's members, as well as independent experts in the field, agree that the May 27th event was a mere 20 seconds from reaching the proportion of the August 2003 blackout. Even more alarming is that the two protection systems that malfunctioned on May 27th are still in service.

To compound matters, all 1,000 Hydro One engineers and other professionals have been on strike since June 6th, meaning that the only qualified employees at Hydro One able to investigate and propose remedial action have been forced off their jobs before their investigation of this matter has been completed. In other words, the true and independent experts who hold the answer to avoid a massive blackout in the U.S, an event that could reach the proportions of the August 2003 event, have been shown the door by management. Obviously, this has resulted in a less than forthcoming and transparent assessment by Hydro One management to the public of not only the danger that this poses to Canadian citizens, but also to Northeastern U.S. electricity consumers and the economy.

Indeed, the potential of a blackout is not exclusive to Canada, but also threatens your constituents here in the United States. As a result, I am asking you, in your position as a member of the U.S. Congress, to work with the Department of Energy (DOE) in ensuring that North America avoids a repeat of the 2003 blackout disaster that cost billions to the economies of both Canada and the United States. In particular, I am asking that you, in conjunction with the DOE, request that Ontario's Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO), the Northeast Power Coordinating Council (NPCC), as well as the North American Electricity Reliability Council (NERC) do the following:

- 1) Send in independent NERC investigators to Hydro One to ensure that the investigation into the May 27th incident is completed in a transparent and complete fashion.
- 2) To protect the U.S. and Canada from the two defective system protection devices, request that Hydro One move at once to install technology on the transmission ties between Ontario and the USA. This technology could detect system instability on the Canadian grid within time to save the U.S. by tripping the ties if a similar incident were to occur.
- 3) To achieve an immediate temporary solution, request that a restriction of power flows across the border, at transmission ties, until the new technology described above can be installed.

Along with this correspondence is a letter signed by 66 licensed professional engineers employed by Hydro One, detailing the seriousness of this issue. This letter was sent to both NPCC and NERC. It is a licensing requirement that enables professional engineers to report these serious problems to the appropriate bodies.

It is clear that the reliability of energy to both U.S. and Canadian consumers is at risk and requires the direct intervention of the U.S. government. In this regard, I welcome the opportunity to make IFPTE professional engineers involved in this matter, and/or engineers independent of any party to this situation, available to you and your staff.

I thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions or would like to speak with IFPTE provided authorities on this matter, please feel free to contact me directly, or IFPTE Legislative Director Matt Biggs at (301) 565-9016.

Sincerely,



Gregory J. Justmann,
President

GJJ/pjc
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