

Unsung Heroes

Recovery from the devastating and deadly tornadoes that raked Mississippi on April 27th have gained momentum every day since the outbreak. The unsung heroes are the men and women who work for public utilities, especially TVA and its power cooperative affiliates, beginning virtually within minutes of power outages caused by massive damage to the electricity grid. The storms, at their peak, left 185,000 Mississippians without electricity, many of those in Northeast Mississippi, all of which is in TVA's coverage area.

Networking across power association and utility company service boundaries enabled crews to restore service to all of the TVA connection points in Mississippi by May 1st. TVA has released information outlining how it was able to work so quickly and efficiently. "TVA worked around the clock to safely restore the power first to the critical loads, such as hospitals and water pumping stations, and then to residents and businesses in northern Mississippi and across the region," TVA Chief Operating Officer Bill McCollum said. "We still have a lot of work to do to rebuild the transmission towers that were destroyed and reconstruct the transmission system in the hardest-hit areas.

TVA, local power distributors and usually competing neighboring utilities were important factors in Mississippi's rebound. Cooperation with and help from Entergy and South Mississippi Electric Power Association were essential to power restoration. The damage included 300 poles or steel structures, 90 large transmission lines and large portions of the 500-kilovolt and 161-kilovolt lines serving northern Alabama and Mississippi.

At the peak, more than 800,000 customers in Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee were without electricity. By May 16th, that number had been reduced to a few hundred. TVA has largely shifted its attention to helping control flooding on the Mississippi River and its tributaries, many of which flow through the TVA/Tennessee River service region.

TVA CEO Tom Kilgore said in internal memorandums made public that the damage from the tornadoes was the heaviest in the seven-state authority's 78-year history. TVA's 36-county Mississippi service area serves 329,000 households, the third-largest customer concentration in the TVA region, trailing only Tennessee and Alabama.