

# Business Preparation for an Influenza Pandemic

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In fall 2005, the Department of Homeland Security identified the electric industry as a key component of the national infrastructure and requested that utilities, including Progress Energy, prepare an emergency response plan for a pandemic.

While our company has experience with and continually refines its plans to respond to hurricanes, ice storms, and other natural disasters, putting together our flu pandemic plan proved to be a long process and forced us to address issues that had not arisen in storm situations.

For example, natural disasters destroy infrastructure. Our employees pull together to ensure our customers get service restored as soon as possible. Many employees stop doing their regular daily jobs and take on specific storm jobs to ensure we can meet our customers' needs quickly.

In planning for a flu pandemic, though, the scenario is much different. Rather than destroying infrastructure, a pandemic has much more human impact and little if any effect on infrastructure. A flu pandemic incident is outside of our experience. Instead of bringing our employees together, as we are used to in storm events, a flu pandemic could push our employees apart, with many being unable to come to work.

Whatever the effects of such an occurrence, it is critical that electric utilities and other industries, such as banking and transportation, be prepared to continue providing society's essential needs during a pandemic.

Progress Energy took a hard look at its emergency and business continuity plans and determined that we needed to start fresh in looking at our pandemic plan. We learned some very important lessons during this process, and we believe we have developed a robust, comprehensive plan that will ensure we take care of our customers and our employees.

## Involve Everyone

We formed a Pandemic Working Group, made up of departments throughout the company, including:

- Health & safety
- Power plant operations (nuclear and fossil)
- Transmission
- Distribution
- Supply chain
- Information technology & telecommunications
- Corporate communications
- Human resources
- System planning
- Customer service
- Accounting
- Security

This group met frequently for many months to develop our corporate-wide flu pandemic plan along with plans for their individual departments. Having this many groups involved helped us identify enterprise-wide gaps and develop solutions for our company as a whole.

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## Break Down Plan by Phases

Progress Energy chose to use the North American Electric Reliability Council's pandemic phases to guide our planning; this structure is different from the World Health Organization's

six levels of pandemic alert phases. We then identified key steps for the company to take in each phase. These steps are outlined in Table 1. These steps are by no means an exhaustive list, but rather a look at the action items that the entire company needs to undertake in each phase.

<b>Pandemic Phase</b>	<b>Status of Pandemic</b>	<b>Key Company steps</b>
<b>Phase 1: Pandemic Alert</b>	Governments, owners, and operators are notified a pandemic is possible and preparedness plans should be reviewed and updated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information to employees</li> <li>• Develop a list of health-related inventory items</li> <li>• Identify essential staffing needs and identify personnel to meet those needs (assuming a 35% to 40% absentee rate), including backups for key personnel</li> <li>• Develop and update the company's meeting policy</li> <li>• Develop and update the company staff travel policy</li> <li>• Identify augmented workforce requirements</li> <li>• Modify Human Resources policies associated with working from home, remaining sequestered at a job site, and absenteeism</li> <li>• Identify critical operation supplies</li> <li>• Implement an enterprise-wide hand-washing campaign</li> <li>• Develop a training plan for backups</li> <li>• Ensure business continuity plans have been revised to incorporate pandemic plans</li> <li>• Perform a self-assessment</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2: Pre-Pandemic</b>	Localized outbreaks of the disease are occurring with human-to-human transmission. Governments and electricity sector entities begin to assign resources, prepare staffing, and implement contingency plans. Begin an information distribution program to promote appropriate responses by employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodically test and verify preparedness plans and procedures via a simulation exercise, tabletop exercise, or process walk through</li> <li>• Develop and update workforce deployment policies regarding teams and crews working together and the potential need to keep employees separated</li> <li>• Set up telecommuting capabilities for identified personnel</li> <li>• Stock up on water, beverages, and food</li> <li>• Consider the need and conditions for more extreme measures, such as sequestering on-site critical staff</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3: Pandemic Outbreak</b>	General outbreaks of the disease across borders and continents. Implement response plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activate Crisis Management Center</li> <li>• Notify employees</li> <li>• Implement the protocol for telecommuting</li> <li>• Notify all staff on site to leave their full name, employee ID, and after-hours contact numbers</li> <li>• Provide each workstation with disinfection supplies</li> <li>• Close noncritical common areas</li> <li>• Assess the need to vacate all noncritical staff from facilities</li> <li>• Sequester on-site critical staff, as needed</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 4: Maximum Disruption</b>	High absentee rates would occur (35%) and fatalities would begin to impact workforce. This phase could last for several months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze/reevaluate staffing levels</li> <li>• Analyze/reevaluate supplier effectiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 5: Prolonged Recovery</b>	Recovery will be slow. Altered business conditions will be prevalent. This phase will last at least three months and possibly up to six months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deactivate Crisis Management Center</li> <li>• Implement business continuity plan and business resumption plans</li> <li>• Communicate with personnel and departments not addressed in resumption plans</li> <li>• Return to normal business operations</li> </ul>

## Employees are Customers, Too

Time and time again in our discussions, the planning group found itself not only talking about how to maintain reliable electric service, but also how our company should take care of its employees in a pandemic.

We looked for nontraditional communications channels, so we could make sure our employees had the information they would need during a pandemic. We had detailed conversations about Human Resources policies and how those might change, going as far as to write new policies to have ready in the event of a pandemic.

And we decided we shouldn't wait until a threat was imminent—we wanted to educate our employees *now* about a pandemic and what they could do to prepare themselves and their families. Using our company's daily electronic newsletter, we began sharing information about a pandemic and providing preparation checklists. We also published questions and answers and linked our employees to the Federal government's pandemic Web site ([www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)) and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## Be Realistic

We often found ourselves in many "what if" conversations during our planning, all of which helped us to address some key issues. However, it is important to recognize that a company

plan cannot include every step to handle every possible contingency. Instead, we are realistic about the limitations of a written plan and use it as a higher-level guide that can be used in many different situations.

## Challenge One Another

While we did not have any formal "challenge sessions" during our planning, Progress Energy's pandemic planning team frequently engaged in tough debates about the number of critical employees, whether sequestering employees would be necessary, and if and when supplies should be purchased. As is often the case in hypothetical situations, there were no right or wrong answers, but each department was able to further refine their plans based on these tough questions.

## Test and Refine Your Plan

Finally, plans are only as good as the last time they were tested and updated. We have already held one company-wide drill to test our pandemic plan, and we plan to continue these drills in the future.

Providing critical services like electricity will be a challenge in a pandemic situation, but we believe our experience with other disasters and our comprehensive planning process will help us meet the needs of our employees and our customers if a pandemic ever occurs. **NCMJ**

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