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Nebraska mutual aid teams help hurricane-ravaged states

By: [Cindy Gonzalez](#) - October 7, 2024 7:56 pm



Omaha Public Power District deployed workers and vehicles to the Hurricane Helene power restoration effort. Now team members have been sent to assist in Hurricane Milton, set to make landfall on Wednesday. (Courtesy of OPPD)

LINCOLN — A Nebraska emergency response team specializing in communications has been deployed to help North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, Gov. Jim Pillen said Monday.

The four-member Telecommunicator Emergency Response Team (TERT) left Friday for Buncombe County and is expected to return home in 14 days. That county is one of the hardest hit from the storm.



A Nebraska Telecommunicator Emergency Response Team (TERT) has been mobilized to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. From left to right are Mike Binder, Andrew Hayden, Cindy Howard, Kate Beard, who were deployed. Also pictured is Sharon Codre, state lead coordinator for TERT. (Courtesy of Governor's Office)

"The hurricane catastrophically damaged communications systems in North Carolina and this team is desperately needed to provide the kind of specialized 911 communications support that will ensure public safety," Pillen said in a news statement.

Living conditions in the area are affected by power outages, flooding, debris, downed trees and sporadic cellular coverage. The Nebraska team is staying in a gymnasium used to house other emergency responders and TERTs from elsewhere.

Nebraska's TERT deployment is in response to a request received through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, an interstate mutual aid agreement between all states designed to streamline the process for requesting disaster resources.

The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency is monitoring requests from impacted states, said Erv Portis, assistant director for the agency.

"We are constantly communicating with those state and local partners to assess Nebraska's capacity to respond when those requests come in. We will be doing the same as Hurricane Milton makes its approach toward Florida in the coming days."

Utilities respond

Nebraska utilities, including the Omaha Public Power District and Lincoln Electric System, also sent crews to aid the hurricane-ravaged area.

The 16-person OPPD team that was deployed to the Southeast on Sept. 28 to support Appalachian Power in West Virginia and Virginia was released from that massive power restoration effort Monday.



Omaha Public Power District mutual aid crew members Trey Mueller, front, and Jeff Jensen are seen working in Virginia. (Courtesy of OPPD)

But already OPPD's help was being sought for the next storm approaching.

"With the next big storm, Hurricane Milton, set to make landfall on Wednesday, more help will be needed," said OPPD spokesperson Jodi Baker. "Orlando Utilities Commission has already asked if our team can head their way next. Our mutual aid crew is now on the road, headed their direction to pre-stage ahead of the storm."

Two times previously this year, OPPD deployed mutual aid to fellow utilities in need. The team supported Evergy in the Kansas City area in January, and MidAmerican Energy in northern Iowa and ComEd in southern Illinois in mid-July after powerful winds caused extensive damage to trees and power lines.

All three utilities "returned the favor," coming to OPPD's aid when more than 220,000 customers lost power in the historic July 31 storm, said a utility spokesperson.

Bucket trucks, diggers, pickups

LES teams that were deployed to Georgia on Sept. 25 have returned home. The 12 LES employees were joined by six employees from Grand Island Utilities to help in Hurricane Helene recovery efforts.

The group traveled with two bucket trucks, two digger/derricks, three pickups, two trailers and a mechanics truck.

"We learned firsthand all the difference mutual aid support can make when we dealt with the aftermath of the July 31 storm in Lincoln, our first call for mutual aid support in nine years," said Paul Crist, LES vice president of energy delivery. "Power restoration is demanding and stretches resources thin, and LES is proud to return the support to another community in need."

LES said that the American Public Power Association was helping to coordinate assistance efforts in the region. More than 2,000 community-owned electric utilities across the country make up the association. As a member of the national association's mutual aid network, LES is reimbursed for all costs of deploying resources to assist other utilities.

An LES spokesperson said the utility hasn't announced mutual aid efforts for Hurricane Milton but noted that could change quickly.

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