

General Information Notice

Electrical Safety & Compliance

Notice Number: **GI10_20**

1 April 2020

Subject: Continuing to Deliver Critical Work

Dear ASPs,

Energy is essential for the people and economy of NSW. Never more so than during the COVID-19 crisis. Important services such as hospitals, nursing homes and essential businesses rely on energy to keep the community safe and operating.

Critical work maintains grid reliability and the security of electricity supply, connects new customers and keeps economic activity continuing in NSW.

At this stage we are continuing critical works including connecting new customers. The situation is changing rapidly, and we will update you if there are any changes to this based on new advice from the NSW Government.

The purpose of this notice is to share with you how we are explaining to customers what critical work is, why we are continuing to perform this work and how to interact with our crews safely. We have also attached a guide we are using to support our field crews which you may find useful and want to share with your teams.

Why is critical work continuing?

Ausgrid is continuing with critical work during the COVID-19 outbreak to:

- Connect new customers and households to the grid
- Avoid much longer, unexpected customer power outages in coming weeks and months, potentially at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Complete critical repair work where there is likelihood of a major fault or outage.

We must continue to connect new customers as well as undertake critical maintenance, to protect and maintain our network for existing and connecting customers. Delaying critical works would put future power supply for existing and proposed customers at risk. That's a risk to the community that we're not willing to take during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ausgrid is **avoiding any unnecessary work** during this period because we know people are at home either working or looking after children.

Where critical work requires power outages, customers are notified of the outage before it proceeds. We will also reach out to registered life support customers to ensure they have appropriate back up plans they can access. Those on life support, operating a small business or who are concerned about the impacts of critical work are encouraged to call our support team on 13 13 65.

Interacting safely with our crews

We are asking that if customers see our crews, ASPs or other partners working in their area, that they please treat them with respect.

We are asking our customers to treat our teams kindly and reminding them that, while this is a tough time for all Australians, that we are all in this together.

Finally, we are also asking customers, employees, ASPs and other partners to maintain social distancing by staying more than 1.5 metres away, to keep themselves, our employees and other workers safe and minimise the potential spread of COVID-19.

Thank you for everything that you are doing to work with us safely and for continuing to deliver essential services to the community at this difficult time.

Regards,

Trevor Armstrong
Chief Operating Officer

Managing tough conversations with customers during COVID-19 period

Personal Safety

- **Think about your surroundings** when engaging with customers: avoid places where you are not easily able to exit a potentially heated situation. Include this as part of your HAC
- **Ask the customer politely to stop yelling** at you or speaking to you that way – speak softly and slowly. Refocus them by asking them a question about the issue
- **If customer is aggressive or threatening** – remove yourself as quickly as possible and escalate to your supervisor

Listen actively

- **Listen to understand** with your whole body – use positive body language
- The customer wants to be heard and air their grievances
- **Stay calm and deep breaths**
- **Don't talk over the customer** or argue with them
- Give the customer **all of your attention**
- Don't try and solve the situation straight away or jump to conclusions

Practise diffusing anger

- **Apologise**
- **Be empathic** with the customer by using statements like: *'I can see why you're upset. I would be too – this is a difficult time.'*
- **Lower your voice** if the customer gets louder, start speaking more slowly and in a lower tone
- **Speak to the issue, not the person**, even if the customer gets personal with you. Ignore personal comments, gently guide the customer back to the issue

Explore solutions

- **Repeat the customer's concerns** so you are sure that you're addressing the right issue
- If you need to, **ask questions** to make sure you've identified the problem correctly
- **Communicate what you can and can't do** about their problem. Never say: *'There's nothing I can do.'*
- **Test the solution** with them to see whether it's acceptable to them. If it's not, then begin the process again or make a decision to withdraw from the situation.

Act quickly and follow up

- Once you and the customer have agreed on a solution, **you need to take action quickly**
- If you **commit to doing something** for the customer, **then make sure you do it.**
- **Follow up with the customer** to make sure that they are happy with the resolution.
- Wherever you can, **go above and beyond their expectations**

Verbal and non-verbal cues

- **Be courteous,**
- **Your facial expression** needs to be calm, concerned and interested
- **Eye contact** – maintain a healthy level of eye contact but don't stare too much as you might come off as creepy
- **Hand and arm positioning** – keep your arms at your side with your hands open
- **Stance** – maintain a neutral stand, an upright and open posture; stay at least 2m away from the customer.