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NSTAR: Upgrades coming for Allston residents plagued by unreliable electricity

Posted by Matt Rocheleau February 7, 2011 11:26 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Work and planning are underway to improve unreliable electrical service to around 700 NSTAR customers along several residential roadways in Allston adjacent to the border with Brookline.

NSTAR customers living on Kelton Street and Brainerd Road, along with several smaller connecting streets, have experienced an unusually high number of outages for about the past year due to service issues exacerbated by severe summertime thunderstorms and the recent snowstorm barrage, the company said.

“Reliability isn't where it should be ... The good news is we have plans in place to improve reliability on both streets,” said NSTAR spokesman Michael Durand. “We're committed to improving the level of service reliability in the area and have begun taking the steps necessary to make that happen.”

An equipment upgrade began recently on Kelton and is expected to be completed in April, he said.

Electrical equipment will be added on Brainerd and NSTAR is also “re-doing how we deliver electricity to customers” there, according to Durand. That work is still in planning stages and no exact timeframe for the upgrades has been determined, but the company plans to begin work this year.

Both upgrades will impact customers on that local electrical circuit, which includes residents of side streets like Scottfield Road and Woodstock Avenue, he said.

There were three unplanned outages in January, two of which Durand said occurred during the Jan. 11-12 blizzard that dropped around 18 inches of snow in Boston and, at its worst, left as many as **100,000 residents without power statewide**. However, only 6,900 of those outages were reported in the Hub, as most of the outages from that storm happened in southeastern Massachusetts where milder temperatures made the snow stickier and heavier.

According to a Kelton Street resident, the third January outage for that area came on the night of Jan. 24 between 7 p.m. and 3 a.m. during one of the coldest nights of the year and a stretch of days that brought bitter temperatures not witnessed in Boston in six years. The resident said the

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outages caused heating systems in some buildings to fail.

The streets on that local electrical circuit consist primarily of residential homes, apartment and condo buildings with a few businesses sprinkled in between.

During 2010, electric customers in the area experienced eight unplanned outages, half occurring during the summer and often the result of inclement weather, the spokesman said. There were another seven "permit," or planned outages required "to make repairs and/or return the electric system back to normal operation after repairs," he added.

Boston.com was alerted to the repeated outage problems along both roadways by an affected resident and reader of the website. The reporter contacted by that Kelton Street resident was familiar with the problems as the reporter lived on Brainerd this past summer. However, the reporter's recent inquiry on the matter to NSTAR did not prompt the company to begin or alter any work or planning; the electrical service provider had already begun some work and had other planning in place prior to being contacted by Boston.com.

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