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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2012

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A N A C T

RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS - DUTIES OF UTILITIES AND
CARRIERS

Introduced By: Senators Perry, Metts, Crowley, Miller, and DeVall

Date Introduced: February 15, 2012

Referred To: Senate Corporations

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 39-2 of the General Laws entitled "Duties of Utilities and Carriers"
2 is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

3 **39-2-25. Contact voltage, detection, repair and reporting.** -- (a) As used in this section
4 “contact voltage” means and/or refers to a voltage resulting from abnormal power system
5 conditions that may be present between two (2) conductive surfaces that can be simultaneously
6 contacted by members of the general public and/or their animals. Contact voltage is caused by
7 power system fault current as it flows through the impedance of available fault current pathways.
8 Faults contributing to contact voltage may be due to electric system deterioration or damage, or
9 improper installation. Contact voltage is of greatest concern in areas where underground electric
10 distribution systems exist, as faults on those systems may remain active for long periods of time
11 before detection and repair, and therefore contact voltage is a potential shock hazard.

12 (b) Notwithstanding any general or public law, rule, regulation or order to the contrary,
13 the Rhode Island public utilities commission and the Rhode Island division of utilities and
14 carriers shall initiate a proceeding within forty-five (45) days of the effective date of this section,
15 to establish, after notice and provision of the opportunity for comment and public hearing, a
16 contact voltage detection and repair program. The program shall require electric utilities to
17 implement appropriate procedures to detect contact voltage on publicly accessible surfaces which
18 could become energized by contact voltage due to faults in the underground distribution system.

1 The program shall also recognize the potential for publicly accessible objects such as sidewalks,
2 roadways, fences, storm drains, or other metallic gratings to become energized by faults to the
3 underground distribution system. The program shall require every electric utility to adhere to
4 appropriate procedures established by the commission to:

5 (1) Designate contact voltage risk areas. The boundaries of such areas shall be based on
6 the presence of underground electric distribution and situated in pedestrian-dense areas such as
7 urban neighborhoods, commercial areas, central business districts, tourist heavy locations, and
8 other places where pedestrians could be exposed to contact voltage;

9 (2) Within the designated areas, annually survey for contact voltage hazards on all
10 conductive surfaces in public rights-of-way using the most effective technology available;

11 (3) Repair power system faults of the utility's underground distribution system, that result
12 in contact voltage of one volt AC or greater appearing on publicly accessible surfaces; and

13 (4) Annually report on contact voltage findings, including, but not limited to, the number
14 and type of energized objects, voltage level, corrective action taken, shocks that occur to
15 members of the public or to pets owned by members of the public, and any other information that
16 the commission deems appropriate.

17 (c) The commission shall require, as part of the program established pursuant to
18 subsection 39-2-25(b), that electric utilities maintain records of the testing and subsequent,
19 maintenance or repairs performed by such utilities, and submit copies of such records to the
20 commission, which shall make the records available for public inspection.

21 (d) Any electric utility that fails to comply with the requirements of the program
22 established pursuant to subsection 39-2-25(b) shall be subject to a penalty to be determined by the
23 commission and in compliance with Title 39.

24 (e) The commission shall, within one hundred twenty (120) days of the effective date of
25 this section, conclude the proceeding initiated pursuant to subsection 39-2-25(b). Within these
26 one hundred twenty (120) days, the commission shall also issue an order establishing the contact
27 voltage detection and repair program. Within one year after the issuance of the order establishing
28 the program, and during each subsequent one year period following the date of issuance of that
29 order, the commission shall provide the legislature with a report on the effectiveness of the
30 program, and any recommendations for any changes thereto.

1 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

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1 This act would require that the public utilities commission and the Rhode Island division
2 of utilities and carriers establish a program to require electric utilities to conduct voltage detection
3 surveys and complete timely repairs of faults contributing to contact voltage.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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