



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Public Health Medicine Environment and Health Group



Public Consultation on the Draft Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Electricity and Gas Networks Sector

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Summary

The safety and effective functioning of many systems essential for life, health and wellbeing depends on a secure energy supply both within and outside the health sector.

Within the health sector:

- Many essential healthcare interventions both inside and outside hospitals need 24/7 energy supplies.
- There is a drive to provide increasingly more specialist care in the home that is power dependent, e.g. oxygen concentrators and home dialysis.
- GP practices, nursing homes and other health services in primary care need power to provide safe services.

Outside the health sector include:

- Water and sanitation treatment
- Refrigeration of food, medications etc
- Heating and cooking
- Lighting and security
- Communications

We recommend that the adaptation plan incorporates the needs of vulnerable and essential healthcare users. This will include the need to:

- identify these users on an ongoing basis
- advise such users as to their risks and how they may prepare for severe weather events
- advise as to what options are available and whether they can be prioritised in the event of an outage.

This will require co-ordination with the health sector, so that health sector adaptation incorporates energy adaptation and vice versa.

Health Sector Dependence on Secure Energy Supply

Human Needs

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the most fundamental human needs are air, water, food and shelter. Health and wellbeing requires all of these to be clean, safe and secure. A secure energy supply is essential to adequately meet most of these needs.

Additional necessities for specific groups

- Patients in hospital – many healthcare interventions need 24/7 energy supplies and so have additional generation capacity for emergencies
- Patients in nursing homes and other residential care settings are often very dependent and need care interventions which require a secure energy supply
- Patients who are living at home may need electric supply for health interventions such as oxygen concentrators, home dialysis, pressure relieving mattresses
- Patients who need home care packages are advised to stay warm and have hot drinks and meals (see <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/benefitsentitlements/HCPinfo booklet.pdf>)
- GP practices and other health services in primary care need power to provide safe services

Examples of health impacts from failure of power include

Nursing homes

12 deaths reported from a US nursing home that lost its air conditioning during Hurricane Irma (Irish Independent 29/9/2017)

Drinking Water

"Storm Darwin in February 2014 affected 158 supplies serving 171,804 people in the south-west of the country, which were placed on precautionary boil notices for between 1 and 5 days". Some were due to loss of power. (EPA Drinking Water Report 2014)

Hospital Crisis

"A patient who was locked in a lift during a power blackout in Beaumont Hospital had to be given emergency resuscitation. The hospital's generator failed to kick in for several hours" ... "after supply from the national grid was disrupted. The hospital, which is a major centre for neurosurgery and cancer, was plunged into crisis for most of that morning". (Irish Independent 24/6/2017)

Recommendations

1. Consider the health impacts on people (consumers) in the adaptation plan especially how to meet the energy needs of vulnerable and essential healthcare users
2. The membership of vulnerable groups changes – people get better, move to different care settings etc –so a system for identifying these people is essential
3. These users may need to plan for energy disruptions and may need advice from the energy sector as to their options
4. Ideally these groups can be prioritised in the event of an outage, but they may need a back-up plan
5. Co-ordinate with the health sector, so that health sector adaptation incorporates energy adaptation and vice versa.