



**Jessica Kennedy**

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## New York Strengthens Electric Grid for Storm Season

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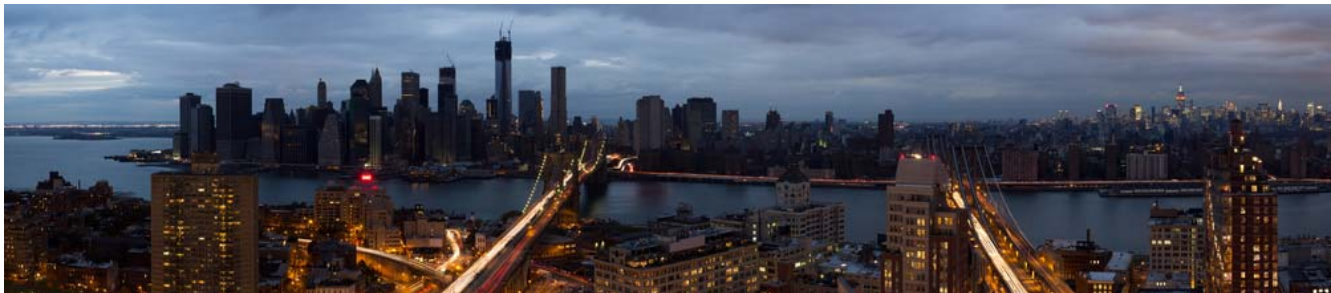
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June 1 will begin the 2013 hurricane season, and according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) it is going to be a busy one. NOAA predicts a 70% chance of 14-20 named storms (winds of 39mph or higher); 7 to 11 storms could reach hurricane force (74mph winds or higher), and potentially 3 to 6 major hurricanes (111mph winds or higher; category 3-5) in the Atlantic Ocean. The average hurricane season includes about 12 named storms and six hurricanes, of which three become major hurricanes. NOAA acting administrator Kathryn Sullivan Ph.D stated “[w]ith the devastation of Sandy fresh in our minds, and another active

season predicted, everyone at NOAA is committed to providing life-saving forecasts in the face of these storms and ensuring that Americans are prepared and ready ahead of time.”

Although the upcoming hurricane season will be considered “very active” it may not differ much from recent years. Hurricane activity, on average, has actually been considered elevated from 1995-2012. Fifteen named storms and eight hurricanes, including four major hurricanes, is the average season for these years. Last year’s Hurricane Sandy highlights the serious need to be prepared for storm season, especially if 2013 is as active as, or more active than last year. While there is no way for any weather agency to predict with certainty how many storms will make landfall or where storms will occur ahead of the season, [Accuweather](#) is estimating that three storms will hit the US. The East Coast will be watching tropical weather closely this season.

Factors contributing to the expected busy hurricane activity include warmer than usual Atlantic Ocean temperatures, and an absence of the El Niño climate pattern in the Pacific Ocean. El Niño occurs every two to seven years and is known to suppress hurricane activity in the Atlantic. As of April 2013, the [Climate Prediction Center](#) reported that sea surface temperatures in the Pacific remain close to normal, which indicates a lack of any El Niño pattern. This week is Hurricane Preparedness Week, so how are electric utilities responding to the news of an upcoming strong storm season? Several electric utility executives and trade associations met with President Obama in early May to discuss how response to extreme weather situations can be improved, and some utilities are wasting no time updating delivery systems.

New York is taking a strong role in preparing its electric system to withstand future storms. Con Edison is investing over \$2 billion for fortifying infrastructure in the five boroughs and Westchester County to prevent widespread power outages this season. Parts of the upgrades include the installation of smarter switches that can isolate damaged power connections to prevent them from causing problems elsewhere. Spokesperson for Con Ed D. Joy Faber explains, “If one part of the customers lose power, the switches are sectionalized where it doesn’t take out a whole line or block of customers at the same time.” The New York Power Authority is also funding improvements across the rest of state. NYPA recently authorized \$31 million in funding for improvements to the electric transmission system in Central and Northern New York. This upgrade project is a part of Governor Cuomo’s \$726 million Transmission Life Extension and Modernization program, which is designed to update the 50 year old electric infrastructure throughout the state.

New York is not the only state improving its infrastructure in preparation for extreme weather, but it is setting a prominent example. The rest of the country should follow New York’s lead and invest in improvements *before* there is need to spend money on reconstruction. As Joe Nimmich, associate administrator for response and recovery at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) points out, “[p]reparedness today can make a big difference down the line, so update your family emergency plan and make sure your emergency kit is stocked. Learn more about how you can prepare for hurricane season at [www.ready.gov/hurricanes](http://www.ready.gov/hurricanes).”

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Jessica has worked in the energy industry since 2008. She has a bachelor's degree in English from the State University of New York at Geneseo, and a master's degree in Physical Geography & Environmental Systems from SUNY at Buffalo. She writes on environmental issues, smart grid developments, clean energy, demand response, and climate change. Jessica is on [Twitter](#), [Google+](#) and [See complete profile](#)

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