Communications Workers of America Reaches Favorable Settlement in Verizon Copper Network Case before Pennsylvania PUC

Friday, June 2, 2017

In a big victory for Pennsylvania consumers, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) has reached a settlement with Verizon that will require the company to repair and replace bad cable, defective equipment, faulty back-up batteries, and to take down 15,000 double telephone poles.

The settlement is the result of a CWA complaint before the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission (PUC) against Verizon for failure to maintain its copper infrastructure in violation of its statutory obligation to provide safe and adequate service to customers.

CWA filed the complaint with the Pennsylvania PUC in October 2015, providing substantial documentation of Verizon’s failure to maintain its copper network. In April 2016, the PUC opened a proceeding to investigate CWA’s complaint. CWA submitted exhaustive testimony documenting Verizon’s inadequate maintenance of copper facilities and service problems that also endangered public and worker safety.

“For nearly two years, CWA documented Verizon’s failure to repair the copper network and equipment, in areas where Verizon has chosen not to build out its FiOS fiber network,” said CWA District 2-13 Vice President Ed Mooney. “We submitted those findings, along with substantial and expert testimony about the issue, spotlighting the threat to service quality and public safety. This settlement is a big victory for Pennsylvania consumers, who pay for and expect their telephone service to work.”

"Today's settlement shows that Verizon cannot neglect its copper
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infrastructure and provide unsafe, inadequate service to its customers in order to maximize profits,” Jim Gardler, CWA Local 13000 President, said. “CWA's testimony and evidence of Verizon's neglect spoke volumes. This settlement will help improve service quality and safety for Pennsylvanians. CWA will continue to monitor the issue and regularly meet with Verizon to review progress."

Here is what Verizon agrees to:

1. Cable Replacements: There is a list of cable replacement requests made in 2015 and 2016 that identified faulty cable in communities across the state - urban, suburban, and rural. Verizon will conduct an engineering review of these requests, determine which should be completed based on objective criteria, share this information with CWA, and complete all cable replacement projects within 18 months.

2. Remediation of copper plant in 30 communities served by wire centers (e.g. central offices) with the worst record of service performance and customer trouble reports (e.g. out-of-service or noise on the line). These are primarily in rural areas of the state. Verizon will allocate additional resources to maintenance or rehabilitation of the infrastructure in these areas. The first 15 areas will be completed within 18 months, the next 15 areas within 36 months.

3. Telephone poles. There are more than 15,000 "double poles" across Pennsylvania. This occurs when Verizon has failed to move its equipment from an old pole that was replaced with a new one by another utility (e.g. the electric company). In many cases, these are dangerous conditions - poles are falling, leaning, rotting, partially cut off, etc. Verizon will remediate 15,000 double poles over the next 36 months at a rate of 5,000 per year.

4. Remote terminal batteries. Verizon has neglected routine testing and replacement of batteries in remote terminals. During a power outage, when a battery in a remote terminal in a neighborhood goes out, telephone service fails. Verizon will inspect and replace, as necessary, batteries in Remote Terminals, with priority to those serving 911 and police departments.

CWA will be provided information about the locations of cable replacement, copper plant remediation, and remote terminal battery replacements, with quarterly progress reports on the cable replacement and copper plant remediation. In addition, CWA will meet
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The goal of CWA Strong is to create a shared understanding of the forces that seek to derail the gains we've made. We'll use the smarts we've acquired in decades of organizing, bargaining and...

The Agreement is enforceable by the Pennsylvania PUC.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

August 3, 2017 – August 6, 2017

CWA NATIONAL MINORITY CAUCUS CONFERENCE

August 5, 2017

CWA RETIRED MEMBERS' COUNCIL