

# Inside Hydro's ice storm 'war room'

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**  
Staff Writer

It is Boxing Day— day six after the ice storm first hit— and the Halton Hills Hydro office is filled with staff.

President and CEO Art Skidmore, who rushed home Sunday from Penetanguishene where he had been on vacation with his son, is making calls trying to find hydro crews and tree trimming contractors around the province to come help as well as finding supplies for their depleted stores.

"I had reached out to my colleagues to look for extra help on Sunday afternoon. And every day we have been getting more and more resources to where we are today with 30 plus crews (a combination of power line companies or tree-trimming companies), scattered throughout Halton Hills for that great final push to get all of customers reconnected," said Skidmore. He is hoping that main restoration will be done by Friday midnight or early Saturday morning.

Just that day a convoy of five trucks and crews arrived from London.

"What an adrenaline rush that was," said Mayor Rick Bonnette as he sits in the "war room" at the Halton Hills Hydro with Skidmore talking about the events of the past week with *The Independent & Free Press* in the early afternoon.

Since Sunday, Mayor Rick Bonnette had been stationed at the Hydro building— powered in the aftermath by a huge generator— on Alice St. in Acton. Today he is on the phone in contact with senior management who are preparing an afternoon press release, greeting volunteers who have brought food for the Hydro workers and re-

sponding and updating residents through email or his Twitter feed with over a 1,000 followers. By Tuesday night, he had responded to close to 1,500 emails and tweets.

In the next room, Operations Manager Don Matthews is talking strategy with his Sub-foreman Mike Quantrell and tree cutting specialist Brian Lang of Horizon Contracts Management. Matthews is coordinating 30 crews— about 60 men out in the field— a geographic area of 280 sq kilometres with over 900 kilometres of lines. Over the course of the week, crews have come from as far away as Ottawa and Sarnia.

Down the hall, Natasha Newman, normally a senior engineering tech and Tracy Rehberg-Rawlingson, a regulatory affairs officer are organizing all calls received about lack of power and grouping them into sections and then giving them out to the crews while Matt Wright, a senior engineering tech sub-station electrician, is putting together work packages for all the additional crews brought into the community.

Junior accountant Raj Johal and Conservation officer Linda Boyer were out delivering meals to the line crews spread across Halton Hills.

Standing in the cold, directing traffic around hydro crews working on Five Sideroad, a Quality Tree Service worker is asked how many days he had been working. "Too many to count," he wearily replies.

In the "communication centre" in the basement— working from their desks, six women: Diane Bailey, Customer Care rep; Janice Tennant, Executive Assistant; Fiona Paaren, Customer Care rep; Car Jarv, Business Analyst; Leslie Froude, AMI Co-ordinator

and Sandie Pitre, Customer Care rep are manning the phone lines. It's only early afternoon and already close to 550 calls have been fielded. Other employees of the 51 Halton Hills Hydro complement are working from home updating the website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, keeping residents informed hourly of the progress. Controllor Ravi Baichan is serving as "the escalation person" for those people who really want to vent.

"We've had a few of those," said the mayor, with a wry smile.

"This has truly been an organizational effort. We have had 100 per cent of line staff in since this happened," said Skidmore, adding one even returned from vacation in Sudbury. "It's unprecedented to see that type of commitment to the organization."

"It's been all hands on deck," added Bonnette, explaining many Town and Hydro employees are working on their vacation days— not to mention Christmas and Boxing Day.

"Morale has been up and down," Skidmore said. "When we saw the devastation in the community, I think our morale was pretty low because we had a ton of work to do. But as progress happened, their spirits picked as we got more help in."

"Everyone is concerned over the length of this, but it's such a vast devastation— 900 kilometres of distribution lines. Just look at the devastation everywhere. ... I don't know how many broken poles and transformers that had to be replaced."

**For full story visit:**  
[www.theifp.ca/news/it-was-an-extra-extraordinary-event-hydro-ceo/](http://www.theifp.ca/news/it-was-an-extra-extraordinary-event-hydro-ceo/)



Matt Wright, a senior engineering tech sub-station electrician, puts together work packages for all the additional crews brought into the community.  
Photo by Cynthia Gamble

## Storm cleanup will take time

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urban and rural streets and sidewalks as snow is predicted for New Year's Day and later in the week.

"Thanks to this absolutely fabulous community that we live in it appears that everyone that can help clean up is doing so, including helping their neighbors. All that we need is patience and understanding and we will prevail," said Spear.

"This has been a traumatic event for our community, but I am pleased by the way we have responded as a community and Town. Our community is a special place and we saw many examples of kindness and generosity over the past week," said Bonnette.

Residents are asked to place debris from private trees out for Regional collection on their identified days— more information is available at [www.halton.ca/](http://www.halton.ca/)

Trees on private property are the responsibility of the property owner. For larger trees and debris, it is recommended that a professional private tree contractor be called in for cleanup.

The Town is committed to clearing all debris and removing any trees on public property. The Town will share more cleanup details

over the next few days, as it needs to ensure resources are also available to undertake needed winter control measures.

The full hydro system was restored by 11 p.m. Saturday.

Art Skidmore, President and CEO of Halton Hills Hydro, said Tuesday morning that 99.5 per cent of customers have power. The .5 per cent— approximately 100 people— without hydro have damage to their systems or in the case of some rural customers, have long laneways with broken poles or trees on their lines they need to repair. When the repair is complete they should contact Halton Hills Hydro.

Crews will reconnect those customers as soon as possible. If a homeowner's service stack has not been repaired, those homes cannot be reconnected until repairs are completed by an Electrical Safety Authority (ESA)-licenced electrician.

Customers are asked to call Halton Hills Hydro at 519-853-3701 or check the following websites: [www.haltonhillshydro.com](http://www.haltonhillshydro.com) or [www.esa-safe.com](http://www.esa-safe.com).

Trees are still being trimmed and the Hydro's call centre was open New Year's Eve to take customer calls.

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