



**By 2030 eThekweni will be Africa's
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Covid-19 Responses/Effects/Challenges for Electricity Service Delivery

Presentation to KZN-AMEU by

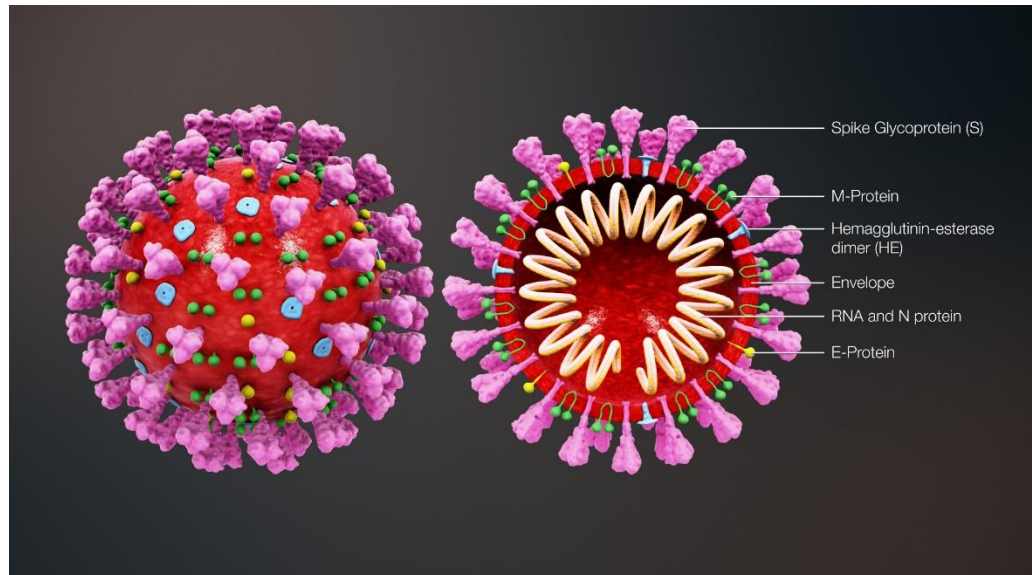
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Profile of eThekweni Electricity (EE)

- The main parameters which define EE, as at 30 June 2020, are:
 - Area of supply: 1 732 km²
 - Number of works depots: 6
 - Number of customers: 764 901
 - Number of employees: 2 699
 - Number of BSc Engineers: 67 (includes Managers)
 - Peak demand: 1 697 MW
 - Total sales: 9 727 GWh
 - Annual sales: R 13,5 billion
 - Asset replacement value: R 34,82 billion
 - Voltage levels: 275 kV, 132 kV, 33 kV, 11 kV
 - Year established: 1897
- Over the past 123 years, the organisation has never experienced a pandemic and of this scale. As it was new for all, some mistakes were made, but lessons have been learnt.

City's response to Covid-19

- City formed Multi-Disciplinary Task Team (MDTT) on 3 March 2020 to co-ordinate measures to address all lockdown levels of Covid-19.
- MDTT comprised of Covid-19 Unit champions, specialists, labour, human resources, occupational health, risk, compliance, communications, supply chain management officials, etc.
- City also formed the Covid-19 War Room on 9 March 2020 to deal with updates from the MDTT and provide direction.
- The Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Unit took the lead role at the MDTT meetings, where professional doctors provided the necessary guidelines on how to handle close contacts, how to quarantine, how to disinfect work spaces, requirements for return-to-work, how to manage vulnerable staff with comorbidities, completion of point-of-entry questionnaire, screening and testing protocols, procedure for employee to follow who has tested positive, etc.

City's response to Covid-19 (concl.)

- Employees who were not essential or critical were given paid special leave for an extended period.
- Addressed demands from employees for a danger allowance as compensation for working during the lockdown. City Manager informed workers that municipality had taken reasonable measures to ensure the health and safety of those working.
- Units were required to complete and submit the Authority for After-Hours Use of municipal vehicle forms.
- Centralised procurement and fitment of Covid-19 screens for those employees engaging with large number of persons (staff and/or public).
- Recruitment and selection moratorium announced on 8 June 2020, due to dire impact on the municipality's financial situation.
- Leave encashment suspended, due to cash flow problems.

EE's response to Covid-19 – Initial

Memo sent to all staff before the level 5 lockdown covering:

- Management support: Managers and Division Heads had to be at work.
- Working from home: Rules on what is expected of employees provided.
- Paperwork and administration support: Addressed the completion and submission of the attendance registers, time-sheets, overtime forms.
- Conditions for the use of municipal vehicles: Artisans given authority to fetch and drop-off their Assistants, when responding to call-outs.
- Sanitising: Staff reminded to frequently sanitise hands.
- Additional measures to reduce risk of transmission of virus provided:
 - Cancellation of meetings and gatherings which exceed 10.
 - Postponement of interviews.
 - Postponement of face-to-face training programmes, workshops, etc.



Note: Measures included emergency procurement of Covid PPE/materials and making these available to staff and at entry points, boardrooms, etc.

EE's response to Covid-19 – Additional

- Affixing of Covid-19 posters at entrance points and lifts: These were affixed at entrance points, boardrooms, lifts, public queueing areas, etc.
- Activities when social distancing is impractical to attain: Staff instructed to use FFP2 masks when working in a cable joint bay, maintaining circuit breakers, travelling in vehicles, etc.
- Rotation of staff or staggered shifts: Managers given flexibility to apply these to their staff, to achieve social distancing or other health and safety protocols. Included, field staff reporting to work sites straight from home, where practical.
- Covid-19 compliance inspections: These were undertaken by EE's Safety Officers to ensure workplace readiness and continuous compliance with directions, directives and regulations.
- Legal appointments: The Compliance Officer (Senior Manager: SHERQ and Training) and Assistant Compliance Officers (Managers) for each work area were appointed.

Effects of Covid-19 on EE's operations – Negative

- Network impacts: Reduced planned/tactical maintenance, due to fewer maintenance teams available. The field teams who were available focused primarily on network faults.
- Financial impacts: Cash flows, cash collections, capital and operating expenditures were negatively affected. When budget cuts were applied, some projects stalled. The level 5 period (April) saw a 22 % drop in purchases or a nett loss of R 120 million. The level 4 period saw a drop of 16% or a nett loss of R 90 million.
- Inter-Unit support: Poor service received from most support Units, such as Supply Chain Management Unit (no contract secured for deep cleaning of contaminated workspaces), Finance Unit (delays in processing of invoices for payment, worsened by first Covid-19 fatality).
- Psycho-social impacts: The news covered on mainstream media and the presence of fake news on social media, spread fear amongst staff, especially those with comorbidities. A toll-free wellness helpline was available to employees.

Effects of Covid-19 on EE's operations – Positive

- Theft of electrical infrastructure: During level 5 of the lockdown, theft reduced significantly due to increased presence of the military and due to the restrictions in the movement of citizens.
- Third party damage to cable circuits: There were fewer incidents during level 5, 4 and 3 due to reduced construction activities.
- General acceptance of electronic forms and platforms: Electronic processing of forms, use of electronic meeting platforms (such as Teams and Zoom) have become embedded in business operations.

Challenges during Covid-19 lockdowns

- Information overload: Created by frequent changes to directions, directives and regulations issued by National Government and the plethora of circulars, guidelines (146 pages), annexures and forms issues by the City.
- Health Risk Assessments (HRAs): Detailed occupational HRAs for workplaces had to be undertaken across the entire electricity business, which covered: entrances to buildings, security guard activities, reception desks and waiting areas, office activities, field tasks, use of common areas, cleaning of workplaces and vehicles, use of machinery and tools, control room operations, entry into electrical substations, contact centre operations, training, storeroom activities, transport to work sites, visits and meetings, etc.
- Disinfecting of vehicles: The City issued a circular but was not ready in terms of availability of PPE, such as spray bottles, PVC gloves, and cleaning cloth.

Challenges during Covid-19 lockdowns (cont.)

- Training of cleaners: Engagements with contract cleaners and their staff for training proved difficult, as these were cooperatives whose contracts were managed by another Unit in the City. The cooperatives initially did not want to cooperate, as a new cleaning contract was in the process of being awarded.
- Training of security guards: This training was undertaken in-house by Safety Officers from EE's Safety Division. Once again, it was difficult to arrange for the training of the security guards posted at EE's buildings, as the contracts were managed by another Unit in the City.
- Ventilation of buildings: Failure of HVAC systems and staff switching off air-conditioners during cold winter months resulted in insufficient air exchange within offices. The failure of the HVAC system at the Control Centre building, was a serious concern.
- Moratorium on filling of vacancies: Senior management had to jump through additional hoops to obtain authority to fill critical vacancies, after City declared the moratorium.

Challenges during Covid-19 lockdowns (cont.)

- Delays in procurement processes: Bid closing dates cancelled and extended. BSC, BEC and BAC meetings initially suspended.
- Logistics to re-issuing of permits: Each level of lockdown had a new permit, requiring printing, signing, stamping and re-issuing.
- Cessation of flash reports: City's Legal Unit advised EE to not publish useful flash reports, even though employee's name was excluded but branch name shown.
- Disinfecting of substations: No contract was secured to disinfect substations, visited by an employee who tested positive. Own staff deployed to undertake task, wearing necessary PPE.
- Quality of fabric face masks: City's SCM procured masks from different suppliers but could not provide evidence these met the recommended guidelines (clause 4.1.4) issued by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, namely: "provide a 5 micron particle barrier efficiency of at least 75%" and "should be resistant to at least 100 wash cycles".

Challenges during Covid-19 lockdowns (concl.)

- Demands for temperature screening: Some employees and shop stewards placed demands for temperature scanners, despite the City's MDDT not supporting its use (not measuring core temperature, calibration and inaccuracies) and it not being a legislated requirement.
- Cessation of training: With no face-to-face refresher training, such as mobile cranes, meant that some training certificates, having an expiry date, became invalid. In addition, internal training programmes for Apprentices, Candidate Technicians and Candidate Engineers were temporarily suspended.
- Non-availability of materials/equipment: Some manufacturers were affected by Covid-19 incidents at their factories, which resulted in no materials/equipment being supplied.
- Reluctance by some staff to return to work: Some staff who have their own offices and hence can easily maintain 1,5 m social distancing were reluctant to return to work and argued to work remotely.

Specific measures for specific branches

HV Control Room and MV Control Rooms: Each separated into different sites to restrict interaction between teams and support business continuity. Switching Officers reported to site from home. (Resulted in the digitisation of the historical wall boards.)

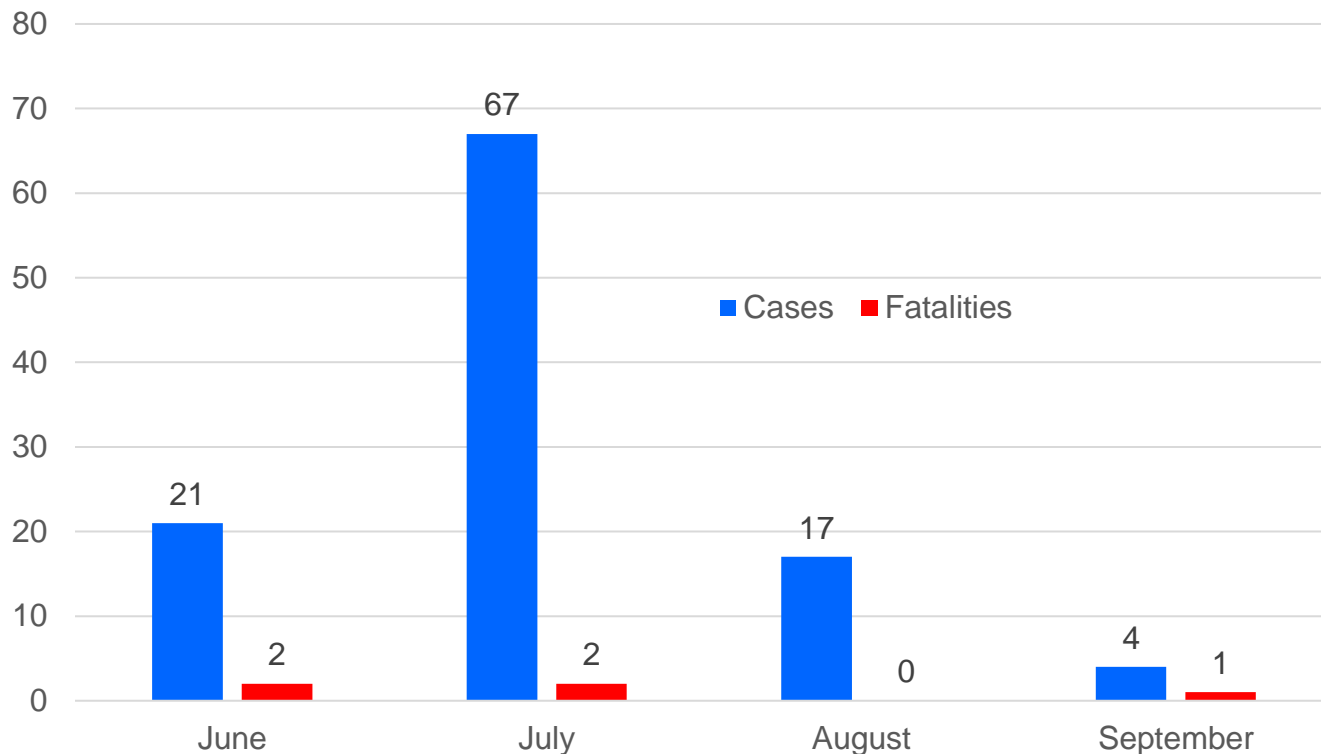
Contact Centre: Also operated from two sites. Staff worked on shift with one hour break between shifts for cleaning of workstations. WhatsApp and E-mail introduced as alternative reporting channels.

Customer Services: All customers filled in screening forms in all Walk-in Centres. Wearing of masks, sanitisation and social distancing was adhered to by all walk-in customers.

Information Technology: EE was fortunate to have its own ICT Branch which provided the required support to all internal branches insofar as to ensure remote access to the systems, provisioning of spare laptops, securing of 3G cards, increasing data allowances where necessary, etc.

Employee statistics on Covid-19

- First fatality on 11 June in the Internal Control and Business Systems Department, which is a support function outside of EE.
- Second fatality on 18 June in EE's LV Network Control Branch.
- Third fatality on 16 July in EE's North Western Construction Branch.
- Forth fatality on 24 July in EE's Network Drawing Office Branch.
- Fifth fatality on 25 September in EE's Central Construction Branch.



Conclusions

- The impacts and challenges created by Covid-19 in a municipal environment are immense and will take many years to address.
- The ageing electrical networks require more maintenance and there is a huge backlog to overcome.
- The use of technologies to ensure business efficiencies, business continuity and paperless processes must be pursued.
- The number of illegal connections and theft incidents can be expected to increase due to job losses arising out of the negative economic impact of Covid-19.

--- Thank You ---