

## TITLE 16 - CONSERVATION

### CHAPTER 12 - FEDERAL REGULATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF POWER

#### SUBCHAPTER II - REGULATION OF ELECTRIC UTILITY COMPANIES ENGAGED IN INTERSTATE COMMERCE

#### § 824o. Electric reliability

##### (a) Definitions

For purposes of this section:

(1) The term “bulk-power system” means—

(A) facilities and control systems necessary for operating an interconnected electric energy transmission network (or any portion thereof); and

(B) electric energy from generation facilities needed to maintain transmission system reliability.

The term does not include facilities used in the local distribution of electric energy.

(2) The terms “Electric Reliability Organization” and “ERO” mean the organization certified by the Commission under subsection (c) of this section the purpose of which is to establish and enforce reliability standards for the bulk-power system, subject to Commission review.

(3) The term “reliability standard” means a requirement, approved by the Commission under this section, to provide for reliable operation of the bulk-power system. The term includes requirements for the operation of existing bulk-power system facilities, including cybersecurity protection, and the design of planned additions or modifications to such facilities to the extent necessary to provide for reliable operation of the bulk-power system, but the term does not include any requirement to enlarge such facilities or to construct new transmission capacity or generation capacity.

(4) The term “reliable operation” means operating the elements of the bulk-power system within equipment and electric system thermal, voltage, and stability limits so that instability, uncontrolled separation, or cascading failures of such system will not occur as a result of a sudden disturbance, including a cybersecurity incident, or unanticipated failure of system elements.

(5) The term “Interconnection” means a geographic area in which the operation of bulk-power system components is synchronized such that the failure of one or more of such components may adversely affect the ability of the operators of other components within the system to maintain reliable operation of the facilities within their control.

(6) The term “transmission organization” means a Regional Transmission Organization, Independent System Operator, independent transmission provider, or other transmission organization finally approved by the Commission for the operation of transmission facilities.

(7) The term “regional entity” means an entity having enforcement authority pursuant to subsection (e)(4) of this section.

(8) The term “cybersecurity incident” means a malicious act or suspicious event that disrupts, or was an attempt to disrupt, the operation of those programmable electronic devices and communication networks including hardware, software and data that are essential to the reliable operation of the bulk power system.

##### (b) Jurisdiction and applicability

(1) The Commission shall have jurisdiction, within the United States, over the ERO certified by the Commission under subsection (c) of this section, any regional entities, and all users, owners and operators of the bulk-power system, including but not limited to the entities described in section 824 (f) of this title, for purposes of approving reliability standards established under this section and enforcing compliance with this section. All users, owners and operators of the bulk-power system shall comply with reliability standards that take effect under this section.

- (2) The Commission shall issue a final rule to implement the requirements of this section not later than 180 days after August 8, 2005.

**(c) Certification**

Following the issuance of a Commission rule under subsection (b)(2) of this section, any person may submit an application to the Commission for certification as the Electric Reliability Organization. The Commission may certify one such ERO if the Commission determines that such ERO—

- (1) has the ability to develop and enforce, subject to subsection (e)(2) of this section, reliability standards that provide for an adequate level of reliability of the bulk-power system; and
- (2) has established rules that—
  - (A) assure its independence of the users and owners and operators of the bulk-power system, while assuring fair stakeholder representation in the selection of its directors and balanced decisionmaking in any ERO committee or subordinate organizational structure;
  - (B) allocate equitably reasonable dues, fees, and other charges among end users for all activities under this section;
  - (C) provide fair and impartial procedures for enforcement of reliability standards through the imposition of penalties in accordance with subsection (e) of this section (including limitations on activities, functions, or operations, or other appropriate sanctions);
  - (D) provide for reasonable notice and opportunity for public comment, due process, openness, and balance of interests in developing reliability standards and otherwise exercising its duties; and
  - (E) provide for taking, after certification, appropriate steps to gain recognition in Canada and Mexico.

**(d) Reliability standards**

- (1) The Electric Reliability Organization shall file each reliability standard or modification to a reliability standard that it proposes to be made effective under this section with the Commission.
- (2) The Commission may approve, by rule or order, a proposed reliability standard or modification to a reliability standard if it determines that the standard is just, reasonable, not unduly discriminatory or preferential, and in the public interest. The Commission shall give due weight to the technical expertise of the Electric Reliability Organization with respect to the content of a proposed standard or modification to a reliability standard and to the technical expertise of a regional entity organized on an Interconnection-wide basis with respect to a reliability standard to be applicable within that Interconnection, but shall not defer with respect to the effect of a standard on competition. A proposed standard or modification shall take effect upon approval by the Commission.
- (3) The Electric Reliability Organization shall rebuttably presume that a proposal from a regional entity organized on an Interconnection-wide basis for a reliability standard or modification to a reliability standard to be applicable on an Interconnection-wide basis is just, reasonable, and not unduly discriminatory or preferential, and in the public interest.
- (4) The Commission shall remand to the Electric Reliability Organization for further consideration a proposed reliability standard or a modification to a reliability standard that the Commission disapproves in whole or in part.
- (5) The Commission, upon its own motion or upon complaint, may order the Electric Reliability Organization to submit to the Commission a proposed reliability standard or a modification to a reliability standard that addresses a specific matter if the Commission considers such a new or modified reliability standard appropriate to carry out this section.
- (6) The final rule adopted under subsection (b)(2) of this section shall include fair processes for the identification and timely resolution of any conflict between a reliability standard and any function, rule, order, tariff, rate schedule, or agreement accepted, approved, or ordered by the Commission applicable to a transmission organization. Such transmission organization shall continue to comply

with such function, rule, order, tariff, rate schedule or agreement accepted, approved, or ordered by the Commission until—

- (A) the Commission finds a conflict exists between a reliability standard and any such provision;
- (B) the Commission orders a change to such provision pursuant to section 824e of this title; and
- (C) the ordered change becomes effective under this subchapter.

If the Commission determines that a reliability standard needs to be changed as a result of such a conflict, it shall order the ERO to develop and file with the Commission a modified reliability standard under paragraph (4) or (5) of this subsection.

**(e) Enforcement**

(1) The ERO may impose, subject to paragraph (2), a penalty on a user or owner or operator of the bulk-power system for a violation of a reliability standard approved by the Commission under subsection (d) of this section if the ERO, after notice and an opportunity for a hearing—

- (A) finds that the user or owner or operator has violated a reliability standard approved by the Commission under subsection (d) of this section; and
- (B) files notice and the record of the proceeding with the Commission.

(2) A penalty imposed under paragraph (1) may take effect not earlier than the 31st day after the ERO files with the Commission notice of the penalty and the record of proceedings. Such penalty shall be subject to review by the Commission, on its own motion or upon application by the user, owner or operator that is the subject of the penalty filed within 30 days after the date such notice is filed with the Commission. Application to the Commission for review, or the initiation of review by the Commission on its own motion, shall not operate as a stay of such penalty unless the Commission otherwise orders upon its own motion or upon application by the user, owner or operator that is the subject of such penalty. In any proceeding to review a penalty imposed under paragraph (1), the Commission, after notice and opportunity for hearing (which hearing may consist solely of the record before the ERO and opportunity for the presentation of supporting reasons to affirm, modify, or set aside the penalty), shall by order affirm, set aside, reinstate, or modify the penalty, and, if appropriate, remand to the ERO for further proceedings. The Commission shall implement expedited procedures for such hearings.

(3) On its own motion or upon complaint, the Commission may order compliance with a reliability standard and may impose a penalty against a user or owner or operator of the bulk-power system if the Commission finds, after notice and opportunity for a hearing, that the user or owner or operator of the bulk-power system has engaged or is about to engage in any acts or practices that constitute or will constitute a violation of a reliability standard.

(4) The Commission shall issue regulations authorizing the ERO to enter into an agreement to delegate authority to a regional entity for the purpose of proposing reliability standards to the ERO and enforcing reliability standards under paragraph (1) if—

- (A) the regional entity is governed by—
  - (i) an independent board;
  - (ii) a balanced stakeholder board; or
  - (iii) a combination independent and balanced stakeholder board.
- (B) the regional entity otherwise satisfies the provisions of subsection (c)(1) and (2) of this section; and
- (C) the agreement promotes effective and efficient administration of bulk-power system reliability.

The Commission may modify such delegation. The ERO and the Commission shall rebuttably presume that a proposal for delegation to a regional entity organized on an Interconnection-wide basis promotes effective and efficient administration of bulk-power system reliability and should

be approved. Such regulation may provide that the Commission may assign the ERO's authority to enforce reliability standards under paragraph (1) directly to a regional entity consistent with the requirements of this paragraph.

(5) The Commission may take such action as is necessary or appropriate against the ERO or a regional entity to ensure compliance with a reliability standard or any Commission order affecting the ERO or a regional entity.

(6) Any penalty imposed under this section shall bear a reasonable relation to the seriousness of the violation and shall take into consideration the efforts of such user, owner, or operator to remedy the violation in a timely manner.

**(f) Changes in Electric Reliability Organization rules**

The Electric Reliability Organization shall file with the Commission for approval any proposed rule or proposed rule change, accompanied by an explanation of its basis and purpose. The Commission, upon its own motion or complaint, may propose a change to the rules of the ERO. A proposed rule or proposed rule change shall take effect upon a finding by the Commission, after notice and opportunity for comment, that the change is just, reasonable, not unduly discriminatory or preferential, is in the public interest, and satisfies the requirements of subsection (c) of this section.

**(g) Reliability reports**

The ERO shall conduct periodic assessments of the reliability and adequacy of the bulk-power system in North America.

**(h) Coordination with Canada and Mexico**

The President is urged to negotiate international agreements with the governments of Canada and Mexico to provide for effective compliance with reliability standards and the effectiveness of the ERO in the United States and Canada or Mexico.

**(i) Savings provisions**

(1) The ERO shall have authority to develop and enforce compliance with reliability standards for only the bulk-power system.

(2) This section does not authorize the ERO or the Commission to order the construction of additional generation or transmission capacity or to set and enforce compliance with standards for adequacy or safety of electric facilities or services.

(3) Nothing in this section shall be construed to preempt any authority of any State to take action to ensure the safety, adequacy, and reliability of electric service within that State, as long as such action is not inconsistent with any reliability standard, except that the State of New York may establish rules that result in greater reliability within that State, as long as such action does not result in lesser reliability outside the State than that provided by the reliability standards.

(4) Within 90 days of the application of the Electric Reliability Organization or other affected party, and after notice and opportunity for comment, the Commission shall issue a final order determining whether a State action is inconsistent with a reliability standard, taking into consideration any recommendation of the ERO.

(5) The Commission, after consultation with the ERO and the State taking action, may stay the effectiveness of any State action, pending the Commission's issuance of a final order.

**(j) Regional advisory bodies**

The Commission shall establish a regional advisory body on the petition of at least two-thirds of the States within a region that have more than one-half of their electric load served within the region. A regional advisory body shall be composed of one member from each participating State in the region, appointed by the Governor of each State, and may include representatives of agencies, States, and provinces outside the United States. A regional advisory body may provide advice to the Electric Reliability Organization, a regional entity, or the Commission regarding the governance of an existing or proposed regional entity within the same region, whether a standard proposed to apply within

*NB: This unofficial compilation of the U.S. Code is current as of Jan. 4, 2012 (see <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/uscpint.html>).*

the region is just, reasonable, not unduly discriminatory or preferential, and in the public interest, whether fees proposed to be assessed within the region are just, reasonable, not unduly discriminatory or preferential, and in the public interest and any other responsibilities requested by the Commission. The Commission may give deference to the advice of any such regional advisory body if that body is organized on an Interconnection-wide basis.

**(k) Alaska and Hawaii**

The provisions of this section do not apply to Alaska or Hawaii.

(June 10, 1920, ch. 285, pt. II, § 215, as added Pub. L. 109–58, title XII, § 1211(a), Aug. 8, 2005, 119 Stat. 941.)

**Status of ERO**

Pub. L. 109–58, title XII, § 1211(b), Aug. 8, 2005, 119 Stat. 946, provided that: “The Electric Reliability Organization certified by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission under section 215(c) of the Federal Power Act [16 U.S.C. 824o (c)] and any regional entity delegated enforcement authority pursuant to section 215(e)(4) of that Act [16 U.S.C. 824o (e)(4)] are not departments, agencies, or instrumentalities of the United States Government.”

**Access Approvals by Federal Agencies**

Pub. L. 109–58, title XII, § 1211(c), Aug. 8, 2005, 119 Stat. 946, provided that: “Federal agencies responsible for approving access to electric transmission or distribution facilities located on lands within the United States shall, in accordance with applicable law, expedite any Federal agency approvals that are necessary to allow the owners or operators of such facilities to comply with any reliability standard, approved by the [Federal Energy Regulatory] Commission under section 215 of the Federal Power Act [16 U.S.C. 824o], that pertains to vegetation management, electric service restoration, or resolution of situations that imminently endanger the reliability or safety of the facilities.”