



Elia launches five-part docuseries on July's storm in Mechelen, providing unique insight into its crisis management strategy

MECHELEN | Given the exceptionally severe damage inflicted by July's storm on the electricity grid and areas surrounding it in Mechelen, Elia filmed its management of the crisis. Viewers of its ensuing docuseries are placed in the front seat, allowing them to closely follow Elia's teams as they assess the damage, evacuate local residents, carry out delicate clean-up operations and install emergency backup pylons. The five-part docuseries will be launched on social media from tomorrow onwards and will also be available on RTV, the local TV network for the Mechelen and Antwerp Kempen regions, from 26 December. The series features different stakeholders who reflect on last summer's eventful weeks. In addition to testimonies from Mayor Bart Somers, weather presenter David Dehenauw, and a resident affected by the storm, Elia's crisis team also feature in the series.

Storm was most severe incident to have hit the Belgian high-voltage grid in years

Due to the extreme storm weather on 9 July in Mechelen, nine high-voltage pylons were toppled over. High-voltage lines (conductors) located across a distance of 4 km also collapsed, landing primarily in fields but also on about 15 houses. Fortunately, no one was injured, but the material damage caused by the storm and its impact on local residents were significant.

Within the space of a month, the area was cleared and an emergency backup line was built. The latter was necessary to strengthen the high-voltage network around Mechelen. The local electricity grid was left vulnerable after the loss of the 150 kV high-voltage line. An additional incident could have jeopardised Mechelen's security of supply.

Each episode focuses on a specific topic

The docuseries begins with several poignant testimonies and video clips that illustrate the power of the storm. In the **first episode**, Elia employees share how they immediately assessed the extent of the disaster after the storm and provided support to the affected residents who were later evacuated from their homes. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, they focused primarily on addressing the electrical emergency, including ensuring that the power supply was stable and grounding the fallen power lines (to eliminate any possible risks in case any lightning strikes had occurred).

In the **second episode**, weather presenter David Dehenauw explains what a 'downburst' is, and how it is linked to why there was so much damage in Mechelen. Using animations, an Elia expert illustrates why there was a cascade of falling pylons and how Elia is adapting its electricity network so that it can withstand more extreme weather conditions that are linked to climate change.

Episode 3 covers the activities of Elia's task force and their preparatory work for the complex clean-up operation. The episode clearly explains that power in the fallen lines could not simply be cut off due to their significant voltage levels, since this could have caused additional damage to the surrounding area.

Episode 4 explains how Mechelen's residents were asked to reduce their electricity consumption on Saturday 13 July. Following an additional safety analysis, Elia decided to proactively cut off power to one of the two 70 kV high-voltage lines that was supplying Mechelen with power. This 70 kV line crossed the 150 kV high-voltage line that was destroyed by the storm.

If a cable had snapped during this operation, the 70 kV line could have been affected. This could have caused a so-called arc flash, posing a risk of electrocution. Elia's call for residents to reduce their consumption levels was a great success and the clean-up operations were completed a day earlier than planned. The affected residents were pleased as they could return to their homes earlier than expected.

The **final episode** shows how the emergency line was constructed and integrated into the existing high-voltage network. The necessary preparations for this were undertaken immediately after the storm. Elia has specialised teams who are trained to quickly build such emergency lines. Its construction began on 24 July. By the end of July, the 5 emergency pylons (each 45 metres tall) had been built. After that, the electricity lines (conductors) were pulled. Following some testing, the 150 kV emergency line was brought into operation on 9 August, exactly one month after the storm hit the area.

The docuseries is entitled "Guardians of the Grid". This term is used within Elia and refers to the passion and dedication of its many employees who keep the lights on 24/7. The series is a tribute to those who are ready at any time of day, come rain or shine, to ensure that Belgium's high-voltage network operates in an optimal manner.

You can watch the entire series by following this link: <https://www.eliagroup.eu/en/stories>

About Elia Group

One of Europe's top five TSOs

Elia Group is a key player in electricity transmission. We ensure that production and consumption are balanced around the clock, supplying 30 million end users with electricity. Through our subsidiaries in Belgium (Elia) and the north and east of Germany (50Hertz), we operate 19,460.5 km of high-voltage connections, meaning that we are one of Europe's top 5 transmission system operators. With a reliability level of 99.99%, we provide society with a robust power grid, which is important for socioeconomic prosperity. We also aspire to be a catalyst for a successful energy transition, helping to establish a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy system.

We are making the energy transition happen

By expanding international high-voltage connections and incorporating ever-increasing amounts of renewable energy into our grid, we are promoting both the integration of the European energy market and the decarbonisation of society. We also continuously optimise our operational systems and develop new market products so that new technologies and market parties can access our grid, thus further facilitating the energy transition.

In the interest of society

As a key player in the energy system, Elia Group is committed to working in the interest of society. We are responding to the rapid increase in renewable energy by constantly adapting our transmission grid. We also ensure that investments are made on time and within budget, with a maximum focus on safety. In carrying out our projects, we manage stakeholders proactively by establishing two-way communication channels between all relevant parties very early on in the development process. We also offer our expertise to different players across the sector in order to build the energy system of the future.

International focus

In addition to its activities as a transmission system operator, Elia Group provides consulting services to international customers through its subsidiary Elia Grid International. In recent years, the Group has launched new non-regulated activities such as re.alto - the first European marketplace for the exchange of energy data via standardised energy APIs - and WindGrid, a subsidiary which will continue to expand the Group's overseas activities, contributing to the development of offshore electricity grids in Europe and beyond.

The legal entity Elia Group is a listed company whose core shareholder is the municipal holding company Publi-T.

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