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Utilities Helped Puerto Rico Fix Its Power Grid. Now They Face Hefty Tax Bills.

When nearly the entire power grid of Puerto Rico was knocked out by a pair of ferocious hurricanes last year, utility companies from across the United States sent crews and equipment to help.

It was a power emergency on a scale rarely seen before, and companies spent tens of millions of dollars to mobilize. The utility in Sacramento, Calif., sent 30 workers and a dozen trucks. Ameren, which serves over two million customers in Missouri and Illinois, sent 225 workers. New York dispatched workers on at least five deployments to repair power lines and assess damaged substations. Florida Power & Light sent more than 100 trucks, several tons of equipment and 800 employees, many of whom spent Thanksgiving and the winter holidays working 16-hour days.

Though their costs are expected to be reimbursed by the federal government, the companies were not earning a profit. So it was with astonishment that, over the summer, some of the utility companies that had sent aid crews opened letters from the towns where they had worked in Puerto Rico: bills demanding millions of dollars in license and construction taxes.

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By James Glanz and Alejandra Rosa

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