

Major power outage shuts down public buildings in Detroit

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A large section of Detroit's public electricity grid lost power Wednesday and Thursday, forcing the closure of government buildings and Wayne State University.

The outage affected the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice, Detroit City Hall, the McNamara Federal Building, the Detroit Public Library main branch, and the city's People Mover monorail, all of which had to be evacuated. Traffic lights failed throughout the downtown and midtown area, and about 1,400 sites throughout the city were without power.

The outage took place on the Detroit Public Lighting Department (DPLD) grid, which has been systematically underfunded, and is slated to be sold off to Electricity giant DTE by the city's emergency manager, Kevyn Orr.

City officials said the outage was a necessary response to an unexpected heat wave, with temperatures hitting the 90s, coupled with a cable failure and routine maintenance, the combination of which threatened to overload the grid.

Bill Nowling of Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr's office, said that the outages were an intentional precaution. "The outages are precautionary measure [*sic*] while DTE and city crews work to fix two main lines in the grid that went down earlier today," he told Fox 2 News.

Nowling said "that city grid customers were asked to reduce power, but failed to, so we had to move intentional outages to protect crucial service."

Building officials say they were not warned about the outages, which left people trapped in elevators and forced to evacuate darkened buildings.

Judge Craig Strong, who works at the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice told Fox 2 news the outage caused a panicked response. "We're in a building that's already on high alert ... we don't need any more mistakes. If

they we're [*sic*] going to do this they should have given us notice so we could plan around it."

Wayne State University students lost two days of classes. Some Wayne State students expressed skepticism at the power outage, saying the outage played into Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr's plans to privatize the public lighting system.

"I think there's something suspicious behind the power outages that occurred, not to mention they occurred without any notification or warning," said T-zar Simmons, an English student at Wayne State University.

A DTE Energy spokesperson commented that the outage was "not a DTE problem," but they sent out crews to assist the city.

The Detroit Public Lighting Department (DPLD), has been systematically defunded for decades, and Democratic Mayor Dave Bing proposed to fully privatize the lighting department in 2012.

In mid-August, Kevyn Orr fired DPLD director Richard Tenney as part of his plan to restructure the city government. Orr announced in June that the city would sell off the public lighting grid to DTE Energy, in line with Bing's proposal.

The drive to privatize the city's lighting department, far from benefiting the city's residents, would be only another means of extracting profit from the city. As the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party reported during citizens' inquiries into fires around Detroit, utility shutoffs by DTE energy have caused the deaths of dozens of people.

Storms regularly knock out large sections of DTE Energy's power grid throughout the metro Detroit area. 6,000 DTE Energy customers in the Detroit suburb of Ferndale lost power for two days in 2011 as a result of the company's systematic neglect of electrical

infrastructure.

Friday morning, 13,000 DTE customers were without power as a result of storms this week, including 1,200 in Washtenaw County.

The Michigan branch of the Sierra Club said in 2012 that DTE shut off power to nearly 200,000 customers in 2011. That year, DTE shut off power to and repossessed the street lights of an entire city: the enclave of Highland Park, for falling behind on its payments.



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