

Detroit Teenager in critical condition from shock from downed power line

Thomas Gaist, Lawrence Porter
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On Monday morning a 14-year-old Detroit middle school student was severely shocked by a downed power line on Detroit's west side. The power line came down the previous evening during storms that swept across the Midwest.

The rainstorm left 530,000 people without power in the state of Michigan, including 275,000 in the Metro Detroit area alone.

The teenager was first presumed dead, but was last reported to be in critical condition at a nearby hospital. He was with two other friends when he touched a power line that had fallen into a field next to his school. He and his friends, who attend Robert Burns Elementary-Middle School, were returning home after finding out the school was closed because there was no power.

"He grabbed it, and he started shaking and blood came out his nose and eye," Carlos Morgan, a 10-year-old who was there at the time, told the *Detroit News*.

He was then knocked away from the downed power line by his friend, 13-year-old Kenneth Gaylor, who had the presence of mind to use a piece of wood.

A Detroit police officer spoke to the *Detroit Free Press* about the manner in which the boy was shocked. "You know when you're walking through the woods and reach up to push a branch out of the way. He used one of those motions and the wire was actually live," Detroit Police Sgt. Michael Woody said.

Despite calls from the neighborhood about widespread power outages and sparking equipment from before midnight on Sunday, DTE personnel only arrived mid-morning on Monday, after a news team showed up to cover the incident.

Lakedia Fields, a 32-year old mother who lives down the street, spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* about DTE's failure to respond to calls from several

neighbors warning that the power lines were down and extremely dangerous.

"The line was on fire last night," Lakedia said. "You could see it sparking for about an hour. My aunt has a video of it. Nobody came even though my aunt called them last night. I saw her call and get a confirmation number."

"All of us saw it," added Henry Taylor, another neighbor. "It happened about 11:30 p.m. It was just sitting there sparking."

"DTE never came until after the boy got shocked," continued Lakedia. "Even Channel 4 News beat DTE here."

Lakedia gave expression to a widespread anger at DTE, which shuts off hundreds of thousands of households from utilities a year. It takes a long time to respond to fallen lines, she said, "but if you are late on your bill that company will cut your lights out for a dollar."

She added, "Just because we live in a poverty stricken neighborhood, it doesn't mean a child should have to die. Our lines are hanging down, and they do nothing to repair them. I asked one of their people [a DTE repairman] about it, and he said 'We're more focused on the incident with the boy because there are potential [law] suits involved.'"

Lakedia went on to describe the horrifying scene she had witnessed, and the severely delayed response of the authorities to the incident.

"The boy went flying 8 feet up in the air. There was a live wire in the middle of the field. If school was in, more kids would have gotten hurt. The principal tried to revive him using CPR for 25 minutes, and it took [the emergency medical services] more than 45 minutes to get here. Then DTE came after that."

Fields complained that power remains out on her

block, and connected the outages to the broader social crisis in Detroit.

“Our power is flickering, the TV keeps shutting off. Down the block they don't have any power at all.”

When she was asked what she thought about the bankruptcy of Detroit and the lack of services, Lakedia responded, “What I want to know is, where's all the money going? Why are all the schools closing? Why are there no jobs? People can't pay for anything if they don't even have a job.”

Marnina Posey, who lives just across the street from the middle school and 30 feet from where the incident occurred, also spoke to the WSWWS team.

“The power went out around 11:30 p.m. All of a sudden there was a loud noise, and the power went down. No one has told us when the power will be back.”

Referring to the young student, Marnina said she heard a horrible cry. “I heard him scream, a long ‘aaaaaaahhh.’ When I saw him he was already laid out.”

Marnina said a man had been trying to revive the boy and frantically asked her to call 911. “I called them twice to make sure they came. The second call was at 8:24 a.m. It was only later that I found out it was the principal” who was trying to revive the boy.

Posey said the power outage was the longest she had experienced in decades.

“This is the first time the power had been down for 12 hours. I've lived here for 20 years, and this is the worst outage we've had. Many people on this block are still without power.”

DTE held a press conference on Monday in response to the incident. DTE Vice President Trevor Lauer attempted to contain the inevitable fallout from the boy's near death by presenting the incident as a tragic accident that the company had done everything possible to prevent.

“This is a tragedy for everybody involved,” Lauer said. “DTE is working cooperatively with the investigation ... DTE wants to extend its heartfelt thoughts to everybody involved.”

“Please do not come into contact with a downed power line,” Lauer recommended.

Lauer claimed that DTE had dispatched hundreds of crews to deal with the storm, but he offered no explanation as to why calls the previous night over

sparkling power lines were not answered. Nor did he address the dismal condition of the neighborhood's electrical infrastructure, with teetering poles and drooping lines clearly visible.

DTE Energy is a for-profit company that is ruthless in its drive for the highest possible earnings. In 2010 the company shut off nearly 400,000 households in southeast Michigan, including Detroit. This was after posting record profits of \$630 million, an increase of nearly \$100 million from the previous year.

More than a dozen people in Detroit died in house fires in 2010 after their utilities had been turned off by DTE Energy, including the three children of Sylvia Young, aged three to five.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party carried out an investigation into those fires, exposing the role of DTE and the utility giants, abetted by the entire political establishment.



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