Texans receive exorbitant electricity bills after winter storm

Trévon Austin
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In the aftermath of the winter storm which left millions of people in Texas without access to power and clean water, some residents are receiving costly electricity bills.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), which oversees approximately 90 percent of the electric load in the state, was wholly unprepared for the record demand for power in the past week as temperatures fell well below freezing.

The combination of insufficient capacity and the temperature-induced crippling of power stations led to a complete collapse of the power grid. As power plants and natural gas pipelines froze, the market price of electrical power in Texas soared from a seasonal average of $50 to $9,000 per megawatt-hour.

Texans on variable rate electricity plans have seen electricity bills for tens of thousands of dollars. According to KHOU 11, Dallas resident Ty Williams owes more than $17,000 for his house, guest home and office.

Williams had a variable-rate plan with energy supplier Griddy, which encouraged its customers to temporarily switch energy providers to avoid high prices. He stated that no company would take him until February 26, leaving him on the hook for thousands of dollars.

Griddy customers pay a monthly fee of $9.99 and then pay for the spot cost of the energy at the time of day which it is used, allowing for the skyrocketing of bills this week.

"How in the world can anyone pay that? I mean, you go from a couple hundred dollars a month … there's absolutely no way, it makes no sense," Williams said.

KHOU 11 also cited a customer who had a bill of over $1,000 for her 700-square foot apartment. Another couple tweeted a picture of a bill for over $3,800, noting, "Using as little as possible 1,300 sq. ft. house and this is my bill. How is this fair. I only paid $1200 for the whole 2020."

Roy Pierce, who lives in the Dallas suburb of Willow Park, told NBC that his electricity bill was $10,000 for his three-bedroom home.

"We are hoping there will be relief," Royce said. "This is something maybe we can skate by and tackle as time goes on, but how many people can't? A lot."

Customers of other companies have also seen their bills increase during the winter storm. Veronica Garcia, a resident in Mansfield, who gets her power from Reliant Energy, said that her bill is projected to be twice as much as she usually pays for power in a month. Garcia paid $63 for electricity usage in January but expects a bill between $114 and $133 for this month.

The Texas government, infamous for its deregulation policies and privatization of public services, has not indicated if it will intervene on behalf of customers. According to legal experts, state law prohibits companies from exploiting natural disasters for profit. However, it is unclear if such legal protections can be extended to customers with hefty electricity bills.

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