

Governor Whitmer declares state of emergency in Wayne County as floods devastate metro Detroit

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On Saturday, June 26, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer declared a state of emergency for Wayne County following widespread flooding in the region after overnight storms knocked out power throughout southeastern Michigan.

Power outages impacted over 30,000 DTE Energy customers Saturday, just five days after another storm had caused 60,000 outages in the region.

Freeway pump failure cited as cause of flood

According to the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), at least 28 freeway pump stations either had communications problems as a direct result of the power outages or experienced mechanical issues due to the heavy downpour Friday night. The pump failures caused massive flooding on major freeways in the metro Detroit area, including busy commuter routes like the John C. Lodge and Southfield freeways, as well as Interstate 94, which connects Detroit to Chicago.

Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan requested assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency as the extent of the flood damage to residences and local businesses became clearer throughout the day.

Drivers stuck in vehicles on the flooded freeways apparently overwhelmed the Michigan State Police's emergency response system as callers waited hours for assistance. "If you are stranded and called 911, we will get to you," MSP posted to Twitter, noting that requests for ETAs were overloading their response capabilities.

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) hosted a press conference at 2:00 p.m. Saturday from Detroit Public Safety Headquarters. Gary Brown—former cop and current head of DWSD—warned that just another inch of rain would likely result in even further backups. He said, "We are aware that hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of Detroit households have experienced water in their basements and sewer backups."

The flooding has severely damaged the historic Jefferson Chalmers neighborhood on the city's east side at the border of Grosse Point. Other surrounding suburbs have seen similar water backups as a result of infrastructure failure.

One of the other worst-hit areas is Dearborn, a working-class suburb on the west side of Detroit, home to Ford's historic Dearborn Truck Plant. The Rotunda and I-94 intersection was entirely underwater by Saturday morning, trapping drivers and causing major traffic backups on one of the most used freeways in the area. The city of Dearborn was forced to open an emergency cooling center and shelter for displaced residents. Many reported several feet of water seeping into basements, causing unlivable housing situations.

Video taken by onlookers from freeway overpasses shows chaos as drivers attempt to navigate around or through feet of flood water. Many flooded areas were still impassable through Sunday afternoon.

Impact on auto industry

In Sterling Heights, a northeastern Detroit suburb, at least 3,000 homes were without power after Friday, according to DTE. Sources at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant reported extreme worker shortages the same day due to flooding on commuter routes. Outside of this, however, the worker reported that the plant was running “business as usual.”

At Jefferson North Assembly Plant (JNAP), a Stellantis factory located on Detroit’s east side, the Friday night shift was sent home early due to flooding inside the parking lot and the plant. Sources told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that the Saturday shift was also sent home approximately an hour early from flooding and that the company call-in system was experiencing problems, likely due to the high volume of calls.

“First shift did not run as employees were not able to get to the plant due to local road closures. Water in the plant has been removed and second shift is expected to begin at 4:30 p.m.,” Stellantis told media in a prepared statement.

Ford Motor Company reported that Dearborn Truck was also shut down Saturday as a result of flooded workspaces and parking lots. Kelli Felker, Ford global manufacturing and labor communications manager, told the *Detroit Free Press*, “They are still shipping but employees had trouble getting in due to the flooded area.”

In addition to limited production, a large number of brand-new vehicles were ruined by flooding in the JNAP shipping yards. It is unclear how this product destruction will impact production in the near future. “It was crazy they still wanted to get our production,” a JNAP worker told the WWS. “With all those cars being water damaged they are going to have to try to make up production. I heard that they were going to try to sell [the damaged vehicles], but how can they do that?”

Increased floods in recent years

The flooding in Detroit, coming off the heels of the collapse of a condominium near Miami, is a further demonstration of the disastrous state of infrastructure in the United States. The American Society of Civil

Engineers (ASCE) gave America’s stormwater drainage infrastructure a “D” rating in this year’s quadrennial “Report Card for America’s infrastructure,” with the age of the country’s drainage systems cited as a particular concern. A separate study by the ASCE found a funding gap of \$434 billion for water, sewerage and drainage systems combined over the space of ten years.

By comparison, the bipartisan infrastructure proposal reached last week includes a paltry \$55 billion for water infrastructure, according to the *New York Times*.

In 2019, the *Detroit News* reported that approximately half of the state of Michigan’s 140 pumping stations were rated in “poor” condition by MDOT. Most of these pumping stations are located in the metro Detroit area, and are responsible for preventing the type of flooding that occurred this weekend.

Similar flooding took place in August 2014, when record rainfall peaked in a day at 6.25 inches. At least two people were killed and thousands more experienced severe property damage from the flooding, which then-Governor Rick Snyder chalked up to “simply a record event of rain,” ignoring the infrastructure failures. Residents in northern Detroit suburbs filed an ongoing class action lawsuit against local governments for failure to maintain infrastructure in order to prevent such damage and flooding.

MDOT has announced in recent years plans to get the state’s infrastructure up to par by 2035 while simultaneously maintaining that any upgrades and maintenance are tied to allotments from the state legislature.

Meanwhile, DTE Energy reported first-quarter earnings of \$397 million, up from \$340 million in 2020. CEO Jerry Norcia received \$7,420,207 in pay in 2019. CMS Energy, Consumers Energy’s parent company, posted \$1.271 billion in quarterly profits for 2021. President and CEO Patricia Poppe received \$8,986,702 in pay in 2019.



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