

# DTE worker electrocuted, major freeways still closed in aftermath of Detroit flooding

**Kathleen Martin**  
**30 June 2021**

Storms knocked out power throughout southeastern Michigan last Friday, resulting in widespread flooding in the region due to freeway pump failures. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer was forced to declare a state of emergency for Wayne County on Sunday, while Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan requested assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The extensive damage to highways, vehicles and homes is the result of a massive infrastructure failure. Residents have been left to deal with submerged cars and flooded basements with little or no governmental assistance.

## DTE worker electrocuted

On Tuesday, a 61-year-old DTE Energy worker who was helping restore power in Detroit was electrocuted by a downed wire in the Brightmoor neighborhood. He was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. The worker's identity has not been released.

DTE released a perfunctory statement:

It's with heavy hearts that we confirm that we lost one of our own at DTE today. A line worker who was working to restore power in Detroit came in contact with a live wire and was fatally wounded. He was dedicated to doing his best to serve our customers, and to us he was a hero. We're in the process of informing his family and colleagues, and are asking for time and respect to make these notifications. Our 10,000 employees are grieving right now. We send our love and support to his family and loved ones.

## Major freeways still underwater

Busy commuter routes such as the Lodge and Southfield freeways were underwater by Saturday morning, as well as Interstate 94 and Interstate 75, which connect Detroit to other major cities. Sections of I-75 were not reopened until four days after the flooding. Westbound I-94 opened Wednesday, but some parts of eastbound I-94 remain closed until further notice.

Traffic is being rerouted from eastbound I-94 to Michigan

Avenue through downtown, causing major congestion and backups with few sustainable alternate routes.

All nine pump stations along this freeway route failed when the rain began because the power was out, thanks to DTE Energy. While power outages are common due to outdated infrastructure, none of the pump stations along this freeway route had a generator to prevent such chaos.

Roads are shoddily constructed, using layers of asphalt, concrete, stone and sand. When the freeway flooded, the water broke some of these layers apart, causing severe damage. Now the freeways need to be rebuilt entirely. Great Lakes Contracting Solutions said it would be strengthening the base using stone instead of asphalt to prevent major damage the next time there is flooding.

## Dirty water reported in several neighborhoods

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) is investigating multiple reports of dirty water coming out of taps at residences and businesses in the east side neighborhoods of East English Village, Morningside and Cornerstone.

As of this writing, the city has not issued an advisory to boil water, suspecting that the discoloration is the result of a disruption in service causing sediment to enter taps.

Households are being told to run water for two minutes and refrain from using it if the color does not change. DWSD claims that it has not received similar reports from other areas.

## Michigan attorney general's statement on price gouging by towing companies

On Friday, city officials estimated that roughly 1,000 vehicles were submerged on flooded freeways. Two fire engines had to be towed. The state's emergency system was overwhelmed on Saturday by the volume of calls, according to the Michigan State Police.

Many drivers had no choice but to abandon vehicles and watch helplessly as the water level rose.

Detroit's Goch and Sons Towing company made the front page of multiple local news outlets for charging exorbitant prices to tow flood victims' vehicles from the submerged freeways. There were reports of towing tickets ranging from \$500 to \$900, including a "swimmer's fee." A GM Freight truck driver was charged \$9,100 after narrowly escaping his semi as it flooded with water while he was stuck in traffic.

As outrage mounted over the price gouging, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel released a statement expressing concern that "bad actors may use the weekend's flooding to overcharge or scam people who need assistance." She added that "while [we] hope that most towing companies are operating properly and legally, we know that some are not."

Goch and Sons' owner defended the extortionate prices in a television interview with "Local 7 Action News." Lieutenant Mike Shaw gave an interview to the same news program expressing the indifference of the Michigan State Police to the price gouging.

"I'm a state trooper, not a tow truck operator," he said. "What the prices are I don't know." When asked why people with towed vehicles were being charged exorbitant daily storage fees when the shop wasn't even open, he responded, "Goch and Sons was closed. Is that fair? That's between the consumer and person who towed the car."

### **Residents left to fend for themselves and each other**

Brian has been a resident since 2014 of Jefferson Chalmers, one of the worst-hit neighborhoods on the city's east side. His told the *World Socialist Web Site* that his neighbors are mostly retired city workers and teachers, whose lives have been upended by the flooding.

He explained his nightmare ordeal to the WSWS. "I got a call from my buddy around 3 a.m. and he told me to go look in my basement. So I went down there and, sure enough, it's up to my waist."

He said he lined up outside Home Depot at around 5 a.m. after watching his basement fill up with five feet of water. Soon, he said, before the doors to the store were even open, dozens of other residents were lining up outside—all to purchase electric pumps to bail raw sewage and rainwater out of their homes.

"Some of my neighbors were totally helpless," he said. "If it wasn't for me driving all the way to this Home Depot in Warren, they wouldn't have been able to buy or rent anything to bail themselves out. It's just crazy."

He said he spent the entire day helping his neighbors drain their basements.

Along with power outages, floods are increasingly commonplace in Detroit and other cities, as Democrats and Republicans alike refuse to allocate the necessary funding to update crumbling infrastructure.

Jon is a resident of Farmington Hills, a northern suburb of the city. While his home was not impacted this time around, he recounted how his teenage son was nearly trapped in a 2018 flood.

As my son drove up the Lodge toward home after some heavy rain, he came upon an area of the highway that had standing water on it. Cars were backed up, passing the flooded section on the one relatively dry shoulder, one by one. My son was not an experienced driver and he figured he could go through the water, not realizing how deep it might be. Soon he felt the tires leave the pavement and the van was then floating helplessly on the highway under the Wyoming Avenue bridge. There was nothing they could do. They couldn't move the van and they didn't dare open the doors to get out.

Eventually, a Detroit Fire Department engine pulled up next to the van, which was bobbing in the water. My son and his friend were able to climb out the van's window and step onto the fire engine, which was heavy enough to keep its wheels on the pavement under the water so it could drive out.

The firefighters drove the boys to a drug store about a half-mile up Wyoming and dropped them off. The fire department was so busy running to other calls that the boys received no information whatsoever about what to do from that point, including about the van. But fortunately, they were safe.

My son called me and as he explained what had happened, I found it hard to believe. The Lodge had famously flooded during heavy rains a few years before, in August 2014, and everyone knew the cause was failed pump houses along the route. At least two people around Detroit died from the 2014 flooding.

It disturbs me to know that in the years between 2014 and 2018, nothing was done to prevent this same dangerous situation from repeating itself. And now, in 2021, it has happened yet again! In seven years, no progress. Clearly, highways turning into swimming pools is now normal, even in the most populous, developed part of Michigan, and the home of the auto industry. Perhaps the car companies should turn to making amphibious vehicles for commuting workers, since the state and the power company DTE Energy are clearly doing nothing near enough to fix this dangerous repeating problem.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**