

Power outages continue into fifth day after severe storms hit Southeast Michigan

Kevin Reed
15 August 2021

Nearly 100,000 electricity customers of DTE Energy in the greater Detroit metropolitan area were still without power on Sunday afternoon as the impact of heavy thunderstorms that began last Wednesday dragged on into a fifth day, exposing the crumbling infrastructure in the Motor City.

While the energy monopoly is patting itself on the back for restoring power to 80 percent of those affected by the storms, some customers in Detroit and surrounding cities are being told that their electricity will not be back on until Wednesday.

Residential customers have been forced to dispose of spoiled food in their refrigerators and freezers while those fortunate enough to have generators are spending as much as 50 dollars per day for fuel to keep their lights on and critical appliances and sump pumps running. For most, there is no hot water, and for some, who depend on well pumps, there is no water at all.

A statement from DTE Energy gave little comfort to those still without electricity. “We understand how hard it is to be without power, especially with the repetition of strong storms that occurred from July 1 to August 11.” The company said that it has deployed 3,000 line workers along with “more than 1,200 from other states as far as New York, Louisiana and Florida, as well as Canada.”

In response to mounting public anger over the decrepit condition of the electricity infrastructure, DTE Energy and Consumers Energy have offered in insulting one-time \$25 credit on an upcoming monthly electric bill. Customers must have been without power during state-authorized “catastrophic conditions” for 120 hours or more in order to qualify for the credit.

A report in ClickOnDetroit said, “94,112 DTE Energy customers were without power as of 2 pm Sunday” due to the series of severe storms on

Wednesday night and Thursday morning. However, the anger of the public toward the energy company and the government was evident in statements from readers posted in response to the article.

One reader wrote, “I want to know who’s going to pay! 4 days now and counting this time, 11 days now in 6 weeks. I’m an understanding person but this is ridiculous and DTE needs to be held accountable! So, they give you some garbage credit and then raise their rates, not sufficient. Give me a whole house generator and diesel to put in it and compensation for all the lost food/time/damage. While DTE can’t control the weather, they are responsible for the TERRIBLE infrastructure and returning our power when it goes out in a timely fashion, this goes beyond the weather and points to DTE as negligent!”

Another posted, “Many of us who lost power have a well for water, so no power means no water. No drinking water, no showers, no flushing toilets. We learned real quickly firsthand to appreciate running water this week.”

Reporter Bill Laitner of the *Detroit Free Press* went out of his way to try to present Michigan’s Attorney General Dana Nessel as a fighter for the public against the energy corporations by demanding that they issue the \$25 credits to customers impacted by the outages. Nessel has been on record deflecting attention away from the energy corporations and issuing “consumer alerts” to remind Michigan residents to look out for scams, saying “bad actors” are seeking to take advantage of people who need repairs. Of course, she did not refer to the corporate bad actors, who are responsible for the damage in the first place.

Laitner also went on to apologize for the utility companies, who “are playing catch up on two key challenges for reducing outages: tree trimming and

improving the grid, the system of wires, poles and the equipment that feeds the wires.”

The *Free Press* advanced a series of excuses for why it was unreasonable for the public to demand reliable electricity, saying that “having electric power that’s always there, or nearly always, no matter the weather or chance of equipment failures” is a “huge” challenge for both DTE Energy and Consumers Energy. It went on to lament over how “Michigan’s electric giants must boost reliability in an era of unprecedented change, as they’re pushed at the same time to revolutionize their power generation amid tightening environmental standards, and to meet the swelling demands of electric cars and computers.”

However, companies like DTE Energy are enormously profitable and are vastly underfunding electrical infrastructure. In announcing the company’s record 2020 earnings last February, DTE Energy President and CEO Jerry Norcia knew full well he was not telling the truth when he said, “We were able to continue investments in our infrastructure and improve reliability to ensure our customers receive the energy they need.”

However, Norcia was being truthful when he said the company delivered “for our investors,” as DTE Energy earned profits of \$1.2 billion and \$1.4 billion for stockholders in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Meanwhile, Norcia himself received a total compensation of \$11 million—a 29 percent increase over 2019—which included \$5.6 million in stock awards. There were six DTE Energy executives who received an average compensation package of \$5.4 million, or an aggregate total of \$32.4 million.

As has been pointed out by energy experts and consumer advocates, instead of moving the electric grid underground, DTE Energy takes down old wooden poles and replaces them with new wooden poles that are continuously getting knocked down by high winds. This is doubly shortsighted under conditions of accelerated climate change, exposing that the priority of electricity monopolies is not the interests of society as a whole but the profit pressure from Wall Street.

The storms that triggered power outages also resulted in a series of floods in working-class neighborhoods throughout the region due to infrastructure neglect. Residents of the western Detroit suburb of Dearborn Heights reported that their streets were caked with raw

sewage after the more than four feet of flood water finally receded.

The neighborhood is located near Ecorse Creek, which has repeatedly overflowed in recent years, and it has flooded the streets six times this summer. New homes have been built too close to the creek while the regional water management problems have been neglected, and drainage systems have not been cleaned due to lack of state and local funding.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact