

At least 1 million still without power in New Orleans and surrounding area three days after Hurricane Ida's landfall

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"We don't have power. We don't have power. We don't have power," New Orleans, Louisiana, Mayor LaToya Cantrell said in a press conference on noon Tuesday, outlining the unfolding disaster in the city. "Lines went down, and contingency plans failed."

New Orleans' electrical infrastructure remains devastated in the wake of Hurricane Ida, which made landfall Sunday as a Category 4 hurricane with sustained wind speeds up to 150 mph. Three days later, the thousands of evacuees who were able to leave are being told by city officials not to return, as power is still out for some 1 million people who remain and emergency services are still very limited, as debris blocks roads and bridges remain inaccessible.

As of Wednesday, six deaths have been officially attributed to the storm but that number is expected to climb as search and rescue operations continue in the areas hardest hit by the storm and as the current heat wave poses life-threatening risks for those trapped without power.

"We feel it is important that you know that there are no shelters, no electricity, very limited resources for food, gasoline and supplies and absolutely no medical services!" the Terrebonne Parish Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness posted Wednesday on Twitter. Cities throughout the parish, including Houma, remain strewn with debris.

Smaller cities such as Houma and Jean Lafitte have suffered greatly as the levees there had not been given the same multi-billion-dollar upgrades following Hurricane Katrina as those in New Orleans had. A levee in Jean Lafitte was overwhelmed, causing flooding in the area not seen in 100 years. One resident in Houma, where people were lined up for hours

outside a local civic center looking for aid, Loretta Williams, teared up as she described the destruction of her home and her car. "All I've been doing lately is crying. I worked so hard for what I had and it all just disappeared overnight," she told Reuters.

On Wednesday, Entergy Corp, the utility service company that powers the New Orleans area, restored electricity to some parts of eastern New Orleans, but for the most part, electricity could be out for at least two weeks as transmission towers and other crucial pieces of electrical service equipment were left in heaps after being pummeled by winds over 100 mph.

Entergy, a company that has monopolized energy service in the region for decades, and reported a net income of \$1.4 billion last year, is calling the destruction "catastrophic," with one large service tower completely collapsed into the Mississippi River, at least seven other towers destroyed and power lines all over the city blown over. The collapse of the power grid came despite a recent \$100 million upgrade that was promised to make the system stand up against the worst storms.

For the residents who stayed through the storm, essential services are nonexistent, as grocery stores and gas stations remain closed, with food supplies rapidly going bad amid sweltering heat. Some local restaurants and food stores distributed leftover food and water to residents left to rely on personal fuel generators to keep their homes cool as temperatures rise into the upper 90s Fahrenheit. Long lines have formed around National Guard posts, where soldiers are handing out MREs, bottled water and ice to those most affected by the damage.

Though some of the residents who stayed have

adequate power generators, those generators run on gasoline, which by Wednesday had completely run out in the city of New Orleans according to many reports.

Those looking for gas for their generators, or who needed gas for vehicles in order to leave the city, were faced with long lines and limited supply in the days after the storm. Cars were reportedly lined up at one gas station for three miles, only for many to find the pumps completely dry.

Many vehicles were abandoned on roads after people waited hours for gas with no luck. Some residents were told that where gas was available there would be a five-plus hour wait time. Where gas ran out there were reports of heated confrontations between frustrated and desperate people. At least a half dozen NOPD officers were called to intervene in one such incident, but no arrests were made.

Residents took to social media to share accounts of desperation and misery in trying to leave the devastated city. One resident who stayed behind reported, "There is nothing moving. So many streets are blocking, making it a maze and all the street lights are off."

The situation outside New Orleans is no less apocalyptic, with traffic at a standstill on the roads leading east and many car accidents along the way. One resident who evacuated on Tuesday reported sightings of abandoned vehicles on the side of the highway with people walking to gas stations in the sweltering heat holding gas cans they could only hope to be able to fill at the nearest station.

Lines to get gas at the stations around Slidell, Louisiana and Biloxi, Mississippi spilled out onto exit ramps and onto the interstate, creating dangerous driving conditions and standstill traffic for thousands hoping to escape the city. Even traffic heading back to the city was particularly heavy, with residents returning to their homes after gassing up in order to fill their empty generators.

Manmade climate change, which fueled Ida's rapid intensification from a minor hurricane into one of the strongest on record, and the neglect of critical infrastructure, have combined to contribute greatly to the mass of misery and deprivation caused by the storm.

According to officials, some 170 substations and transmission lines were damaged throughout the state. Bridges and roads around the region have been

damaged or destroyed, leading to at least a few deaths in the area as fleeing motorists were swept away in flood waters.

Following the devastation of hurricanes Katrina and Gustav in 2005 and 2008, Entergy had pledged to upgrade its dated infrastructure with concrete and steel in many areas where wood was still being used. According to the utility company, the tower that collapsed into the river had previously passed inspection, though it was not clear when the last inspection occurred and if it accounted for withstanding the 150 mph winds associated with Category 4 hurricanes.

As recently as 2018 Entergy admitted to diverting infrastructure funds away from fortifications due to what was considered by the company at the time to be an already "strong performance" for existing fortifications.



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