

More than 300,000 in Michigan with no power five days after ice storm

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More than 300,000 homes and businesses in southern Michigan were still without power as of Sunday, a fifth day without electricity, after a nationwide winter storm brought snow, freezing rain and wind gusts of 30 to 40 miles per hour to the Great Lakes State on Wednesday.

Based on data maintained by PowerOutage.us, more than 175,000 customers of DTE Energy and more than 65,000 customers of Consumers Energy, the two largest utilities in the state, and 60,000 more customers had no power from another five smaller regional and county-based electric companies in Michigan.

With winter temperatures fluctuating between the low 20s and upper 30s, families scrambled to find a way to stay warm and keep their water pipes from freezing. Some were forced to move in with relatives and friends who had power or make the expensive decision to book a hotel room to keep from freezing to death.

Others relocated to warming centers set up by local governments and the American Red Cross. In the city of Ann Arbor, for example, 40 percent of residents were without power and four warming centers were set up to provide cots, warm meals and water. Many residents have lost all their food at a time when the inflationary spiral has increased the cost of groceries to record levels.

Teresa, an auto parts worker from Ypsilanti, Michigan, has been without power since Thursday. She told the WSWS, “When I got home from work at 2:30, it was off. At first, they did not have any information as to when it would be on. Yesterday they started giving estimates as to when it would be on. One had said Sunday. Then another one said Monday. Then the text I got today said Tuesday.”

Teresa said the electric company is not offering residents any compensation for the disastrous outage, saying, “It felt like it was below zero in the house,

freezing. I didn’t have lights. When the power goes off, everything goes. Somebody told me that DTE is going to give you a \$25 voucher.

She continued, “I’m going to laugh in their face if they try to give me \$25. They could at least give you \$100 to replace some kind of food. They are probably going to refer people to FIA (Family Independence Agency). FIA surely is not going to give me anything. If you make over \$1,000 a month you can’t get any help from them.”

While the energy companies have maintained that the ice storm was historic and impossible to prepare for, mass power outages in Michigan have become routine and the public is fed up with them. This widespread anger over the increasing deadly conditions is not being reported by local news media, which, instead, are giving energy company officials a platform to blame climate change for the crisis.

For example, Josh Paciorek, a spokesperson for Consumers Energy, was quoted without comment by *Bridge Michigan*, saying, “Over the past several years, we have seen severe storms becoming more frequent, with more and more weather events featuring severe and damaging wind gusts as storms move into the state off of Lake Michigan.”

However, the resources of the multibillion-dollar energy corporations have not been utilized to upgrade the electric power infrastructure to prepare for the reality of climate change. Instead, for example, CMS Energy, the parent of Consumers Energy, announced on February 2 that it had earned \$827 million in net income in 2022 that was “available to common stockholders.” In other words, the profits of Consumers Energy are being paid out to billionaire investors while the public is being left to freeze in the dead of winter.

According to a report by the nonprofit Citizens Utility

Board, Michigan ranked as the fifth worst state for power outages in the country, with the average customer experiencing more than nine hours without electricity each year.

By comparison, during the storm last week, Illinois still had 12,000 customers without power as of Friday and Wisconsin, Indiana and Ohio had fewer than 3,000 outages combined. In Minnesota, where 21 inches of snow accumulated on Wednesday and Thursday, only nine households were without power on Friday.

Like others in Michigan who have endured repeated power outages, Teresa said, “It has gotten real sensitive over here. The last two times it went off, I would not have thought it should have gone off. Now, it seems that rain, or anything can knock it out.”

In the city of Redford, a working class community just west of Detroit, over a thousand people have been without power since Thursday. One resident said, “DTE Energy had ample time to prepare and was well aware of the coming ice storm for days. The utility companies have put their profit interests above the needs of customers who have lost thousands of dollars of groceries and endured immense suffering from the cold temperatures.”

A resident of Detroit told the WSWS, “My power went out on Thursday. My furnace is controlled electronically, so the temperature went from 75 degrees to 30 degrees by Friday. My family had to share a crazy hotel bill for 3 days while DTE worked to get the power back on. When we called the insurance company, they said they would not reimburse us for the hotel stay because power outages are only considered an ‘inconvenience.’ But no heat in a snowstorm is more than an inconvenience, it is death.”

On Friday, Kalamazoo County and the city of Kalamazoo declared a state of emergency in the area covered by Consumers Energy. In a joint press statement, the two government entities said there were hundreds of downed trees and power lines in the area. “The City’s available resources to fully respond and recover have been exhausted, which is causing significant strain on our community’s ability to respond safely during this time,” the press release stated.

Other communities in the area impacted by the outage include Battle Creek, Jackson, Hillsdale and Adrian. Jordan Kellicut, the disaster program manager for

American Red Cross-Southwest Michigan, told Grand Rapids-based WOOD-TV, “We got a request from the city of Kalamazoo, just a lot of power outages, a lot of people that need a place to go and so we were able to mobilize our team and get this shelter set up.”

He said that Red Cross emergency shelters typically remain open for only 48 hours, and there were no plans for the Kalamazoo shelter to stay open longer than that. However, Kellicut added, “The Red Cross has declared this a disaster relief operation, so nothing is off the table as it were.”



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