

Second storm in one week knocks out power for tens of thousands again in Michigan

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Over 100,000 customers of DTE Energy and Consumers Energy were without power in Michigan on Tuesday evening, many of whom have had no electricity for seven days now.

Last Wednesday, a winter storm knocked out power across the southern portion of Michigan for 800,000 homes and businesses. The area was hit by high winds and freezing rain that crippled the electrical infrastructure when trees fell, and power lines snapped after being coated with up to three-quarters of an inch of ice.

While power was being restored to those impacted by the first weather event, another storm of snow, high winds, rain and ice hit Michigan from the Grand Rapids area on down to the Detroit area and knocked out the electricity again for tens of thousands.

According to FOX 2 Detroit, the second event—which included a rare thunder snowstorm in Mount Pleasant—knocked out power for an additional 82,000 homes on Monday. The report on Tuesday morning said DTE Energy had an additional 37,000 and Consumers Energy an additional 45,000 outages, “that came in over the weekend or due to last night’s [Monday’s] weather.”

As of this writing, according to PowerOutage.us, a web site that tracks live power outage data across the US, there were a total of 104,793 customers in Michigan without electricity. Meanwhile, the National Weather Service is warning of another winter storm of cold, windy, wet and icy weather in the region this Friday and over the coming weekend.

The electricity crisis in Michigan in the middle of winter is having a devastating impact on residents. Going a week without electricity means that all the food in a family refrigerator and freezer is lost. Some families, especially those with small children, were

forced to pay hundreds of dollars for hotel rooms to keep warm, while others entered shelters set up by local government and charity organizations such as the Red Cross.

Since most families do not have gas or propane power generators, they must also try to keep their pipes from freezing with no heat in their houses and there is also the matter of keeping sump pumps running to prevent basements from filling up with water during heavy rains.

A Detroit public school teacher told the WSWS, “I have gotten messages from parents saying their children won’t be at school today because the power is out since last Friday morning. Many other children came in explaining that their power was out during the mid-winter break.

“One staff member who lives with her elderly relative lost power and they were wearing extra layers of clothes to try to stay warm. She said power outages are so routine the family was used to it. On top of that, DTE is asking for a multi-million dollar rate increase.”

In some instances, families have lost power twice in one week. A report by the Associated Press (AP) quoted Leah Thomas of Beverly Hills, Michigan, who lost power on Wednesday and then again on Monday.

The report said, “It was back on Sunday evening but was lost again the next day. And like thousands of Michigan residents left in the dark following back-to-back ice storms, Thomas wonders when the lights will come on—and stay on.”

The AP also spoke with Richard Rood, a professor at the University of Michigan’s Department of Climate and Space Sciences and Engineering, who explained the influence of climate change on the timing and intensity of the storms, “Events like freezing rain ... they’re pretty rare but they’re showing up in places

that are new and in times that are new. They might be a little more intense because its warmer. Before, (the moisture) might fall as snow, which is not nearly as damaging.”

Rood also pointed to the crumbling condition of the electrical infrastructure saying that heat events in the summer and ice storms in the winter are pushing the system over the edge. “That infrastructure was built for a different climate, different environmental conditions. Now it’s changing, and we need to be thinking about the future,” Rood said.

However, massive capitalist enterprises such as DTE Energy and Consumers Energy are focused on quarterly earnings and dividend payouts to their investors, and incapable of thinking about the future of society as a whole.

While the devastating storms were bearing down on Michigan in the month of February, both these multi-billion dollar monopolies were preoccupied with issuing their annual financial statistics for 2022 and telling stockholders their “diluted earnings per share.”

On February 23, the day after the first ice storm hit Michigan, CEO Gerardo Norcia, whose total compensation topped \$10 million in 2021, apparently did not see the irony in a company press release that said DTE Energy had “improved our infrastructure” and was “building a brighter future for our customers,” while more than a half-million customers spent the next several days in the cold and dark.

The outrageous failure of the electrical system twice in one week has exposed the indifference and negligence of the corporate and political establishment toward the suffering of the public. After it was reported that Democratic Party Governor Gretchen Whitmer was out on the town the night after the power went out for nearly 1 million residents of the state, the administration went into damage control.

Governor Whitmer issued a statement calling for “accountability” and said, “we can move faster as these climate events happen more and more often.” Other Democrats, such as State Senator Sean McCann from Kalamazoo, chair of the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment, called for an investigation.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, another Democrat, called on DTE and Consumers Energy to start routinely issuing a \$35 credit when customers lose power for periods of 96 hours or more, an increase of

\$10 over the paltry state-set \$25 per customer for power outages.

Reluctantly agreeing to the insulting payout, DTE Energy issued a statement saying, “Customers should note that it may take one to two billing cycles for the credit to appear on their bill.”



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