

Third storm in 10 days shuts down power for 220,000 in Metro Detroit

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6 March 2023

For the third time in 10 days, a winter storm knocked out power for hundreds of thousands in Metropolitan Detroit on Friday. As of this writing more than 15,000 homes and businesses were still without electricity on Monday.

After a heavy mix of rain, snow and high winds rolled through southeast Michigan in the afternoon and continued into the early morning hours of Saturday, more than 220,000 homes and business were left with no electricity.

As of late Friday evening, DTE Energy reported more than 187,000 customers without power and Consumers Energy reported more than 25,000 without power.

The storm knocked out power for more than a million people in Michigan, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, West Virginia, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York as it moved east on Saturday.

While winter storms are by no means new to Michigan, the fact that the temperatures have been generally warmer and fluctuating above and below freezing has meant that the recent three storms have brought unusually high winds and excessive ice accumulation on trees and power lines.

This combination of circumstances has exposed the decrepit condition of the power infrastructure owned and operated by energy monopolies in the most populated areas of the Great Lakes state.

According to recent reports, much of the power grid is based on equipment that is decades beyond its expected lifespan. Utility poles are brittle and likely to snap off when stressed by the wind. Wires damaged in previous storms have been patched instead of replaced and are in a weakened condition with insulation wearing off.

According to comments to *Energy News* made by Douglas Jester, a consultant with 5 Lakes Energy, a

firm involved in energy company litigation, “The grid in the older parts of DTE’s service area is weaker and less able to avoid outages when there are storms.”

It is a fact that both DTE Energy, based in Detroit, and Consumers Energy, based in Jackson, are well aware of the condition of the system and dangers it poses to the public when power goes out for days or a week at a time.

It is also well-known that putting the power distribution system underground would vastly reduce the number of outages during severe weather. However, focused exclusively on profitability and the financial returns for investors, the energy monopolies claim they cannot afford the tens of billions of dollars required to rebuild the infrastructure.

According to publicly available data, DTE Energy has earned between \$5.6 billion and \$6.1 billion in gross profits in each of the last three years, all of which took place under conditions of the coronavirus pandemic and economic crisis that have devastated the lives of many of its customers.

Meanwhile, DTE Energy has petitioned state regulators to approve a rate increase totaling \$620 million which would lead to double digit increases for both residents and industrial users.

According to a report in *Crain’s Detroit Business* on February 27, the energy company filed its request on February 10 even though the commission had just approved a \$31 million rate increase last November.

Trevor Lauer, who earned more than \$3 million in 2021 as DTE Energy president and chief financial officer, told *Crain’s* the utility needs money to improve the grid and to prepare for auto electrification and decarbonization efforts.

Lauer claimed the energy company did not boost rates for two and a half years during the COVID-19

pandemic and went on, “I’m dealing with inflation pressures just like everybody else is.” Although he complained about the increasing costs, Lauer did not mention that the company is making more money now than it has made in since 2009.

Meanwhile, Lauer had nothing to say about the fact that families with children and the elderly were being forced to endure freezing temperatures in homes without any electricity for days on end. The negligence and callous indifference of the millionaires and billionaires who control these critical resources of society is nothing, if not criminal.

The anger within the population is building up and ready to boil over because power has gone out in Detroit and surrounding communities three times in less than two weeks as though it were a war zone.

The political establishment is aware of the potentially explosive situation and the Democratic Party administration of Governor Gretchen Whitmer has launched a public relations offensive pretending to be going on the offensive against the energy giants.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel appeared on CBS News Detroit on Monday evening claiming the state government was going to hold DTE Energy accountable. Nessel feigned, “If I had to give them a grade, I guess I give them an F. I think they’re failing.”

She went on, “These are monopolies. And so, how else are we going to get them to perform better if there aren’t penalties that are associated with their poor performance?”

But what is it that Nessel and other state political representatives are proposing to do? Are they demanding the energy companies fix the infrastructure problems? No, of course not. Nessel is saying that customers should get credits on their energy bill when the power goes out. “\$35 is simply not going to cut it,” Nessel said.

She then said that legislators in Michigan are “willing to risk their own political future in an effort to make sure that we finally, at long last, have some accountability here.” And what is this “accountability”? The legislators are planning to hold hearings in Lansing that will lead to legislation that will pay customers by the hour whenever there is an outage.

These toothless proposals are not surprising given the fact that 102 out of the 148 Michigan legislators currently serving have accepted more than \$2 million

from the political arms of both DTE Energy and Consumers Energy between 2017 and 2022.

According to a report in *Bridge Michigan*, “In all, the PACs donated more than \$2 million to Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, lawmakers and legislative caucus funds from January 2017 to December 2022. DTE’s PAC gave \$1.2 million, while Consumers’ PAC donated \$855,000.”



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