

Gary, Indiana residents still without power weeks after storm

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Two weeks after a derecho storm tore through northwest Indiana, hundreds of Gary residents are still living without electricity. Over 300,000 people lost power after hurricane-strength winds and multiple tornadoes downed power lines, trees and utility poles across the Calumet region, part of the broader Chicagoland metro area. Tens of thousands of North Indiana Public Services Company (NIPSCO) customers were left in the dark without electricity until last week.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials were deployed to the area and are expected to remain for several weeks as assistance centers open up for residents impacted by the storm, including in Gary, Crown Point, Hobart, and Munster. Many have been left to clean up the debris alone and are being denied insurance claims for property damage, spoiled food, generator costs, and other repairs.

About a third of Gary residents live below the federal poverty line. Unexpected costs like hotel stays and increased fuel, food and water costs from price gouging can mean financial ruin for those living paycheck to paycheck.

Uprooted trees and downed branches still line the streets. A FEMA worker who wished to remain anonymous told the WSWs that he's "never seen anything like this in the Midwest. This is hurricane-level damage," he said.

"I have people asking me to come clear debris out of their yards. They're supposed to have all the debris brought out to the curb for us already," he explained. "But most of the residents, it's a lot of older people, they can't do it, and I'm just one guy. I'm doing what I can, but we need a higher-level organizational response to this to help residents clear these trees and get stuff out to the curb," he said.

A NIPSCO worker told the WSWs that this was not a "usual storm." He said that they were given an "all hands

on deck" order from the company and that they also brought in extra linemen and contractors from around the US "because the damage was so bad."

"I don't know if that makes sense," he said. "We're all running on basically skeleton crews. [NIPSCO] could open up more positions if they really wanted to. But they're going out and contracting. They have to pay all these contractors to travel and then give them more money to do the same work that we're doing," he explained.

"We voted to strike earlier this year and the company met with our union representatives and ended up actually locking us out before we got to the point of striking," he said. NIPSCO workers are members of the United Steelworkers union, which also covers nearby BP workers in Whiting, Illinois who are currently locked out of the refinery illegally.

Many residents pointed to the fact that NIPSCO has scaled back tree trimming in recent years to save on costs, which contributed to the storm damage. Others reported that the outdated infrastructure is in urgent need of replacement. One resident, Frances, pointed to the power lines in her backyard and said that they lose power every time a squirrel walks across the power lines.

Bryan is a retired Chicago city worker who lives in Gary with his girlfriend, who is disabled. He lives within walking distance from the power plant; his household lost power for two weeks. He decided to purchase a generator so that his girlfriend's necessary medical equipment would run. He lost over \$200 in groceries.

He was told by NIPSCO the day after the storm that their power would be restored in a few hours. It took two weeks, and he pointed to several houses on his block that were still shut off.

"We have to make sure everybody in this whole block area is safe. We didn't even have the streetlights. It was pitch black dark out here, we couldn't see anything, it

was nuts.”

“NIPSCO are backstabbers,” he said. “You can guarantee on the first of the month, they’re gonna have your bill in the mail that quick, instead of taking care of people for all this trouble.”

He said a family member spent days attempting to contact NIPSCO to explain that they urgently needed power for his girlfriend’s medical equipment. “They more or less told us, ‘Oh, well,’” Bryan said. “It could’ve been real bad. That could’ve put her in the hospital without having that machine running. Paying \$300 for that generator wasn’t easy,” he said.

“When you call [NIPSCO] to ask them things, they don’t tell you what you need to hear, they just tell you what they wanna tell you. They hang up on you quite a bit, then when you call back you just get a recording.”

Bryan continued, “If [NIPSCO] needs to hire more people, then they should hire more people. Pay your workers better or something. But keep the power on! There’s no reason for that power to have been out this long. Why can’t they keep it going? Put some crews out here 24/7 to keep an eye on it, put a dome over that thing, do something,” he said, pointing to the power station up the street.

“They just wanna make money off you. That’s all it is, money, money, money. Paying everybody else off and not taking care of their regular people. They can’t tell me they ain’t making money. If you got 10 houses right here in a row, and each house pays maybe \$400 or \$500 a month, you tell me they ain’t making money?” he said, and insisted that NIPSCO should invest in infrastructure updates to prevent this from happening again. He also said that all Gary residents should be compensated by NIPSCO for their bills for the month.

“There’s another storm coming Sunday. I bet you NIPSCO ain’t prepared for it, because they sure weren’t prepared a few weeks ago. That’s another thing, and I want everybody to hear this in Indiana: Why didn’t they sound the sirens when this was happening?” he asked.

“There were no tornado sirens, not a damn one that went off. There’s a siren pole right here and never once did it go off. I wanna know if anyone can explain that!”

Tornado sirens are visible from his home, but he and other residents said that no warning ever went off. Most residents only took shelter after they received an emergency notice on their phones. Federal cuts to the National Weather Service (NWS) have caused local weather stations to consolidate, leaving some areas without warnings for emergency weather events, like the

March 2026 tornado in nearby Three Rivers, which killed three people.

Ruben is a retired steelworker who has lived in Gary for his whole life. He was at church with his wife when the storm hit, and they found their house and truck hit by fallen trees when they managed to return home. They also received a warning to shelter, but only from Ruben’s phone. “If you didn’t have a cell phone, you’re totally in the dark. I’ve been doing everything from my cell phone because we had no internet or nothing. The people who don’t have cell phones, what do they do? I’m trying to figure out, what would I do insurance-wise if I didn’t have my cell phone? How would they get in contact with me?” he said.

He and his wife invested in a generator four years earlier due to problems with the electrical grid, but they were without power for a week and a half. He was not used to having the generator run for that long. He spent the last two weeks “just helping out with whatever I can,” he said. “I’ve been the ice man, the re-charge man, dropping things off, whatever I can do. It’s been an ordeal, it was quite devastating,” he said.

Ronald, a retired pipe fitter, and Melanie, a nurse, spoke with the WSWS about NIPSCO’s treatment of residents. They explained how the company had just asked for customers to foot the bill for a rate increase while also ending services like foliage maintenance.

“They used to come around and trim the trees if they were close to their lines. They stopped that years ago. And they just haven’t been taking care of stuff,” he said.

“They have money, though,” said Melanie.

“I saw that their CEO makes \$12 million a year, something like that,” Ronald said. “He doesn’t deserve it.”



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