

First tornado to hit city since 1997 as aging power grids once again buckle

Tornado hits Detroit's east side, as storms leave 250,000 without power in Michigan

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Powerful thunderstorms sweeping across southern Michigan Thursday afternoon and evening spawned the first tornado to hit Detroit since 1997. The storms damaged homes and businesses, leaving more than 300,000 people at least temporarily without power across the state. As of Friday afternoon, 246,000 were still without power.

More than 450,000 people nationwide lost power across a large swath of the US extending from the Dakotas to Virginia, as storms generating winds of up to 75 miles per hour swept east, overwhelming antiquated power grids. Southeast Michigan has been hit by several rounds of severe thunderstorms in recent days, spawning multiple tornadoes.

This is the second major outage in the metro Detroit area this summer. Some 400,000 DTE Energy (Detroit Edison) customers lost power over the July 4 weekend. Three Detroit-area children died of carbon monoxide poisoning from generators their families hooked up after being forced to live without electricity for days.

This follows the climate-driven severe weather that pounded Indiana in mid-August, leaving roughly 375,000 customers regionwide without power, including more than 38,300 homes and businesses in Gary alone. Some waited as long as two weeks for electric service to be restored.

While no deaths or serious injuries in metro Detroit have been reported so far, there were narrow escapes. A massive tree fell on a home on Detroit's east side with a man and a three-week-old baby inside. According to Local 4 News, the tornado narrowly missed an after-school daycare packed with young children.

A daycare worker described the damage in the area as “surreal.” She said buildings were damaged on either side of the street. “Trees down. Some cars were damaged. It is amazing we did not get touched.”

Thousands of workers at the Stellantis Detroit Assembly Complex, near where the tornado hit, were told to shelter in place while the tornado warning was in effect.

On Thursday evening, traffic lights at more than 80 intersections in Detroit were without power, and firefighters were checking on residents in the affected neighborhoods.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team that visited the area saw downed power lines, debris-strewn streets and damaged buildings. John, 61, a resident of the area, told the WSW: “I looked out the window and told my friend, ‘It’s a tornado. Trees are falling. We better get away from the window.’ It sounded like a train. It was loud. I am surprised it didn’t hit the house.”

He said it was the first tornado he had ever experienced.

“As soon as it hit these trees the power went out. We have had no power since it hit. I asked when we are getting power, and no one seems to know.”

He added, “I just moved here. The rent is cheaper.”

Detroit's suburbs also suffered storm damage, with Madison Heights and Southfield particularly hard hit. In Madison Heights, a tree fell on a home with a family inside. All escaped, but the house was essentially destroyed. Scores of traffic lights in Oakland County, north of Detroit, were still not functioning Friday

afternoon, making travel hazardous.

An official for DTE Energy, the primary gas and electric provider in the region, claimed 90 percent of customers would have power restored by Saturday night.

The service disruptions triggered by increasingly frequent severe weather events have had their greatest impact on poor and working-class residents, who are most likely to live in areas with aging power lines. Those who cannot afford a backup generator face losing a freezer full of food, and those who depend on electrically powered medical equipment can face life-threatening situations.

Prolonged outages are becoming a fact of life for workers in storm-prone areas of the US as the frequency and intensity of severe weather increase, while most power lines remain above ground and therefore highly vulnerable. Despite this, utilities have refused to upgrade infrastructure, as profits are directed instead to stockholders and executives.

Flood damage from storms is also more frequent, with aging infrastructure largely to blame. According to a recent analysis, about half of Michigan's pumping stations are in poor condition.

A 2026 report by the Union of Concerned Scientists, "Power After the Storm," documents a series of severe Michigan outages since 2010, including a February 2023 winter storm that knocked out power to some 650,000 customers statewide at its peak. It found that most Michigan counties experienced more than 1 million customer-hours of outages between 2014 and 2024.

A 2022 report by the nonprofit Climate Central, "Surging Weather-Related Power Outages," found that the number of weather-related power outages in 2011–2021 was roughly 78 percent higher than in 2000–2010. Over the full period, Michigan reported 132 outages affecting 50,000 or more customers. These included a 2010 windstorm that downed dilapidated power lines on the east side of Detroit, triggering a firestorm that burned 85 houses.

An earlier Climate Central report found that "Michigan led all states with 111 major weather-related power outages between 2000 and 2019, affecting an average of at least 160,000 customers each year during those two decades."

Meanwhile, Michigan utilities DTE Energy and

Consumers Energy are enjoying rising revenues and earnings. A recent state mandate to improve reliability gave the utilities the go-ahead to raise rates on struggling consumers, further boosting revenue and profit while mass outages continue. Both companies have for years neglected decaying electrical infrastructure while sharply raising rates and boosting payouts to wealthy investors and top executives.

A 2024 audit commissioned by the Michigan Public Service Commission found that both DTE and Consumers Energy ranked in the bottom quartile among peer utilities for service restoration times. In response to public outrage, customers now receive \$42 a day in bill credits if it takes more than 96 hours to restore power, a pittance for families struggling for days in winter cold or summer heat.

According to a Center for Biological Diversity report, "Powerless in the United States," released in February 2025, which analyzed shutoff data and financial records from six major US utilities, DTE shut off power to 150,000 customers in 2024 while paying out \$607 million to shareholders. The report noted that in the first nine months of 2024, DTE generated over \$1 billion in profits, up 41 percent from the previous year.

Michigan is hardly alone. According to the same report, the six largest private utilities in the US, from January through September 2024, "collectively increased shutoffs by nearly 21 percent, compared to the same period in 2023, disconnecting power to homes and businesses over 662,000 times — including during the hottest months of 2024's record-breaking heat." The six utilities took in \$10 billion in profits over those nine months, a 21 percent increase over the same period in 2023. The report added: "Only 1.4 percent of the more than \$6.8 billion the utilities spent on shareholder dividends from January through September 2024 would have covered the cost to prevent the more than 662,000 shutoffs they executed during the same nine-month period."



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