

Power outages linger for millions as another icy storm looms

February 18 2021, by Paul J. Weber and Jill Bleed



People wait in line to fill propane tanks Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Houston. Customers waited over an hour in the freezing rain to fill their tanks. Millions in Texas still had no power after a historic snowfall and single-digit temperatures created a surge of demand for electricity to warm up homes unaccustomed to such extreme lows, buckling the state's power grid and causing widespread blackouts. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip)

Utility crews raced Wednesday to restore power to nearly 3.4 million customers around the U.S. who were still without electricity or heat in the aftermath of a deadly winter storm while another blast of ice and snow threatened to sow more chaos.

The latest storm front was certain to complicate recovery efforts, especially in states that are unaccustomed to such frigid weather—parts of Texas, Arkansas and the Lower Mississippi Valley.

"There's really no letup to some of the misery people are feeling across that area," said Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service, referring to Texas.

The system was forecast to move into the Northeast on Thursday. More than 100 million people live in areas covered by some type of winter weather warning, watch or advisory, the weather service said.

This week's extreme weather has been blamed for the deaths of more than 30 people, some of whom perished while struggling to keep warm inside their homes. In the Houston area, one family succumbed to carbon monoxide from car exhaust in their garage. Another family died while using a fireplace to keep warm.

Weather-related outages have been particularly stubborn in Oregon, where some customers have been without power for almost a week.

Record low temperatures were reported in city after city. Scientists say the [polar vortex](#), a weather pattern that usually keeps to the Arctic, is increasingly spilling into lower latitudes and staying there longer, and global warming caused by humans is partly responsible.



Sara Castillo loads firewood into her car Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Dallas. Castillo said the fire would be used to burn for warmth as her family has been without power since Sunday due to blackouts caused by extreme cold. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

Utilities from Minnesota to Texas and Mississippi have implemented rolling blackouts to ease the burden on [power grids](#) straining to meet extreme demand for heat and electricity. In Mexico, rolling blackouts covered more than one-third of the country after storms in Texas cut the supply of imported natural gas.

The worst U.S. power outages by far have been in Texas, where 3 million homes and businesses remained without power as of midday Wednesday. The president of the state's power grid manager, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, said he hoped many customers would see at

least partial service restored by later Wednesday or Thursday.

Dashawn Walker, 33, was thrilled Wednesday to find the power back on in his Dallas apartment. He stayed at a suburban hotel Tuesday night after being without power since Sunday, but said he was charged \$474 for one night.



Joecyah Heath, left, Morning Day, center, and Jenesis Heath rest in recliners at a Gallery Furniture store which opened as a shelter Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Houston. Millions in Texas still had no power after a historic snowfall and single-digit temperatures created a surge of demand for electricity to warm up homes unaccustomed to such extreme lows, buckling the state's power grid and causing widespread blackouts. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip)

"It's crazy," Walker said. "I mean why would y'all go up on the hotels in the middle of a crisis?"

More than 200,000 additional customers were in the dark in four Appalachian states, and nearly that many in the Pacific Northwest, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility outage reports.

The outages in and around Portland, Oregon, affected nearly 150,000 customers nearly a week after a massive snow and ice storm toppled many trees and took out hundreds of miles of power lines.

The damage to the power system was the worst in 40 years, said Maria Pope, CEO of Portland General Electric. At the peak of the storm, more than 350,000 customers in the Portland area were in the dark.

"These are the most dangerous conditions we've ever seen in the history of PGE," said Dale Goodman, director of utility operations, who declined to predict when all customers would have power restored.



Dori Ann Upchurch is helped by Austin Disaster Relief Network volunteer Cody Sandquist, left, and a Red Cross volunteer to a warming station at University Avenue Church of Christ in Austin, Texas, after being evacuated from her home on Wednesday Feb. 17, 2021. Nearly 3.4 million utility customers around the U.S. were still without power Wednesday in the aftermath of a winter storm that overwhelmed power grids unprepared for climate change, and another blast of snow and ice threatened to impede the efforts to restore service.(Jay Janner/Austin American-Statesman via AP)

Oklahoma and Nebraska avoided outages on Wednesday, a day after rolling blackouts stopped electric-powered space heaters, furnaces and lights in sub-zero weather. Oklahoma Gas & Electric warned customers of the potential for more short-term service interruptions due to the

extreme cold and high demand for [natural gas](#).

Rolling blackouts were imposed Tuesday in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Southeast Texas at the direction of another grid manager, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, according to [a statement](#) from the New Orleans-based utility Entergy.

The Southwest Power Pool, a group of utilities covering 14 states, said the blackouts were "a last resort to preserve the reliability of the electric system as a whole."

The weather also caused major disruptions to [water systems](#) in several Southern cities, including in Shreveport, Louisiana, where city fire trucks delivered water to several hospitals, and bottled water was being brought in for patients and staff, Shreveport television station KSLA [reported](#).



Dialina Gonzalez sleeps on a mattress inside a Gallery Furniture store which opened as a shelter Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Houston. Millions in Texas still had no power after a historic snowfall and single-digit temperatures created a surge of demand for electricity to warm up homes unaccustomed to such extreme lows, buckling the state's power grid and causing widespread blackouts. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip)

In Austin, Houston and other cities, residents were asked to stop letting water drip from pipes, a practice to prevent freezing, because of a major drop in water pressure. Houston residents also were told to boil their water, if possible, because the pressure drop allowed bacteria to seep into the pipes.

In the southwest Louisiana city of Lake Charles, Mayor Nic Hunter said

Wednesday that water reserves remained low and local hospitals were faced with the possibility they might have to transfer patients to other areas.

Travel remains ill-advised in much of the United States, with roadways treacherous and thousands of flights canceled. Many school systems delayed or canceled face-to-face classes. But staying home can be hazardous in places without power.

Authorities said a fire that killed three young children and their grandmother in the Houston area likely was caused by the fireplace they were using to keep warm. In Oregon, authorities confirmed Tuesday that four people died in the Portland area of carbon monoxide poisoning.



Snow and ice grips a neighborhood in East Austin on Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. Day six of the statewide freeze and still millions of Texans are without power. (Bronte Wittpenn /Austin American-Statesman via AP)



Brett Saint rests inside a Gallery Furniture store which opened as a shelter for those in need of food, water and heat Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Houston. Millions in Texas still had no power after a historic snowfall and single-digit temperatures created a surge of demand for electricity to warm up homes unaccustomed to such extreme lows, buckling the state's power grid and causing widespread blackouts. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip)



Jose' Nives tries to shovel his way out after getting stuck in the middle of the street on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021 in Austin, Texas. A winter storm that brought snow, ice, and plunging temperatures across Central Texas shut down roads and causing the electrical grid to shut down leaving thousands of people without power. (Ricardo B. Brazziell/Austin American-Statesman via AP)



People line up to collect firewood from a wood heap opened to the public Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Dallas. Groups of thirteen were allowed six minutes to load as much wood as they could carry away from the recycling center. (AP Photo/LM Otero)



A woman walks past the front desk at a Gallery Furniture store which opened as a shelter for those in need of food, water and heat Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Houston. Millions in Texas still had no power after a historic snowfall and single-digit temperatures created a surge of demand for electricity to warm up homes unaccustomed to such extreme lows, buckling the state's power grid and causing widespread blackouts. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip)



Icicles form on a the frozen helmet of a Tulsa Firefigther working the scene of a 3 alarm fire on Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021 in Tulsa, Okla. Temperatures hovered in the single digits. (Mike Simons /Tulsa World via AP)



Brett Archibad tries to entertain his family as they attempt to stay warm in their home the BlackHawk neighborhood in Pflugerville, Texas, Tuesday, Feb 16, 2021. Anger over Texas' power grid failing in the face of a record winter freeze mounted Tuesday as millions of residents in the energy capital of the U.S. remained shivering with no assurances that their electricity and heat —out for 36 hours or longer in many homes—would return soon or stay on once it finally does. (Ricardo B. Braziell/Austin American-Statesman via AP)



People line up to fill their empty propane tanks Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021, in Houston. Temperatures stayed below freezing Tuesday, and many residents were without electricity. (Brett Coomer/Houston Chronicle via AP)



A woman who identified herself as Caroline and using blankets to keep warm outside the Majestic Theater, is encouraged by Morgan Handley, left, and Pastor Gavin Rogers, right, to seek shelter, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021, in San Antonio. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)



Christopher Harris, left, his wife Novi, center, and their daughter Keeva, occupy an office suite at a pop-up warming center in Richardson, Texas, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. In cooperation with the cities emergency management center, this location is one of seven that have opened in the city, offering those in need a place to keep warm and have access to power supply to charge devices. This particular location is a 24-hour location whereas the six others will be open on Wednesday, and Thursday if needed for limited hours. (AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez)



Jorge Sanhueza-Lyon stands on his kitchen counter to warm his feet over his gas stove Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021, in Austin, Texas. Power was out for thousands of central Texas residents after temperatures dropped into the single digits when a snow storm hit the area on Sunday night. (AP Photo/Ashley Landis)

At least 13 children were treated for [carbon monoxide](#) poisoning at Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth and one parent died of the toxic fumes, hospital officials said.

Stories of kindness emerged from the crisis.

In Clinton, Mississippi, Army veteran Evelyn Fletcher has been cooking and delivering meals to sidelined truck drivers, travelers and people staying at hotels after losing [power](#) at home.

"They're stranded, they're isolated—people are in need of support right now," Fletcher said.

On Monday, Fletcher made 85 meals. On Tuesday, she made 30 plates, while a local restaurant, T'Beaux's Crawfish and Catering, cooked 75 plates of shrimp and gumbo that she and other volunteers delivered. And on Wednesday, Fletcher was cooking a pot of turkey noodle soup, hoping to deliver another 70 meals.

"People are worried about more snow," she said. "We are going to keep people fed and keep them feeling hopeful."

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