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With No Power, Tens of Thousands in a 'Nightmare' a Week After Storm

By Mihir Zaveri and Nate Schweber

7-9 minutes

For residents of Connecticut and New York who are still without power, frustration with utility companies grew as temperatures rose.





Credit...Stephanie Keith for The New York Times

After Darren Demeterio was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer last year, a scan in June detected a new cancerous spot on his liver. His doctor told him to eat healthily and stay positive.

But right now it's hard for him to do either: Since Tropical Storm Isaias battered the New York region, he has been without power for nearly a week at his suburban home.

There is no electricity to refrigerate fruits, vegetables, fish or chicken, so his wife has taken trips to the grocery store every day. With temperatures rising, and no way to keep cool, Mr. Demeterio, 49, is scared.

"The last week has been such a nightmare you can't get away from," said Mr. Demetrio, who lives in Tarrytown, about 25 miles north of Manhattan. "Normally for me, you keep yourself occupied so you're not thinking negatively. Unfortunately, there's no way around that now."

Though the storm that tore through the Northeast is long gone,

the anger and anxiety endured for at least 43,000 customers, mostly in New York and Connecticut, who remained without electricity as of Tuesday morning, according to tallies from utility companies.

Thousands of crews called in from around the country are scrambling to restore power. But they are being stymied by trees blocking roads and damage to buildings that makes repair work unsafe.

With temperatures expected to exceed 90 degrees in many parts of the region this week, the outages are now prompting fears about the safety of older people and other vulnerable residents, who are having trouble escaping the heat and keeping medication cool and medical devices running.

In New York, PSEG Long Island reported on Tuesday morning that about 6,600 of its nearly 1.2 million customers were without power from outages that were reported during Isaias. In total, more than 39,000 of the utility's customers were without power on Tuesday morning, but it was not immediately clear how many of the outages stemmed from other electrical problems unrelated to Isaias.

Con Edison reported on Tuesday morning that about 6,100 of its customers still did not have power because of outages from Isaias; about 4,600 were in Westchester County and 1,200 were in Queens.

At a news conference Tuesday, Mayor Bill de Blasio, asked about how tree damage was still affecting at least one resident in Queens, said the city must move quickly to help New

Yorkers still affected by the storm.

“We did get hit real hard by this storm, really, really hard, biggest winds since Hurricane Sandy, a lot of trees down,” Mr. de Blasio said. “But we can’t leave people vulnerable.”



Image





Credit...Stephanie Keith for The New York Times

In New Jersey, originally one of the states hit hardest by outages, power was mostly restored by Monday. But in New York and Connecticut, whole streets remained in the dark, and utility companies drew the ire of residents and elected officials.

In Connecticut, where 30,000 customers of Eversource, the main power supplier, still had no power Tuesday morning, state officials have said they are investigating utilities' preparations and have accused Eversource of dramatically underestimating the storm's severity.

In New York, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has also called for an investigation into the utilities, a move he has made in the past after natural disasters and blackouts.

Mr. Cuomo said on Monday that depending on the findings of the investigation, utilities could face a host of consequences, including the revocation of their ability to do business in the state.

"They can require fines, penalties, restitution, and I want the utilities to know that we do not abide by the concept in New York that anything is too big to fail," Mr. Cuomo said. "Your franchise can be revoked. I am not bluffing."

Some outages could continue into the middle of the week, utilities said.

Mitch Gross, a spokesman for Eversource, said that the "vast majority" of Eversource customers in Connecticut should have

their power restored before midnight on Tuesday.

He rejected the idea that Eversource was not ready for the storm, saying that the company had prepared based on weather forecasts and positioned repair crews and equipment around the state.

He said the forecast for Isaias changed as the storm approached.

“Storms change track, strength,” he said. “It changed, and you have to be flexible, you have to adapt, and that’s what we did. We immediately began securing additional help.”

Con Edison said in a statement that it was “completely focused on restoring power as safely and quickly as possible to every customer.”

“After every major event we perform a thorough analysis of what can be improved, and we’ll do the same following the second worst storm in the history of our service territory,” the statement said.

At Glen Apartments, a public housing complex in Danbury where around 100 older and disabled residents live, Tim Hinckley sat in the shade in his wheelchair as he watched crews work on power lines on the street. Behind him were toppled trees.

Power had been restored to about half of the complex on Monday morning, but not for Mr. Hinckley.



Image



Credit...Stephanie Keith for The New York Times

“In my sweatbox, you can’t breathe, that’s how hot it is in there,” Mr. Hinckley, 54, said gesturing toward his apartment.

"It's been hell."

Mr. Hinckley finally got a few hours of rest on Sunday night by moving to a community center in the apartment complex, where a generator was able to power his air mattress. But there was no power to save \$200 worth of groceries in his refrigerator.

"It's ridiculous," he said.

His neighbor, Marilyn Andujar, said she had no way to plug in the medical devices she needed to care for her husband, Ramon Montero, who has throat cancer. One device lubricates his throat, making it possible for him to breathe; the other is a blender, which allows him to eat.

"He's suffocating," Ms. Andujar, 64, said from her doorway while Mr. Montero, 74, sat in the shade holding a handkerchief over the hole in his trachea. "This is not so good."

Robin Murena, 44, of Bethel, a town next to Danbury, said she lost power last Tuesday. Because of the pandemic, she had been stocking up her refrigerator with vegetables from her garden, but everything spoiled.

Ms. Murena, who works at a cosmetic store at a mall, has used power outlets there to keep her devices charged.

Throughout the Danbury area, trees still littered roads, and some residents whose power had been restored left power strips in their driveways for others to use. Streetlights were out, making driving through intersections tricky.

Ms. Murena said that even during Hurricane Sandy in 2012,

she only lost power for three or four days.

"I haven't had to navigate a week without power," she said.

On Monday, as the temperature rose, she set out to the waterfront at Sherwood Island State Park to keep cool.

"Right now, it's just a waiting game," she said. "Now that we're hitting a heat wave, the big concern is no air conditioning."

She said the power is supposed to be restored by Tuesday evening, but she has not seen any utility crews near her house.

Mr. Demeterio, in Tarrytown, said Con Edison has repeatedly told him over the last two days that his power would be back, but crews have come out and driven away again.

"I don't know what to do anymore," he said.

Neil Vigdor contributed reporting.

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