

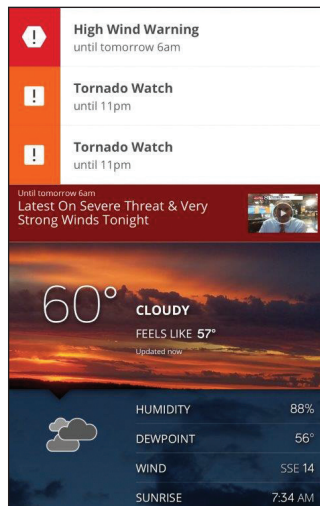
A NIGHT (AND DAY) IN THE LIFE OF A POWER OUTAGE:

The historic December 15, 2021 storm

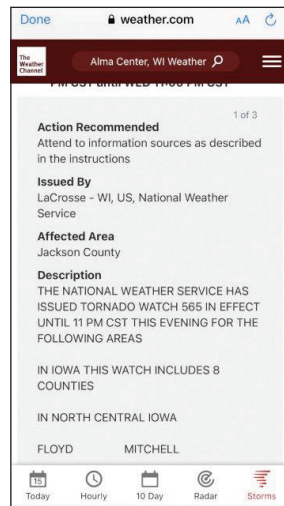


I think it's safe to say that we all have the same assumption that electricity will always be available when we want it. And in some instances, we take for granted how much we rely on electricity until we're without it. When a power outage occurs, what happens behind the scenes to get your power restored? When it seems like an eternity for your power to be restored, be assured that there are 20 employees at Jackson Electric working together to get your power back on, safely and quickly.

Before the storm It's Wednesday, December 15, 2021. The weather forecast warns high winds and storms are on their way. The temperatures will grow unseasonably warm for December. The mix of warm and cool air make the perfect conditions for a tornado. If the forecasters are correct, this storm will go down as the most strange and unprecedented storm in Wisconsin's history.



Left: Members across Jackson Electric's service territory received weather alerts of high winds and a tornado watch the evening of December 15. Right: A tornado watch was issued for Jackson County, just shy of 7 p.m.



On the Radar Later in the evening, the local channel programming is interrupted for live coverage of where the storm has hit and where it's headed next. Lineman Matt Bush is on call and watching the weather closely. There's a tornado watch for much of the viewing area. He's prepared to get called in any minute. "You're on call for a week at a time, with the switch occurring every Friday at 4 p.m.," Matt explains. "You have to be within a 30-minute response time in case the Cooperative Response Center, CRC (Jackson's after-hours

outage reporting center), notifies you of an outage."

Normally, when a lineman is on call, he must then find someone on the crew to call to work with him. Unless it's a metering issue or the like, two people go out on a call. If two or more lines are out at the same time, a second crew is called in. "Even if you're not on call, if you know a big storm is coming you can expect to get called in," shares Line Foreman Brian Schultz. "I was planning to be off work the week of the storm, but I stuck around because I knew it was coming."

With this outage, Line Superintendent Eric Stein recognized the extent of the outages and called in the entire crew, Matt included, to begin the restoration process. "My girls were upset when I left because it was storming and they wanted Daddy home," Matt recalls. But this is part of Matt's job, along with the others on the line crew—to respond as quickly as they can to restore power to Jackson Electric's membership.

Into the Storm The line crew is ready to head out into the storm with bottled water, flashlights, snacks, and extra clothing in tow to avoid any unnecessary stops later. "Most of the equipment you need is already on the truck," says Schultz. "At night you're mainly grabbing lights."

Nighttime outage work seems to go slower than working in the daylight, mainly because you can't readily see the damage. "In a storm, you're shining around with lights looking for tangled wires, busted equipment, and downed trees," explains Lead Lineman Jesse Hansen. "There are many scenarios and variables."

When linemen are called out to restore a power outage, they go out in all weather conditions, usually the worst of the worst. While most people are told to stay home or shelter in place, they are leaving their families and the safety of their homes to restore power for our members. "The weather is definitely a challenge," Schultz adds. "You can't really see anything when it's dark and raining and you're trying to run line out 100 yards off the road."

9:40 p.m. By now, Member Relations Manager Carol Blaken, who is at a remote location, has received an outage



Matt and the other linemen kept a close eye on the radar as the storm drew closer to Jackson Electric's service territory.

update from Eric that approximately 700 members throughout the service territory are without power. She composes a Facebook post to notify members of the extent of the outage. “I post updates as soon as I get updates,” she says. “Because I’m not right there in the field, I won’t post anything that I’m not sure is accurate.”

In this outage update, Carol reminds members not to report their outage to Facebook, as the page is not generally monitored throughout the night. “It’s best to call the outage reporting number or report your outage through the SmartHub app to ensure your outage is added to our outage management system,” she says. “You can also check the outage map on our website to see if your location is part of a predicted outage.”

The outage order of response begins with fixing issues that are going to restore power to the most members at one time. “Generally, we try to start with three-phase and main feeder lines, then we work down from there,” says Matt.



7:30 a.m. The crew has worked through the night and a new day has begun. As the front office team starts their day, they know that today will be beyond business as usual. “Whatever you are working on stops,” Jerel Gunning, operations accountant, explains. “The outage becomes your priority, and it’s all hands on deck to make sure members’ power is restored.”

Just months before the storm, Jerel started training to be the backup for the outage management system, which consists of entering outages and monitoring predicted outages. Before this storm, he was already entering the smaller outages that occurred during normal business hours. His training was put to the test on Thursday, December 16.

“Steve Bucholz (GIS/Mapping) worked overnight dispatching and entering the mass number of outages. I then worked the entire next day until 8 p.m. coordinating the outages, making sure we didn’t miss anyone,” Jerel says.

Meanwhile, Carol has returned from running equipment and water to



Clockwise, starting top left: Lineman Matt Bush prepares to pull a line up with the hoist; Lead Lineman Jesse watches to ensure the proper clearance for the wire, while lineman Spencer Paulson reinstalls the phase wire; Lead Lineman Jesse Hansen walks a downed line wire to check for frays or nicks before pulling it back up.



Member Relations Manager Carol Blaken posts an outage notification from a remote location on the night of the storm.

the crew after hours and taking photos of the storm damage. She prepares to brief the office staff on the outage. “We make sure all the employees, and in some instances the board of directors, know what the status is with the outages, where the crews are, and how to respond to membership questions,” she says. “However, we won’t give an estimated time of restoral because we don’t want to give false hope. It’s happened before, that when the crew energizes the line, the lights come on, and suddenly off again. The crew obviously knows that something isn’t working correctly, and more work needs to be done which means more time.”

Outages not only affect the front office’s schedule for the day, but also the crew’s schedule. Most of the crew’s work is scheduled in advance for specific days because they either need to meet with a member at a certain time or an electrician for a disconnect/reconnect for electrical work at a member’s home. “It throws a wrench into things because you then have to reschedule those appointments, which affects your upcoming work schedule as well,” explains Schultz.

I, Brandi, learned first-hand how outages affect both the crew and office. I recall having several dual fuel inspection appointments scheduled that morning for our metering/load management technician Don Fortun. All these appointments had to be rescheduled and fit into the schedule at a later date. Fortunately, the members were very understanding of the situation.

Mid-day All hands on deck extends to the front office staff, where everyone is involved with answering outage calls



or helping in any way that they can, even with a limited amount of staff. “I have only experienced one major outage so far,” shares Maggie Mickelson, member relations representative. “As soon as you are done with one call another is coming through. You also still need to process payments and assist members that come into the office as not all members are affected by the outage.”

If Maggie is on another line and your call rolls over, you may speak with either Deanna, Samantha, or myself (Brandi). “An outage adds to your day,” explains Deanna. “Our other work doesn’t go away, and we still have due dates and deadlines to meet. Thankfully, there’s never been a major outage while I am working on billing.”

If an outage occurs during working hours, warehouse clerk Brian Dolesy helps the line crew get supplies loaded. When the outage happens overnight, his job is to make sure the crew has everything they need to restore power. This may mean delivering parts or materials. “I loaded and delivered a transformer during the December outage,” Brian D. shares. “I have a Class A CDL to assist with tasks like this if needed.”

After the outage, Brian D. will spend his time with inventory, making sure enough wire, poles, and cross arms are on hand for the next outage.

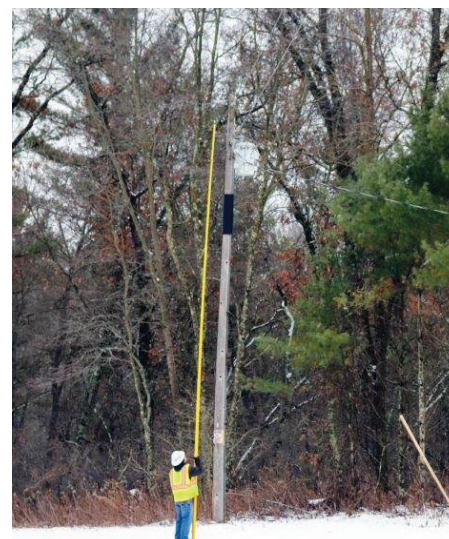
Afternoon Some members’ power has been restored, while others can no longer count the hours on two hands. The outdoor temperatures have grown

colder than yesterday’s, meaning many homes are without heat and starting to grow cold. The crew carries on and has only taken breaks every six to eight hours. “We at least try to stop at a gas station to grab something warm to eat, but it’s usually run, run, run,” shares Jesse. “Sometimes you’re not near anything, so you just have some water and granola bars that you grabbed on your way out,” Schultz adds.

Marketing Communications Specialist Samantha Bratland has ventured out to take photos of where the crew is working, while learning more about the service territory in the process. “It’s important to have photos to show how extensive the damage is,” says Samantha. “Even though you may live a few miles apart, your damage may be very different.”

Before leaving for the day, Samantha uploads her photos and works with Carol to write an update for the members. About 30 members remain without power. The office team may be leaving for the day, but the line crew continues restoration efforts. “Crews are close to having all our members’ power restored,” Carol updates the Facebook page once more for the evening, close to 8 p.m.

After the Storm After working a full eight-hour shift, each member of the line crew worked upwards of 24 to 36 straight hours during this outage before going home to get a night of sleep. “It can be challenging, but if you know you’re getting close to the end it makes sense to finish,” Jesse says. “Even



Line Foreman Brian Schultz energizes a fuse.

though we’ve had a long day, we all enjoy outdoor work,” adds Matt. “It’s what we signed up to do.”

Matt’s wife, Brittany, comments on Jackson Electric’s Facebook post: “Our girls say thank you to Daddy and his friends for helping other people get their heat on and coming home safe to us after being gone all night, all day, and then again at night.”

December 17, 2021 When the storm has passed and the lights are back on, the work is not done for the line crew or office when they return to work on Friday, December 17. There’s often clean up and damage to repair. “There were at least six poles that we had to replace after the storm, and there were locations to go

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3 Ways to Reach Us When You Experience a POWER OUTAGE

ONE: Call 855.222.3275

TWO: Text “OUT” to 833.679.0919. Must be a registered account user on SmartHub and your current phone number must be on file.

THREE: Log in to your mobile SmartHub account and follow the prompts for outage reporting.

Members can also view the live outage map on our website at www.jackelec.com/report-outage.

Power Outage Tips

1. When storms are forecast, keep your cell phone fully charged.
2. Keep the fridge and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
3. Stay away from downed lines and warn others to stay away.
4. Hire an electrician to ensure your generator is installed properly. An improper install puts lineworkers at risk and damages equipment.
5. You may consider turning off appliances and unplugging major equipment until power is restored.

Power Outage

Continued from previous page

back to because temporary repairs were made to restore power,” says Jerel. “All of this is tied to work orders, and I need to make sure time and material expenses get recorded correctly.”

The main causes of the December outages included downed trees and tree branches out of the rights-of-way that snapped poles or landed on lines. “Please be patient when there’s an outage,” concludes Matt. “We’re out there doing the best we can with what we have to work with. Sometimes it takes time.”

Jackson Electric Cooperative makes every effort to provide a reliable and dependable supply of electricity. However, it is beyond the control of the cooperative to guarantee uninterrupted service. Should you suffer damage to personal property due to the factors beyond the cooperative’s control, the cooperative is not legally liable for this damage.—*Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor*

A DEHUMIDIFIER CAN CAUSE HIGH USAGE

It’s time for humidity to start lurking in your home, and dehumidifiers will start operating. If you have a basement that holds humidity, then a dehumidifier is one device that you shouldn’t be without regardless of the operating costs.

Dehumidifiers that operate continuously in an area where it is very humid consume a considerable amount of energy, and a monthly increase of \$20 to \$50 in energy costs is not unusual. However, the size of the unit will also



affect the operating cost.

Look for the Energy Star logo when purchasing a dehumidifier. According to the Energy Star website, Energy Star certified models have more efficient refrigeration coils, compressors, and fans than

conventional models. This means they use less energy to remove moisture.

Energy Star rated dehumidifiers qualify for a \$50 rebate from Jackson Electric. Rebate forms are available online or from our office.

PREPARE FOR A PEAK ALERT

Did you unexpectedly run out of hot water, or do you think your cooling system is acting unusually strange? It may be that a peak alert event is issued. When issued, our power supplier interrupts electric water heaters and cooling systems that have an energy management receiver installed.

These events can happen any weekday through the months of June, July, and August. When issued, the heating elements in the residential water heaters

will be interrupted from 2 to 8 p.m. and cooling systems will be cycled on and off every 15 minutes from 2 to 6:30 p.m.

Members can be notified by email, text, and/or phone call of a load management event. Please contact the office to request a load management enrollment form or go to www.jackelec.com/dual-fuel-program to download a form. This form must be on file for you to receive notifications.



Did You Know...

That Jackson Electric provides rebates for qualified Energy Star appliances, lighting, and electric heat pumps. Contact our office for more information.



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