

# power grid at risk of 18-month blackout; 1 city now in dark for more than a week

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Electrical substation is seen in Houston, Wednesday, July 10, 2024. (AP Photo/Maria Lysaker) AP



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US power grid at risk of 18-month blackout; 1 city now in dark for more than a week

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The United States power grid is at risk of a major blackout that could last up to 18 months, according to a new report. Concerns are heightened as one U.S. city has been without power for more than a week.

Jon Wellinghoff, former chair of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), told [The New York Times Magazine](#) that America's aging infrastructure is badly outdated and potentially vulnerable to a coordinated attack. He first raised the alarm in 2013 after gunmen shot up 17 transformers at an electrical substation near San Jose, California

Wellinghoff said the FERC did an analysis that determined the U.S. power grid could be seriously disrupted if similar incidents targeted the 10 most important substations in the country's three sections: Western, Eastern and Texas Interconnections. Substations are where multiple high-voltage lines meet, routing electricity between power plants, transmission lines, and local neighborhoods

"We came up with some very astounding numbers," Wellinghoff told the publication. "If you knock out nine total substations along those three grids, you can black out the entire United States."

Wellinghoff added that it didn't matter which nine substations were hit, as long as they were among the 10 most important in its respective region. He told the NYT Magazine that even 12-year-olds could find them with a map on the internet, and anyone with enough guns could destroy them in 20 minutes.

According to the [New York Post](#), it took Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) nearly a month to bring the California substation back online in 2013. To this day, no arrests have been made.

One of the reasons why the grid is especially vulnerable is its age. According to the New York Times Magazine, more than 75% of distribution transformers like on street corners and telephone poles are older than their 50-year life expectancy. Larger power transformers, which have shorter lifespans, were an average of 38-40 years old in 2014.

So it may be unsurprising that tens of thousands of people in northwest Indiana have remained without power since storms knocked down power lines across the region last week.

According to the Associated Press, the Northern Indiana Public Service Co. said more than 75,000 customers were still in the dark Wednesday. That includes 21,000 people in the city of Gary, Indiana, where people have sought relief from food pantries or gone to community centers just to charge their phones.

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Full restoration is not expected until Aug. 25, a full two weeks after the Aug. 11 storm with 99 mph winds. NIPSCO said its work includes replacing 300 poles and 44 power transmission poles

“These aren’t simple repairs,” said Melody Birmingham, an executive at NIPSCO’s parent company. “These are systems that are being rebuilt.”

According to the New York Times Magazine, the average wait time to repair or replace a large transformer at a major substation is even longer. What previously took less than a year has jumped to 128 weeks since 2021, with some needing more than five years.



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Geoff "DeafGeoff" Herbert is a Reporter and Content Supervisor for Advance Local. He covers a wide range of topics including entertainment, national news and trending topics, plus specializes in search engine...[more](#)

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