



Gretchen Whitmer, Governor
Dan Scripps, Chair
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MPSC launches inquest into power outages, electric utility reliability; plans technical conference Oct. 22

The Michigan Public Service Commission today directed the electric utilities it regulates to answer questions about the companies' responses to storms that left more than 1.0 million Michiganders without power, some for more than a week, in addition to addressing how to best prepare for extreme storms that have grown increasingly severe and frequent amid the state's changing climate.

The Aug. 10-12 storms swept across the Lower Peninsula, with winds topping 70 mph, leading to widespread damage to trees, utility poles and power lines. DTE Electric Co. reported more than 500,000 outages and Consumers Energy Co. reported 372,000 customer outages. More than 1 million utility customers lost power, factoring in smaller utilities.

"The MPSC recognizes Michiganders' rights to expect reliable service from their utility companies and timely restoration of power after storms," said MPSC Chair Dan Scripps. "In the last several years, we've taken a number of concrete steps to improve reliability and update customer bill credits. But as this summer's storms laid bare, we have more work to do, and we have to do it faster."

The MPSC today opened Case No. U-21122, an effort to expand the data it receives from utilities about their efforts to boost reliability, support more transparency around planning, and encourage more engagement in how best to prepare and harden Michigan's electric distribution system to better withstand the state's increasingly recurrent extreme weather. The order addresses recommendations Gov. Gretchen Whitmer made in a [letter to the Commission](#) on Aug. 20. The work will center customers in the discussions to ensure the efforts are informed by the impacts of outages, particularly on the most vulnerable.

To that end, the Commission today directed the utilities it regulates — DTE Electric, Consumers Energy; Indiana Michigan Power Co. (I&M); Alpena Power Co.; Northern States Power Co.; Upper Michigan Energy Resources Corp., and Upper Peninsula Power Co. — to file reports on:

- Vegetation management and grid hardening efforts, and how those efforts contribute to reliability performance.

- A breakdown of each company's worst-performing electric circuits including frequency of and duration of outages and repeat outages and where those circuits stand in relation to tree trimming practices, grid hardening and other system upgrades.
- A list of the top ten ZIP codes that have the most and least frequent outages and the longest and shortest restoration times, and the top ten ZIP codes where future efforts for the most tree trimming, reliability, and resiliency improvements are planned.
- Summaries of efforts in each utility's 5-year distribution plans to tackle outages and reliability, including, for Consumers and DTE Electric, information on metrics and financial incentives and penalties.
- Plans or actions after the August storms addressing bill credits for customers, and a summary of restoration efforts, including costs for restoration, details of customer communication efforts, and opportunities for improvement in storm response and communication customers, including proactive communication efforts with vulnerable customers.

In addition, the Commission directed the utilities to provide cost and benefit information about moving established electric lines underground, the maintenance cost differences between overhead and underground electric lines, and reliability and safety comparisons between the two.

The Commission also seeks stakeholder input on the final 5-year distribution plan filed by Consumers Energy and draft plans filed by DTE Electric and I&M. Questions on which the Commission seeks feedback include whether current planning and reliability improvement measures are sufficiently robust as Michigan's storms continue to be more severe and frequent; whether metrics used by utilities adequately address repeat customer outages; whether financial incentives and penalties work to address reliability goals; whether 5-year distribution plans strike the right balance between investment and customer affordability, and whether there are potential utility pilot projects involving moving overhead electric lines underground. Additionally, the Commission seeks input on whether the distribution plans sufficiently address issues of equity, particularly as the MPSC seeks to avoid further marginalization of vulnerable customers and communities. Written comments must reference Case No. U-20147 and be received no later than 5 p.m. Oct. 1, 2021.

The Commission also requested comments on whether utility planning processes that rely on historical weather data to identify investments and upgrades are sufficiently robust, given the steady rise in frequency and intensity of severe storms in Michigan and across the country. The Commission noted that the two largest storms in DTE Electric's 135-year history happened in 2017 and in the Aug. 10-12 outages. Written comments must reference Case No. U-21122 and should be received by 5 p.m. Sept. 24, 2021.

Written comments may be submitted by email to mpscedockets@michigan.gov or by mail to Executive Secretary, Michigan Public Service Commission, PO Box 30221, Lansing, MI 48909.

The MPSC also announced plans to host a one-day Technical Conference on Emergency Preparedness, Distribution Reliability, and Storm Response. The conference will be held in person and via videoconference on Wednesday, Oct. 22, 2021, at the Commission's offices at 7109 W. Saginaw Hwy., Lansing, MI. Information on how to participate will be made available in the Case No. U-21122 docket no later than Oct. 4, 2021. Persons seeking to provide input on topics they would like to see addressed in the conference may email the Commission's Executive Secretary at mpscedockets@michigan.gov no later than 5 p.m. on Sept. 17, 2021; the email should reference Case No. U-21222.

To look up cases from today's meeting, access the [MPSC's E-Dockets filing system](#).

Watch recordings of the MPSC's meetings on the [MPSC's YouTube channel](#).

For information about the MPSC, visit www.Michigan.gov/MPSC, sign up for its [monthly newsletter](#) or other [listservs](#), or follow the Commission on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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