
The Power Line Debate: Over vs. Under

On average, 350,000 customers can expect to experience one power outage each year—though hopefully not all at once. Still, whenever an outage occurs, especially after a storm, there is a renewed discussion about whether overhead power lines should be buried underground to protect against the elements.

For the record, 37 percent of MLGW's residential lines are underground. There's also underground service for large commercial establishments where transformers are grouped and more easily accessible for repair. However, electric service provided by underground lines is not impervious to disrepair; moreover, damage to a substation that services a neighborhood served by underground lines can render the entire neighborhood powerless.

Even though overhead lines can break during bad weather, they are noticeable and thus easier to replace. Non-functioning underground lines must be tediously extricated. After Hurricane Elvis, the 2003 storm that knocked power out to 309,000 customers, an MLGW study noted that it would cost \$3 billion to \$5 billion to bury the rest of MLGW's residential lines.

MLGW continues to work to ensure the electric grid's safety and reliability whether the lines are overhead or underground.

Restoration Forecast Met, cont. from cover

restoration efforts."

Indeed, MLGW learned its lesson from Hurricane Elvis, the 2003 storm that knocked out power to 309,000 customers. Since then, the utility has made it a practice to contract with sister utilities to quickly acquire additional crews in anticipation of storm damage. "One of the lessons that we learned from Hurricane Elvis: Don't dither about getting the resources in," said Chris Bieber, vice president of Customer Care and team leader of the restoration effort.

As the storm approached on the afternoon of June 12, calls were already made to request crews from Nashville and Chattanooga. They arrived on Saturday. At one point, 110 electric crews and 65 tree-trimming crews were working to restore power. There were no storm-related deaths or serious injuries.

Throughout it all, MLGW managed to keep customers apprised of the restoration process through several means: radio, television and newspaper interviews; an outage map on mlgw.com; its blog, Bird on a Wire, at mlgw.blogspot.com; Facebook; and, for the first time, on Twitter (twitter.com/mlgw), where followers could receive personalized outage updates.

"We want to thank our customers for the patience and appreciation they've shown to our employees during a difficult process. We will learn lessons from this that will make us a better utility in the future," Collins said.



July 11-12: Shelby County Citizens Corps Disaster Preparedness Training. Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training is a 16-hour seminar that is appropriate for any age group and free to the public. The classes are from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. To register, please visit www.msccma.org or call the Shelby County Office of Preparedness HLS/Emergency Management Agency Education / Training Officer, Cheryl Ballard, at (901) 515-2605.

July 31: The deadline for contesting your 2009 appraisal values. Contact Shelby County Board of Equalization at 379-7160 or pick up appeal forms at any public library.

Sept. 12: Latino News Festival. Delta Fair in the Agricenter International. Admission is only \$8 for adults, children (ages 5-12) \$5 and children (ages 4-under) free. Hours are 10 a.m.-11 p.m.



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Customer CONNECTION



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MLGW Meets Restoration Forecast

In the aftermath of the June 12 storm, MLGW officials predicted that it would take at least a week to restore power to about 130,000 customers—and that didn't change even though subsequent storms on June 14 and 15 raised the total outage number to more than 140,000 customers.

All customers were restored by 11 p.m. on Friday, June 16.

In addition to those behind the scenes, more than 800 MLGW representatives and contractors in the field worked 24 hours a day in 16-hour shifts to meet the prediction. On June 12, straight-line winds, at 70 mph, toppled trees, downed power lines and initially knocked out 76 electric substation circuits. Bartlett was struck by a tornado.

"Despite the tremendous damage to our infrastructure, all of our resources were immediately devoted to bringing power back to every single customer," said MLGW President and CEO Jerry Collins Jr. "Even before the storm hit, MLGW was at work readying for the possible devastation and the ensuing (continued inside)

MLGW Tweets To Help Customers

MLGW had sparingly used its Twitter account (twitter.com/mlgw) before a storm struck and knocked out power to about 130,000 customers on June 12. Afterwards, however, the account proved to be a timely, effective and rapid way to respond to customers who used Twitter via their laptops and cell phones to find information about the utility's restoration efforts. Many were using Twitter for the first time.

By the end of the storm, MLGW's Communications and Public Relations department sent about 3,000 personal communications via Twitter to customers; the number of Twitter followers swelled to more than 1,500, up from about 200 or so before the storm.

Here are a few comments from customers about their Twitter experience: **Mike Jones and Becky Sowell:** "I feel like I had personal contact with MLGW through Twitter."

Melanie Semore: "Whoever did the Tweeting got up to speed in a hurry and did very well navigating the whole Twitter thing. It was especially great that [MLGW President and CEO] Jerry Collins himself was on Twitter for one afternoon."

Carl B. Schultz: "I felt like I was getting the 'cutting edge' information but I was not subjected to information overload. The occasional map and screen-shot were appropriate and helpful."

Outage Preparedness

In any emergency situation, whether it's a tornado, ice storm, earthquake or flood, you need to be prepared for the possibility of temporary power outages. You should know where your gas and water shutoff valves are located, how to identify the main electric service panel and how to turn them off in the event of an emergency. You'll want to keep a crescent wrench handy for the gas meter and a cutoff tool for use with your water meter; both items can be found at area hardware stores.

MLGW highly recommends that you have an "emergency kit" in case water, electric or gas service is interrupted. An emergency survival kit could include: bottled water, canned food, prescription medicines, flashlight, radio, batteries, can opener, first-aid kit, baby food, diapers and eating utensils.

MLGW has a free brochure, "Emergency Preparedness," that is filled with ideas to help you prepare your personal survival kit, as well as much more valuable information. If you would like a copy of our Emergency Preparedness brochure, please call our Customer Care Center at 544-MLGW (6549).

Visit MLGW's Web site: www.mlgw.com