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Utilities perform poorly at fixing electric outages



Lansing Board of Water and Light foreman Brandon Johnson, left, and trimmer Jon Corrin pick up branches cut from trees around power lines on Garden Street in Lansing. Some experts say inadequate tree trimming is the cause of some of the state's electricity outages. RYAN GARZA/DFP

Keith Matheny

Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

Michigan's two largest electricity providers, DTE and Consumers Energy, are among the worst-performing utilities in the country at how long it takes them to get the lights back on after a power outage, a review of reliability data shows.

Despite that, Michiganders pay more for electricity than their neighbors around the Great Lakes.

About 700,000 DTE and Consumers Energy customers faced outages of up to five days or more following late-February ice storms, and many were then left in the dark by a second winter storm less than two weeks later. It was a familiar feeling, the fourth outage since July 2019 involving 470,000 or more DTE and/or Consumers customers that took days to restore.

Officials with the two utilities blame more severe weather happening more often in Michigan — and it is. But the data shows the utilities perform even worse compared with similar size counterparts on the duration of power outages that don't involve severe weather.

Advocate: Utilities fall short in hardening grid, enforcement lax

Amy Bandyk is executive director of the Michigan Citizens Utility Board, an organization formed in 2018 to represent ratepayer interests in utility rate cases and other matters before the state's utility regulator, the Michigan Public Service Commission. She said DTE and Consumers take longer to restore power because they aren't investing enough in hardening their electrical grid and cost-effective outage prevention measures, and state



Samer Sadqe, of Warren, checks on the small generator he is using to keep some basic electrical items going in his house. Many Michiganders were without power for days in February. MANDI WRIGHT/DETROIT FREE PRESS

Tell us your power outage story

Were you among the 700,000 DTE or Consumers Energy customers who lost power during last month's ice storm, or the subsequent snowstorm? The Free Press wants to know about your experiences. Please fill out the form at bit.ly/IceStormPower and a Free Press journalist may reach out to you.

regulators aren't forcing them to do more.

"We see that in the data, for years, Michigan has had worse power outages than neighboring states dealing with similar weather," she said. "Michigan utility customers already pay some of the highest rates in the Midwest compared to our neighbors and the country, but it doesn't address the basic problems with how our major utilities are regulated."

Michigan's residential electricity price of 17.79 cents per kilowatt hour in

December outpaced all other Great Lakes region states, 9.9% higher than the next-highest Midwestern state, Illinois.

The number of outages per year that DTE and Consumers experience is not much different from other large U.S. utilities. It's the duration of those outages where the Michigan utilities plunge toward the bottom.

For 2021, the most recent year for which the federal data from utilities is

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Who does not want to be a spy?

New exhibit to come to Knowlton Ice Museum

McKenna Golat

Port Huron Times Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

PORT HURON — An interactive spy exhibit will soon replace the long-standing ice collection at the Knowlton Ice Museum.

Organizers said the upcoming spy exhibit is being brought to Port Huron as an effort to rebrand the museum. The Community Foundation of St. Clair County, which owns the museum, wanted to expand the scope of what the museum offers. The new exhibit, titled "Top Secret: License to Spy," is the first opportunity to do so.

"We still want the museum to keep its ties to the Knowlton family and the ice collection, but the family and the Community Foundation want to use this space to do traveling exhibits," said Jackie Hanton, vice president of the Community Foundation.

The spy exhibit will be at the Knowlton Ice Museum, 317 Grand River Ave., from April 29 to Sept. 5. It will feature 20 different interactive stations throughout the museum. Hanton said the exhibit is for all ages.

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Should Port Huron sell Municipal Office Center?

Jackie Smith

Port Huron Times Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK - MICHIGAN

PORT HURON — City residents will decide the fate of the massive Municipal Office Center property during a special May 2 election.

The ballot language asks voters whether City Council members should be able to sell the multi-story structure, which is perched at 100 McMorran Blvd. on the St. Clair River, through December 2025.

A public vote is required under Port Huron's charter before the city can sell, lease, develop, or dispose of any waterfront property.

In addition to the MOC question, voters also will be asked to renew the city's public safety and parks and recreation taxes on May 2. According to the city clerk's office, 1,969 absentee ballots were first sent out on Friday, so some may be through voting in a matter of days.

All ballot language and registration information can be confirmed through Michigan.gov/vote. Learn more about requesting a local absentee ballot or

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