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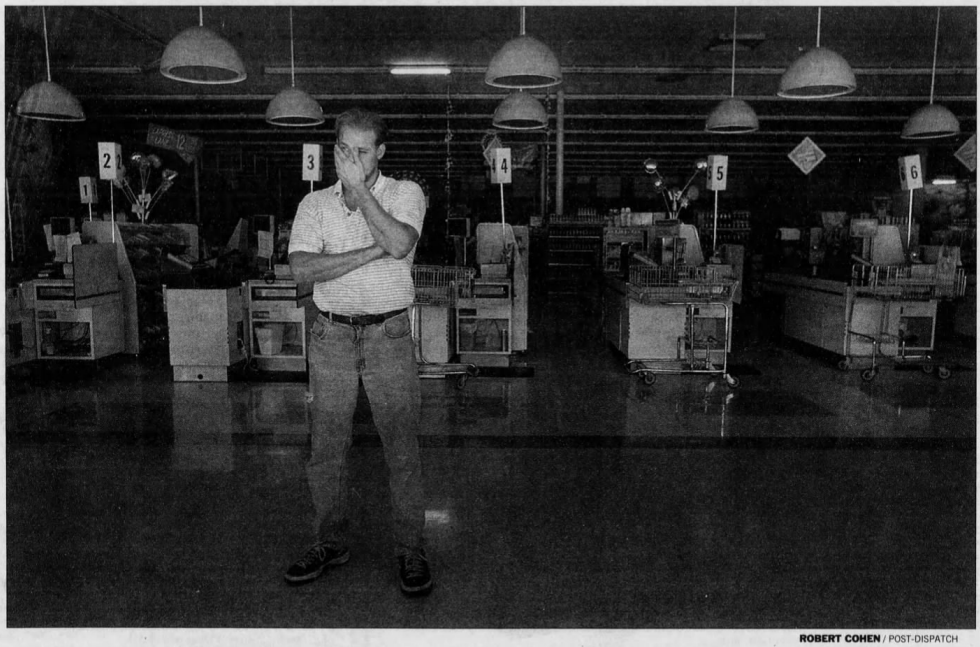
# Thousands may remain without power today after storms ripped through area



ROBERT COHEN / POST-DISPATCH

**Brady Miller, floor manager of Foodland at 1605 South Jefferson Avenue, watches as customers are turned away Friday because the power was still out after storms raked the St. Louis area Thursday night. Miller and other employees worked through the night to load meat and other perishables into a refrigerated truck.**

■ AmerenUE assigns hundreds to repair power lines as businesses and homeowners assess damage and begin cleanup.

BY VALERIE SCHREMP
*Of the Post-Dispatch*

Thousands of area residents are expected to remain without electricity today, two days after a powerful nighttime storm caused widespread damage but apparently no injuries.

About 20 percent of the area's population served by AmerenUE lost electricity after storms tore through the area Thursday night. Company officials predicted that some homes and businesses wouldn't get power restored until Sunday.

High wind downed tree branches and power lines throughout the metro area, leaving more than 185,000 AmerenUE customers without electricity at some time Thursday night. By late Friday evening, 36,000 customers still didn't have power.

At the peak of the blackout, about 52,000 customers of Illinois Power Co. also lost electricity. By Friday evening, about 2,000 remained without power.

About 400 local AmerenUE workers aided by dozens of extra workers from Illinois and Kansas City worked all day Friday to restore power.

At the Amoco station at Hampton Avenue and Interstate 40, the storms left a refrigerator of warm beer and a freezer with squishy ice cream. The electricity was out from about 9:30 p.m. Thursday until about 1 p.m. Friday.

The clerks couldn't sell gasoline because electricity powers the pumps, but anything else — even the beer and ice cream — was fair game.

Frannie Redfern was making sales the old-fashioned way — with a pen, paper and calculator. She asked customers: "Do you want a free ice cream with your cigarettes?"

Just blocks away from the gas station, orange city street department trucks rumbled through the Dogtown neighborhood past trees uprooted on lawns. Tower Grove Park looked as if it sprouted bushes overnight — felled branches from decades-old trees lay scattered in the grass.

In Caseyville, crews worked to dismantle a 150-foot-tall Wendy's sign near Interstate 64 that teetered precariously over Illinois Route 157.

In Brentwood, at the Roman Co. in the Hanley Industrial Court, pieces of the storage warehouse's roof littered the parking lot. President Lloyd Rosser told about half of his 200 employees to go home. Without electricity, nobody could use the computers, and without a secured warehouse building, nobody could go inside.

Still, workers at the costume jewelry company sat outside and displayed their wares to distributors as purchasers placed and shipped orders on cell phones.

## Storm, August 19, 2000 p1

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COVER STORY

*"We went ahead with our 10 o'clock newscast because we didn't know when it might come back on, but it turned out the only people who saw it were those who have DirecTV."*
**JEFF ALAN**, news director at KDNL, Channel 30

"We've got roofers coming, we stopped inbound freight, all the stuff you have to do," Rosser said Friday morning, glancing cheerfully at his watch. "That's not bad for 10:30."

Residents south and north in both St. Louis and St. Louis County were hit hard by the power outages. AmerenUE customers in parts of St. Charles and Jefferson counties and in the Illinois communities of Granite City, Madison, Venice and Belleville also lost power. Most outages stemmed from wind or tree branches taking down neighborhood feeder lines.

A weather spotter reported a gust of 60 miles an hour in Kirkwood, and a gust hit 58 miles an hour at Parks Airport in Cahokia. Such gusts are strong enough to topple trees or jostle mobile homes.

The Canadian wind also blew away hot and high-pressure air that had brought Thursday's temperature to a sizzling 102 degrees — a high for the year. On Friday, workers buzzed through felled trees and fixed power lines to temperatures in the upper 70s, and high temperatures in the low 80s are expected to stay until Tuesday, when the high is expected to reach 89.

Thursday night, residents told Brentwood police they saw a funnel cloud form north of Highway 40, touch down in the Brentwood Promenade parking lot and travel southwest for about three blocks. But officials at the National Weather Service who analyzed satellite pictures and inspected the site concluded that there was no funnel cloud — just high wind.

Even so, wind at the shopping center was strong enough to take a piece of metal and send it sailing at a security officer's jeep, slicing off the fender and a side-view mirror.

The security officer was a Brentwood police officer working a second job, said Brentwood Police Chief William Karabas.

"He got out of his car, then a few minutes later, 'Whap, zap.' I told him, 'You are one lucky guy. If you would have been out there, you would have been killed.' "

The storm also shut down traffic on Highway 40 (Interstate 64) near Big Bend Boulevard for at least four hours.

Winds snapped utility poles on each side of the highway, and about a dozen high-voltage lines fell across the highway. Two women in a sport utility vehicle and a man in a County Cab minivan were trapped as crews worked to free them from lines around and on their vehicles.

Thousands of cable customers on AT&T lines and about 1,200 Charter Communications customers in the Richmond Heights area lost service at some point during the night. Charter expected all customers to regain service by today; AT&T said many customers were on backup systems, leaving them with temporarily fuzzy pictures.

AT&T faced another problem: The fallen lines also carried the phone line for the company's offices on Oakland Avenue. Customers sitting home without cable TV couldn't call to report the outage. Its phone service resumed about 3 p.m.

Local TV stations experienced transmitter problems at the height of the thunder and lightning. KDNL (Channel 30) was knocked out at 9:50 p.m.

"We went ahead with our 10 o'clock newscast because we didn't know when it might come back on, but it turned out the only people who saw it were those who have DirecTV," news director Jeff Alan said. The station has a direct fiberoptic connection to the satellite service in Los Angeles.

Heavy rain and poor visibility prompted air traffic controllers at MidAmerica Airport in Mascoutah to divert an arriving Pan American Airways flight to Lambert Field. The plane, carrying some of the same passengers who had left town Wednesday morning on the airport's inaugural commercial flight, landed at Lambert at about 8:30 p.m.

When the storm and power outages forced Lambert Field to ground its departing planes and send incoming flights elsewhere, a TWA flight carrying 176 passengers from San Francisco landed instead at MidAmerica at 9:55 p.m.

The passengers stretched their legs and bought Cokes and snacks from vending machines in MidAmerica's terminal but returned to the plane before the Pan Am passengers arrived there at about 12:30 a.m. The TWA plane took off for Lambert at 2:15 a.m., arriving there at about 3 a.m., said Chris Kelly, an airline spokeswoman.

Most businesses that lined DeMun Avenue in Clayton were closed Friday; many had signs on their doors blaming the power outage.

Although Forest Park Auto sits across the street from an AmerenUE substation, the shop in the 6200 block of Clayton Avenue in Dogtown had no electricity. Alan Gold, the owner, joked about running an extension cord across the road.

At Stopwatch Maps, a data development company, the firm's manager spent about $1,600 on a generator, said office manager Marney Koblenz.

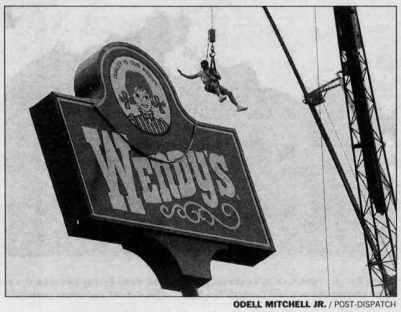
"He's out getting diesel," Koblenz said.

AmerenUE customers can call 314-342-1000 to ask when their electricity will be restored. Illinois residents should call 800-552-7583.

*Gail Pennington, William Lamb, Robert Goodrich, Terry Hillig and Chern Yeh Kwok of the Post-Dispatch contributed information for this story.*

ANDREW CUTRARO / POST-DISPATCH

**Laura Ferguson takes photographs Friday of her damaged 1998 Volvo as it sits in her driveway covered with tree limbs in the 7500 block of Westmoreland Avenue in University City. Storms Thursday night toppled trees and knocked out power to tens of thousands in the St. Louis area.**




ODELL MITCHELL JR. / POST-DISPATCH

**Earl Elliott of All Star Signs, Lighting and Electrical is lifted by crane to a damaged 150-foot-tall sign of a Wendy's restaurant near Interstate 64 in Caseyville. The teetering sign was lowered to the ground.**

**Advice for those without refrigeration**

- Perishable foods such as milk, eggs, meats and leftovers kept in the refrigerator should be disposed of or consumed within 24 hours of loss of electricity.
- Food in a freezer will stay frozen for up to three days if the freezer door is kept closed and no unfrozen items are added. If items thaw out, they should be cooked, consumed or discarded within 24 hours.
- Dry ice, if available, can be used for refrigeration.
- If possible, move any frozen or perishable food to the refrigerator of friends or family in areas that have electrical power.
- Properly dispose of unusable food in closed paper or plastic bags.
- When in doubt, throw it out.

Source: St. Louis Health Department

**postnet.com/links** Be prepared the next time severe weather comes through the region and before the electricity goes out. Find links for weather tracking, utilities companies and government agencies with safety tips.

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