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Answers sought on west-end blackout

Hydro firms to address residents' concerns

Jan 20, 2009 04:30 AM

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DALE ANNE FREED
STAFF REPORTER

West-end activist Jutta Mason and her neighbours want fast answers on last week's blackout.

She emailed MPPs on the residents' behalf and they want to be briefed, she said.

Now Cheri DiNovo, MPP Parkdale-High Park, has called a community meeting for Thursday at 7 p.m. in the Parkdale Public Library, a week after the blackout, so residents can get answers from Toronto Hydro and Hydro One. Councillor Gord Perks for Parkdale-High Park will also attend.

"Why it happened and how they plan on preventing it" are the big questions said DiNovo. "That's what the community needs to hear."

"I thought this had been resolved back in 2003," DiNovo said, referring to the August blackout that blanketed Toronto.

"One of our big interests in this meeting is how to prepare in case such a thing could happen again," said Mason, the administrator for the Centre for Local Research into Public Space, which has added a page on its website devoted to power blackouts.

As well as hearing from the hydro companies, the meeting will include "a show-and-tell" about battery packs, wind-up radios, generators and solar panels as possible backup systems should another blackout happen.

"A Buddhist workshop in the neighbourhood managed to carry on because they had a generator," Mason said.

Last Thursday night, a black pall fell over the west end when a Dufferin St. transformer station flooded, triggered by a malfunctioning valve in the sprinkler system.

"We've got to look at all levels of maintenance history," said Laura Cooke, spokesperson for Hydro One.

"We are undertaking an investigation of the events that caused this valve to open."

The malfunctioning valve is located on the Hydro One side, where the power "is brought into the system as high voltage and then is distributed to Toronto Hydro customers through a low voltage system or distribution system," Cooke explained.

Power was restored Friday night, announced by Mayor David Miller at 9:40 p.m.

"We want answers," said DiNovo. "If this was a malfunction, simply as a matter of wear and tear, shouldn't all the sprinkler systems be checked to prevent this happening? And to those who really suffered because of costs (due to lost business) is there any recompense?"

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Drains are the solution

Transformer stations are knocked out by flooding. The solution is to have adequate drains in all

transformer stations. Otherwise we remain vulnerable to further blackouts. Secondly, Hydro should have a network of power routes so that when one route fails, they can deliver power by another route. Simple!

Submitted by Bob @ Toronto at 3:23 PM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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Typical

People can complain and moan all they want, but the fact is you get what you pay for. As any engineer will tell you, redundancy, backups and proper maintenance all cost big bucks. If you want to get rid of single points of failure, have proper backups and better inspections, you'll have to get more equipment and hire more people, two things that cost money. So unless you're willing to pay more for Hydro and/or pay higher taxes, don't complain. By the way, I was affected by the blackout and didn't think it was a big deal. Only if you're disabled, an elder or own a business can you have been justifiably inconvenienced.

Submitted by SydneyCarton at 11:31 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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Single Point of Failure (SPOF)

Should a failure at one location cause such a large blackout? Should the system not be able to reroute power from another source? Are there other SPOF's in the city that we should know about? And as in a previous comment, should they not use a fire retardent system other than water that would not damage the equipment?

Submitted by mythoughts at 10:15 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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Correction for MacGegrrrr

Hydro One, whose sprinklers failed, and Toronto Hydro, whose system was affected, are both monopolies as you say. However, both are regulated by the Ontario Energy Board and neither is privately-owned. Hydro One is entirely owned by the province of Ontario, and Toronto Hydro is 100% owned by the City of Toronto. The citizens are in fact the shareholders. Whatever the the root cause of this outage, private-sector profiteering is not it.

Submitted by John Voss at 9:35 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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I somewhat agree with pcharters

though any money sent to Hydro is wasted, 50% of our hydro bills still go to "debt reduction" which is paying down previous hydro mis-management from the 80's and 90's, (Though I would be curious to see how much has been collected vs. how much has been paid down). Everyone is so intent on not being responsible for taking care of themselves, it's always someone elses responsibility to do everything for you and your family while you just sit back and bitch that everything isn't being done for you the way they think it should be being done. Power outages will always happen, buy a generator, take some ownership of your own life.

Submitted by J-Mac at 8:57 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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Overreaction? I don't think so.

23 hours with no heat or power in the middle of January? Surely it's reasonable to ask for details so that the chances of this happening again are reduced.

Submitted by tgreg at 8:35 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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Pay now, or pay later

The "cuts" perpetuated by the right wing are rearing their ugly head again. Short term thinking always yields long term cost. Look at our roadways. Ever since the "Common Sense Revolution" road maintenance was cut back. Now there are major repairs required to bring them back to acceptable 1st World standards. People should be asking questions. We're not living in 3rd world conditions yet, but if we don't ask the questions we may just grow complacent enough to accept power going down for 24 hours in the middle of a frigid winter. Perhaps this is acceptable to someone living in a remote area of Canada, but not in a big city like Toronto.

Submitted by philosopherdog at 8:17 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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Overreacting

These things happen no matter how great the infrastructure may be. We have power outages. I don't see why this requires the services of an activist or why there is so much rumbling. I live in an area that is now 10 years old and the first few years were peppered with regular blackouts - some incompetence and some growing pains. As for the reference to August of 2003 - that was a province-wide blackout. How can these two incidents be related? Good grief - the hysterics amaze me. As for taxi reimbursement - let's get a grip on things.

Submitted by forevergreen2000 at 7:57 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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How much are you willing to pay?

The answer to all the complainers is: Yes, there can be a more reliable system and it will cost money. How much are you willing to pay to have it? I have just spent a couple of thousand bucks to put in a generator system that will require a couple of hundred bucks a year to maintain. If every family in Toronto invests a similar amount in Toronto Hydro, I'll bet they can cut down on the number of outages; not eliminate, just reduce the number.

Submitted by pcharters at 7:46 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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It's obvious....

Other Hydro Utilities use foam, not water, as a fire retardant. This should have been rectified years ago!

Submitted by The Hawk at 7:20 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

[Agree](#) 3 | [Disagree](#) | [Alert a moderator](#)

lower taxes that why

Because all the right wingers who complain on the Star site want lower taxes and thats what Mel gave them. Enjoy in the dark.

Submitted by ScottD at 7:10 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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oh no....

oh no, GTA to be hit with yet another snow storm! oh no, a section of toronto went with out power! sections of canada, better yet ontario deal with these issues all the time. does it hit the paper? people living up north that have generators for just such a thing don't demand action from their MPP. come on, the world is not a perfect place, errors occur...deal with it...everyone is told to be prepared for an emergency, listen and prepare for the next time.

Submitted by sunshine07 at 7:07 AM Tuesday, January 20 2009

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