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# Blackout victims told to be patient

## Until investigation complete, hydro officials have few answers for west-end residents

Jan 23, 2009 04:30 AM

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**NICK AVELING**  
STAFF REPORTER

About 70 west-enders crammed themselves, their notebooks and their misgivings into the Parkdale Library basement last night, to find out why their neighbourhood spent almost 24 hours in the dark during last week's blackout.

Be patient, they were told by a panel of city and hydro officials. Answers are on the way.

The panel, led by Hydro One director of asset management Mike Penstone, was able to explain why the city rushed to shut down the transformer station at Bloor St. W. and Dufferin St. last Thursday night.

A valve in the fire protection system, essentially a sprinkler, said Penstone, mistakenly opened.

But what he couldn't say, at least until Hydro One's investigation is complete, is how or why that valve opened. "We regret the inconvenience," he told the crowd.

The crowd, as became evident during the meeting's question and answer period, regretted it, too.

But there was some news that everyone could agree was good: Penstone announced that Hydro One would entirely replace the station's fire protection system.

What Hydro One intends to replace it with, however, is still undecided.

The investigation, explained Hydro One spokesperson Laura Cooke earlier in the day, "is going to inform a decision about a replacement system."

That investigation will also inform decisions about what they'll do at other stations, she said.

The next step will be to submit a proposal to Toronto Hydro for its "full review and acceptance," said Cooke.

But last night, west-end residents had other concerns, too. Complaints about the city's communication efforts – including contradictory advice from Mayor David Miller and Hydro One about how to keep your pipes from freezing – were a recurring theme.

Concerns were also raised about the station's holding tanks, which are designed to collect water in the event of a leak, keeping it away from transformers.

Why, residents asked, isn't there an automatic system to alert Toronto Hydro when the tank is half-full, giving crews enough time to reach the station and assess the leak?

They received no straightforward answer.

Arne Nes, who lives near Bloor St. W. and Dufferin St. and used to be a high-voltage technician in Norway, received the night's biggest round of applause when he used his time at the microphone to raise what he said was the real issue.

He described the hydro station that was the cause of last week's blackout, which is similar to 32 others in Toronto, as a complete disaster.

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### to sydney carton

well they ARE raising the hydro rates. the excuse of no money does not wash. you either run an efficient modern hydro system or you do like in Zimbabwe. there should be people who lose their jobs over this incident.

Submitted by gonzo at 12:20 PM Friday, January 23 2009

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### further to previous

i trust that the entire cost of the sorry episode will be borne by hydro one, as it is their equipment that failed and their negligence that caused the conditions for the failure to occur. the ratepayers of toronto hydro and city taxpayers should in no way be responsible for any overtime, wages, police wages, or any other cost resulting from this completely avoidable catastrophe.

Submitted by gonzo at 12:15 PM Friday, January 23 2009

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### Another solution for alerting residents

Battery radios are still a good idea, but I think the mayor should acknowledge that many people in the city prefer more modern forms of technology. The best way to do that: Send alerts by text-message as well as radio, so people can get information about power outages on their phones.

Submitted by kisekileia at 12:10 PM Friday, January 23 2009

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### i was there

the position of hydro one (old Ontario Hydro) is a complete and utter disgrace. having a water line in proximity to electrical equipment is the equivalent of using your hair-dryer in the shower. anyone with any brains knows that hydro and water do not mix, but not Hydro One! the gentleman from norway said that this system is not what would be used in a first-world country. i agree! furthermore the crews responding did not have light until 3 in the morning (apparently the electric company does not have generators!! let alone battery backups) and it took 90 minutes from initial incident for response from hydro (no watchman let alone alarm monitor - this is not rocket science here!!) for all of these reasons, hydro one's performance is completely unacceptable and is in fact outrageous negligence of duty and responsibility to the community.

Submitted by gonzo at 12:00 PM Friday, January 23 2009

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### Broken water pipes

I was at the meeting and two people said they now have thousands of dollars in expenses due to frozen broken pipes from their water system and heating system.How many others are there?

Submitted by LD at 11:07 AM Friday, January 23 2009

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### Money is the issue

Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland (cold northern countries like Canada) all have top notch infrastructure. Why? Because they can afford it. How? They can afford it because they have higher taxes. I'm not saying we should raise our taxes, or not, but what really irks me is how people want their cake and eat it to. In fact, sometimes it seems the anti tax crowd are the ones who complain the most. Everybody wants to have top infrastructure, but nobody wants to pay for it. You can be part of the anti tax crowd or the complaining crowd, but you can't be part of both.

Submitted by SydneyCarton at 9:57 AM Friday, January 23 2009

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### Toronto

Only in Toronto would the mayor tell people to buy battery radios instead of telling them he was going to upgrade a deteriorating power system. Apparently he is more interested in the tax from the radios than he is in the safety of the residents.

Submitted by jlane at 9:04 AM Friday, January 23 2009

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### Only in Canada

Unfortunately, in many respects we are a backward country. As far as how the TTC was designed - there is no plan B, or how are Hydro lines /grids are designed . Something goes bad, we all suffer. Toronto is still contemplating about a direct train-line to the airport. Most world cities built one after WW2. How slowly changes and decisions made in City Hall - no wonder only criminals immigrate here, who walk away with a slap on the wrist for murder. Just think about it - we have a Parliament on autopilot for more than a month . No one is complaining. Canada - a really strange place!

Submitted by samm at 6:21 AM Friday, January 23 2009

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