

Winter preparedness not mandatory at Texas power plants and generators, despite 2011 report



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AUSTIN (KXAN) — While millions of Texans endure another day in the dark and cold, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) has been taking the heat. However, there are new questions about steps private power generators could have taken to prevent outages caused, in part, by their frozen equipment and infrastructure.

ERCOT is the body that manages the state's power grid, balancing supply and demand — but for that supply, they rely on natural gas, coal, nuclear facilities and even wind energy producers.

[ERCOT: Power outages meant to save Texas from longer-lasting 'cascading, catastrophic blackout'](#)



So far, ERCOT reported 46,000 megawatts out on the system and 185 tripped generators, since the storm rolled in Sunday.

Equipment locking up and taking down power plants, entire natural gas infrastructure systems, starting at the well heads, being frozen, and even ice grinding wind turbine blades to a halt — these conditions echo the ones described in a report following a large winter storm in 2011.

- [To read the full report, click here](#)

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the North American Electric Reliability Corporation found Texas power generators were “reactive as opposed to being proactive in their approach to winterization and preparedness.”

“The lack of any state, regional or Reliability Standards that directly require generators to perform winterization left winter-readiness dependent on plant or corporate choices,” the report read.

FERC and NERC made industry recommendations to prevent these types of outages from happening again, and as the standard-setting bodies for the industry, these guidelines became best practices for power generators.

[‘System-wide failure’: Energy expert says outages could have been prevented — at a cost](#)



However, Dr. Dave Tuttle, research associate in the Energy Institute at University of Texas at Austin, noted that’s all they are — best practices, but not requirements or laws.

“The point is there’s a lot of these plants around the world in colder regions, and the technology is there. It’s a matter of: do they get deployed in our region given how seldom we have these events,” he said.

“Those are not mandatory.”

It’s up to the individual generators to spare the cost and take steps to winterize their equipment. While they must submit winterization plans to the Public Utility Commission of Texas, there are no specific measures that must be taken across the industry.

ERCOT said they do voluntary “spot-checks” for around a sixth of the state’s generators to make sure they are following best practices. This past year, those checks happened virtually instead of on-site because of the pandemic. Ultimately, the council is not in charge of keeping power generators up to speed.

In a press call on Wednesday, ERCOT’s Senior Director of System Operations Dan Woodfin said, “they have financial incentives to stay online, but there’s no regulation at this point.”

[What went wrong? Energy expert weighs in on Texas energy crisis](#)



He and ERCOT president and CEO Bill Magness both emphasized that their primary goal at this point was to balance the state’s supply and demand, in order to get power back to Texas residents.

“Right now, the way we can best serve Texans is getting the load in balance,” Magness said. “If folks want to look at how ERCOT is run and who runs it, obviously that is part of the investigation into how we do things in the future. I mean, all of those things are on the table.”

In addition to calls for state investigations into the power crisis during this storm, this week FERC and NERC also announced a joint inquiry into what happened across the southern and mid-western parts of the country, in order to “identify problems with the bulk power system” and how to move forward.

When the ice melts, Tuttle says there will a reckoning on how the industry handles winter weather preparations — and needs to be.

[Texas Gov. Greg Abbott declares investigation, calls for resignations at ERCOT after mass power outages during freeze](#)



“Because this is going to happen again,” he said. “It may be a few years. It may be another decade.”

Still, he thinks small changes in requirements, even “tweaks” in policy at the local, state and federal level could have a big impact.

“People don’t want to hear that a little bit of extra money — and it will be millions of dollars — could have been invested because we have millions of people hurting from this. They don’t want to hear that we didn’t invest or it doesn’t happen that often. They just want to get the lights back on.”