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● Officials blame system failure  
on Niagara Mohawk power grid

● Shutdown creates cascading effect  
across Ontario, northeastern U.S.

● Millions stranded as airports  
closed, traffic in chaos

# Day of the blackout



As motorists faced yet another Toronto intersection without working signals yesterday afternoon, a good samaritan (centre) directs traffic at University Avenue and Front Street.

PATTI GOWER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## Toronto emergency plan is triggered by Lastman

BY MARINA JIMENEZ  
AND MICHAEL VALPY

An unprecedented power outage paralyzed much of Ontario, New York and parts of the northeastern United States yesterday, stranding millions of commuters as airports were closed, offices emptied and elevators and subways ground to a halt.

New York, Toronto, Ottawa and other major cities were in chaos, with traffic-clogged streets and frustrated workers driven from stifling offices. Volunteers with whistles directed traffic in the sweltering heat, while bystanders rushed to buy batteries, flashlights and pressed radios to their ears. The outage also caused enormous disruptions in the media, knocking television stations off the air and forcing newspapers to scramble to produce today's editions. Motorists were unable to refuel as gas stations were forced to close.

Amid fears New York was once again the target of a terror attack, officials were quick to blame a power system failure at the Niagara Mohawk power grid in the Niagara region on the U.S. side.

"The first thing that everyone should do is understand that there is no evidence of any terrorism whatsoever," Michael Bloomberg, New York mayor, said.

Officials in Ontario expected the power to be restored slowly but surely over the next 24 hours. Officials with Hydro One urged residents to minimize their use of power, turn air conditioners off and to expect periodic outages throughout the next several days.

The shutdown caused a cascading effect, as parts of Ontario and Quebec are on the same power grid as the northeastern region of the United States. Blackouts extended as far north as Timmins and North Bay, and west to Windsor.

Six airports closed, including those in Ottawa, Toronto, Newark, Cleveland, and New York's J.F. Kennedy and La Guardia. At Pearson International Airport in Toronto, some passengers who had just landed were stuck on the runway, unable to disembark from the stiflingly hot plane.

In the U.S., cities stretching from Newark and Rhode Island to Cleveland and Detroit were affected. Thousands of people streamed into the streets of lower Manhattan after the blackout in a scene reminiscent of the first hour after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

For some, even those far from Manhattan, the similarities were frightening.

"I was in the office building," said Dean Petrovich, 33, a property tax consultant in Toronto. "I just walked down 20 flights - I didn't want to be in any building."

In Toronto, Mel Lastman triggered Toronto's emergency plan, shortly after the power went out at 4:15 p.m. The public transit system in the country's largest commuter city shut down, and the streets were filled with frustrated pedestrians trying to hail cabs, and lining up at public phone booths as

many cell phones were not working. Subway trains stopped where they were when the electricity disappeared, some in stations, others in the blackness of unlit tunnels.

Toronto's major hospitals were without electricity for only about half an hour before their emergency generators took over. But as the outage stretched into the night, worry grew that the generators might run out of diesel fuel before power was restored.

"The buses kept running, but only until their fuel ran out. They need electricity to be refuelled," said Lynn Hilborn, deputy general manager of the Toronto Transit Commission.

British tourists Nigel and Paula Gyte from Darbyshire, England, found themselves and their three children stuck in the CN Tower's rotating restaurant.

The family spent 40 minutes waiting before an auxiliary power source got the elevators going again.

CN staff said the power outage was the first in 24 years.

The lights were on at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, thanks to an oil-powered back-up generator in the basement.

By suppertime, there were lines forming at the check-in desk, which was offering rooms for \$99 to commuters, and a group had gathered around the lobby piano.

The 1,365-room landmark also was offering tired travellers something that was hard to come by last night - a breeze.

"We are one of the few luxury hotels with windows that open," hotel spokeswoman Melanie Coates said.

Ms. Coates said the lights were not on in guestrooms, but several parties were going ahead as planned in the lighted common areas of the hotel and room service was offering cold dinners to guests.

The crisis brought out many Good Samaritans in Toronto, with motorists handing volunteer traffic directors bottles of water and cyclists giving refreshments to police officers. "People seem nicer somehow. There is a sense of bonding in an emergency," said Tim Lund-Pedersen, 32, who planned to walk home.

With reports from Elizabeth Church, Leah McLaren and Alanna Mitchell

## It hit us, too

You will quickly notice that today's Globe and Mail is a highly unusual edition. Our production schedule was badly disrupted shortly after 4 p.m. (EDT) yesterday by the major power failure in Ontario and parts of the northeastern United States. These circumstances compelled us to produce a truncated version of the paper, with Report on Business and Sports folded into the front section. We apologize because some of your favourite features, including stock listings, are missing. For the story of how we put out today's paper, please see inside. For continuing coverage of the blackout story, please visit [globeandmail.com](http://globeandmail.com).

## New Yorkers unfazed by power cut

BY ROBERT MacLEOD, NEW YORK

In a city already scarred by the catastrophic events of 9/11, New Yorkers managed to maintain an uneasy sense of resignation by the power blackout that gripped their city yesterday.

"Nothing like this has ever happened in Texas," Steve Shaw, a visiting telephone business man from Lewisville, Tex., dryly noted. "This is a crazy enough town even when the lights are working."

Mr. Shaw was speaking as he waited to be rescued from a stranded elevator near the 14th floor of the Massive Marriott Marquis hotel, situated in the heart of Times Square.

He and I were trying to get to ground level to assess the extent of the blackout firsthand when the elevator abruptly halted.

About 20 minutes after a service man with the hotel tracked down his location the elevator doors were pried open and we were free to join the hundreds of other guests, bemusedly trudging down to the ground level through the stairwell.

Times Square is usually lit up like a Christmas tree but it was uncommonly muted with all the power shut off. That did not deter the pedestrian traffic, as thousands of people clogged the sidewalks, gawking to try to figure out what was going on.

Everywhere people were trying — mostly unsuccessfully — to make cellphone calls.

People were also lined up three deep or more at every public payphone, in temperatures of 35.

Stores chased customers outside and people who were lucky enough grabbed choice seats at darkened outside cafes.

# Massive failure highlights system's fragility

BY JANET McFARLAND,  
RICHARD BLOOM  
and SHOWWEI CHU, TORONTO

Eastern North America was knocked back to the 19th century yesterday by the new 21st-century realities of power supply.

The cascading failure of electricity grids highlighted the fragility of a system that has become increasingly interlinked, experts said.

Officials said they could not explain the cause of the failure, but it spread quickly through a cross-border power grid that has become as intertwined as the World Wide Web.

Conflicting early reports suggested the problem might have started at a power plant in New York State, and spread from there. Ontario imports power directly from New York State through a major power connection between grids on both sides of the border.

New York State Governor George Pataki yesterday blamed a system failure for the widespread outage. He told reporters that to his knowledge, the outage started in New York City and spread, creating a cascading power blackout.

"We had this happen back in the sixties. It wasn't supposed to happen again, and it did happen again."

Nonetheless, he said the system had worked in the sense that power had tripped out without damaging hydroelectric plants.

Critics have been calling for breakers to be installed throughout North America's grids for some time, only to be told by the grid operators that there is no money to fund such a massive infrastructure overhaul, an energy analyst said.

William Lacey, who covers the power industry for First Energy in Calgary, said he wasn't surprised by the widespread outage because North American energy markets have become so closely linked.

"That's one of the quandaries

[observers] have had, that they're all connected and when one goes down, you have this whole cascading effect that runs through the entire grid," Mr. Lacey said.

Paul Choudhury, manager of system control at B.C. Transmission Corp., which manages the transmission system for the province, said if there is an outage on a grid system, a transmission line can be disconnected from the network. But the remaining lines have to carry the same amount of power, and they can overload.

He said there is equipment in place that monitors the amount of electricity going through the lines. If they get overloaded, they're

taken out of service to protect the remaining transmission lines so they don't burn down. This can repeat itself, and the result is a cascading shutdown.

"One element at a time will become overloaded and has to be taken out of service, and it just cascades, and finally you've got no connection between your generator and your city," he said.

It can take three to eight hours to restore power, Mr. Choudhury said, because the lines have to be restored one piece at a time to ensure safety. And they have to arrange for power to be delivered to them.

Yesterday's failure was not the

first of its kind. On Aug. 11, 1996 — almost exactly seven years ago — a squirrel found its way into a grid on the U.S. West Coast and knocked out power in nine states and parts of Mexico.

In 1965, a power outage involving Ontario and New York was caused by a line tripping out in Canada on the border between Canada and the United States.



\$1 including tax  
in metro areas.  
Price may be  
higher outside.