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Building maintenance

Will you be ready when the lights go out?



By Bernadette Braman

The integrity of the electrical grid has been a topic of discussion and debate for many years, and the bottom line to all of the discussion comes down to a question of not IF but WHEN we will experience a major and extended power outage. Will it be a terrorist attack on our infrastructure? Mother Nature reminding us who is really in charge? Or simply an internal breakdown of the grid's infrastructure during a summer heat wave?

Without getting into conspiracy theories, it is my opinion that there are two major factors that will affect the likelihood of the power going out for extended periods of time in the Northeast region in the future: the combination of severe weather and the age and condition of the grid. When these two factors combine, extended outages are the likely outcome. Will you be prepared?

Statistics show that the number of significant power outages has risen from 76 in 2007 to 307 in 2011. Think back to 1998 when over 3.5 million people were affected by blackouts that hit Northeastern North America when transmission towers were destroyed by ice. In 2000-2001, the Western U.S. energy crisis hit California, causing rolling blackouts and cutting power to 55 million people lasting over 12 months. And a lot closer to home, who can forget the 2013 winter storm NEMO knocking out power to 655,000+ in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut alone and some for a week or more?

While you may not have noticed, the average number of days in New England with temperatures exceeding 90 degrees has doubled over the past 45 years and with global warming, the frequency of severe storms is predicted to increase. Precipitation increases of about 10 percent are expected by the end of the century with mainly winter precipitations rising fastest in the form of rain as the average winter temperature is on the rise.

In a study conducted by Generac Power Systems, the average number of hours without power in Massachusetts over the past three years was 65.4 hours, and while these hours were not all concurrent, that is quite a few days without

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power in any given year. Who can afford for the power to be out that many hours per year? Certainly not businesses – the study went on to provide average losses to businesses during a day without power:

- The average restaurant loses \$8,640 per day.
- The average retailer loses \$123,300 per day.
- The average gas station loses \$10,000 per day.
- The average professional building loses \$3,200 per day.

Depending upon the complexity of the generator installation, one day without backup power would pay for the project. With an average number of hours without power each year at 65.4 in Massachusetts, which is greater than an average work week, perhaps it is time to consider protecting your business with a backup generator.

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Backup generators are not just a good investment for business owners. The National Association of Home Builders' Remodeling Market Index indicates that installing a backup generator in your home has a 67.5 percent return on your investment. With an estimated cost of \$11,742, there is a resale value of \$7,922 – better returns than a home office remodel.

Now is the time to be thinking of preparing for power outages, despite the nice weather and the calm of the spring. Don't be caught in the dark WHEN the power goes out. **CPB**

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