

# Austin Energy February Storm Briefing: Event Overview and Communications



March 8, 2021

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# Unprecedented Winter Weather Event in Texas Strains Electric Grid

February 11-21

Sidney Jackson

Deputy General Manager and Chief Operating Officer



# 100-Year Storm Event



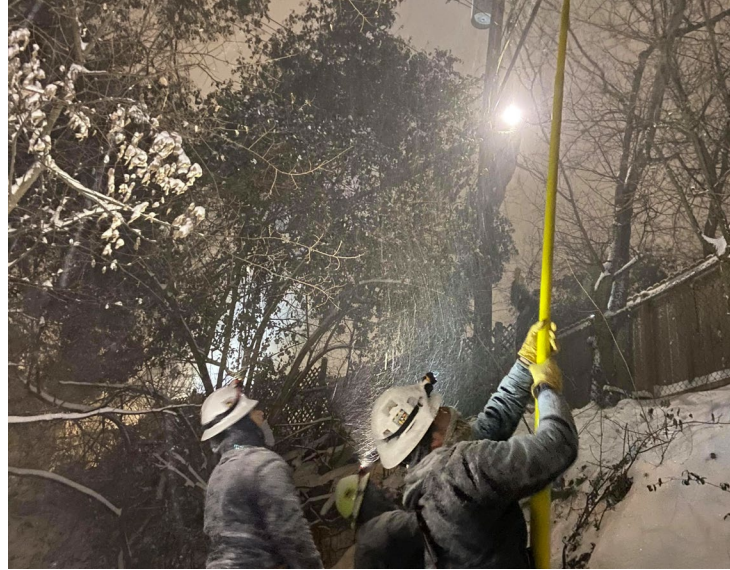


# Emergency Preparedness and Response



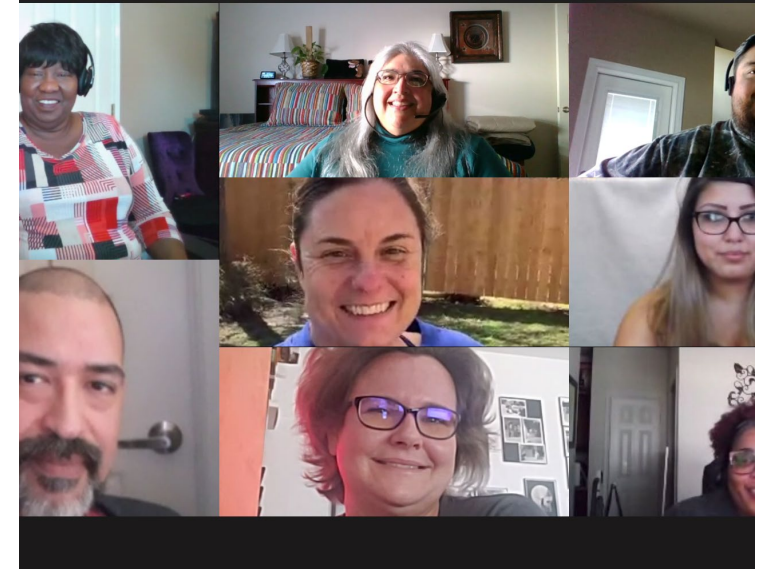
## Incident Command

Austin Energy's Incident Command has been operational since COVID-19 and pivoted to winter storm mode for this event. Crews were sequestered during the event.



## Distribution Crews

Dozens of distribution crews were sequestered and worked through ice and snow to restore power.



## Customer Care

The Utility Contact Center fielded thousands of calls during the winter storm. They were able to provide information to customers and help them with questions regarding outages.





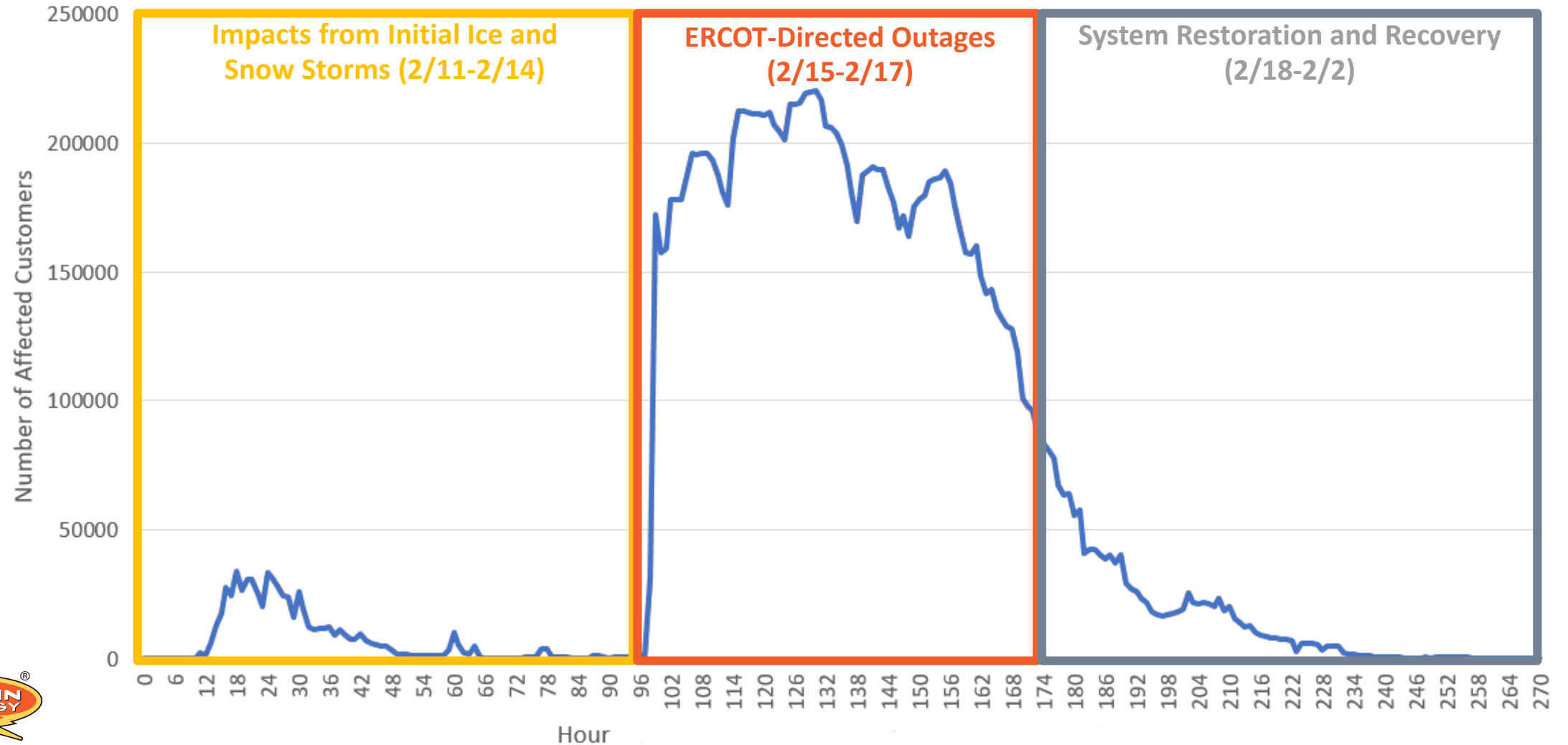
# Vegetation Impact to Power Lines

- Polar Vortex event combined with multiple winter ice, snow and windstorms that crossed the area Feb. 11-18
- Ice accumulation increased during the events and weighed down limbs and overhanging power lines.
- Falling trees, falling limbs and tree contact occurred during the entire period from Feb 11-18. This resulted in damage to active feeders and just-restored feeders as well as feeders out for load shed.
- Frozen lines and vegetation created hazardous working conditions and contributed to increased restoration times

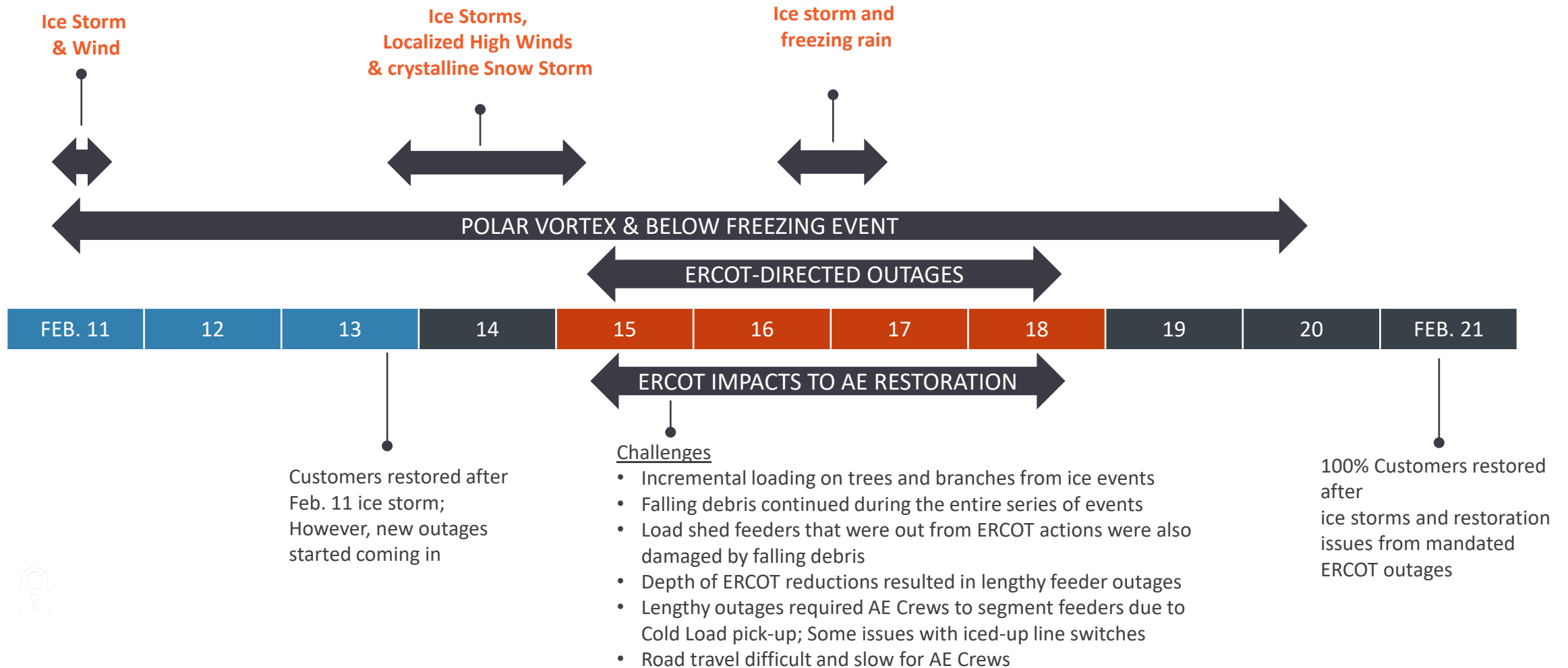


# Phases of Extreme Winter Weather Event

2021 February Ice Storm: Affected Customers vs. Time  
02/11 00:00 - 02/22 06:00

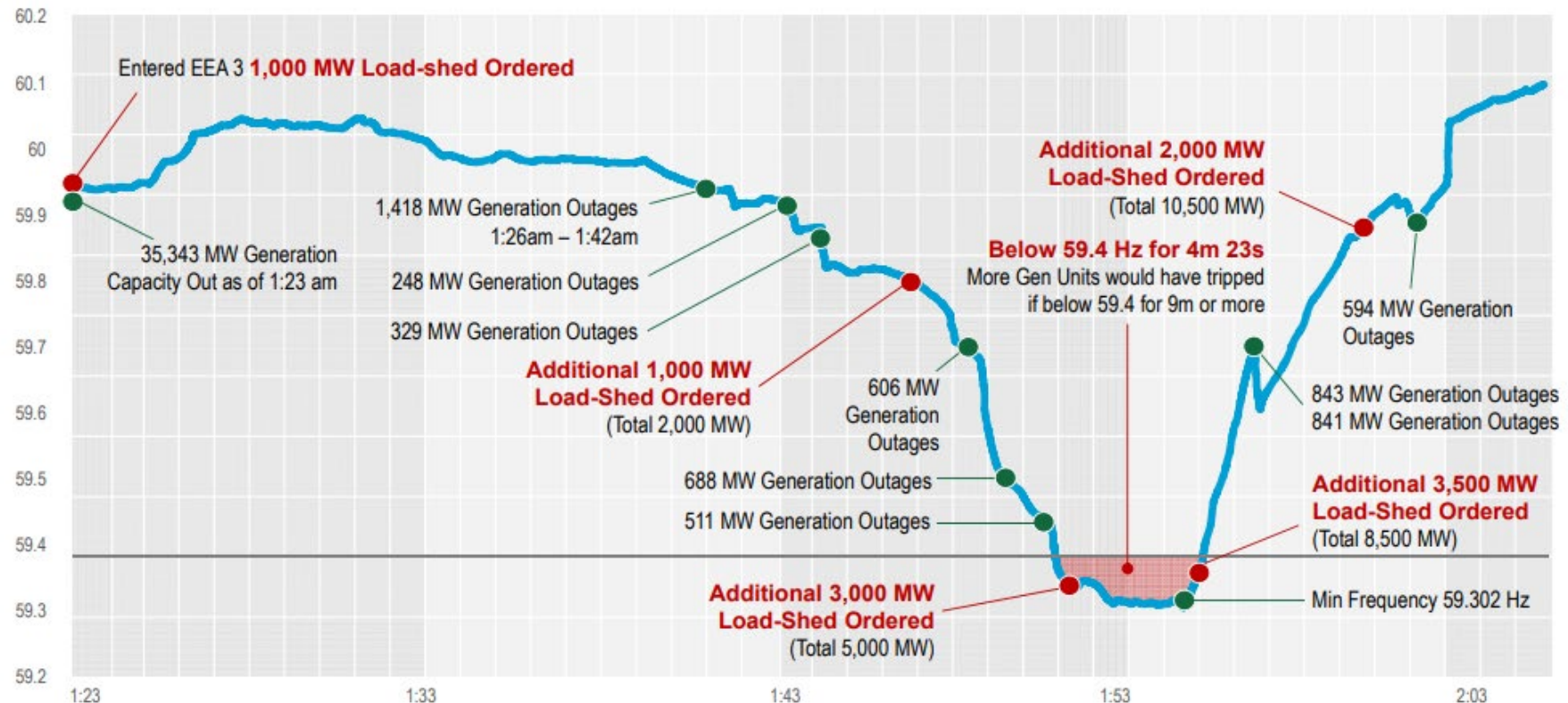


# Overall Event Timeline (February 11-21)



# Rapid Escalation of ERCOT Emergency on February 15

## Rapid Decrease in Generation Causes Frequency Drop



PUBLIC



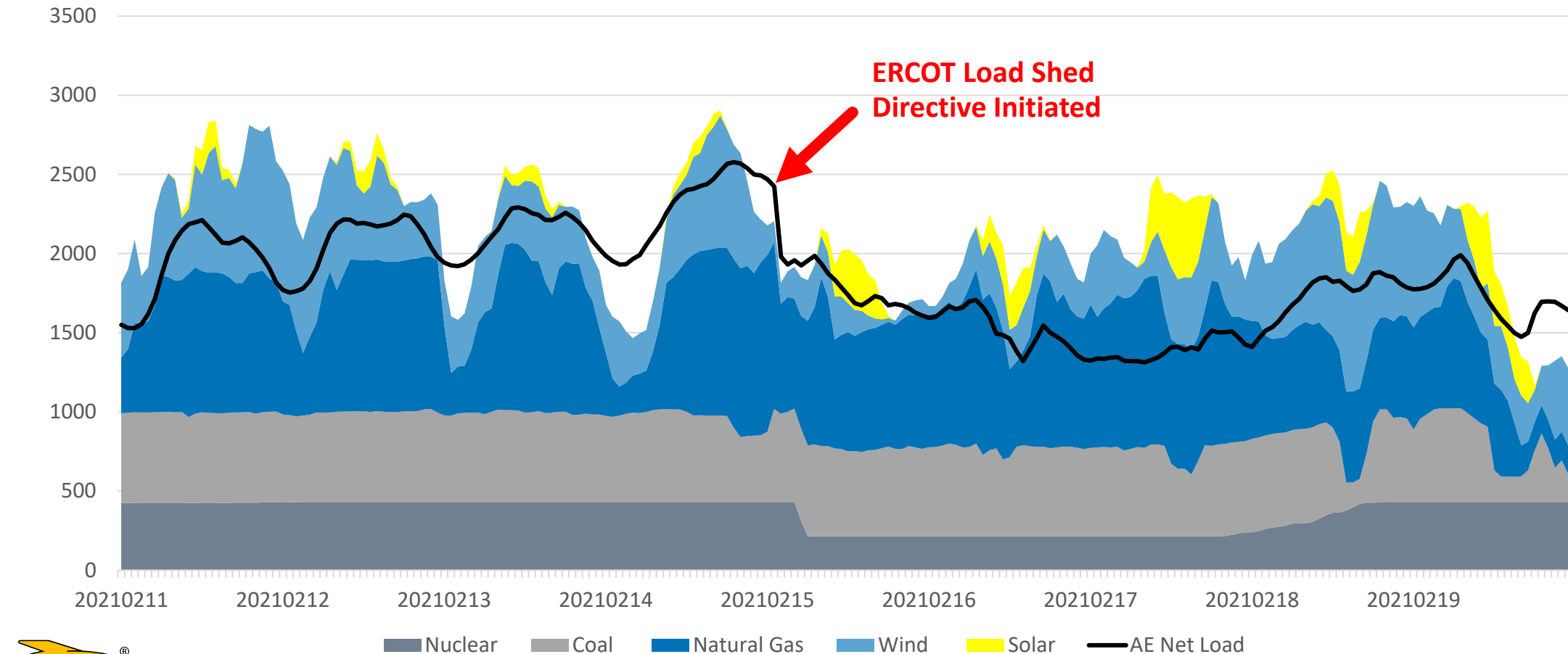
12

Source: ERCOT Board Presentation (February 24, 2021)



# Austin Energy's Diverse Generation Resource Portfolio Performed Well

Supply by Fuel Source versus Austin Energy Load



# Outage Reporting is Important to our Customers

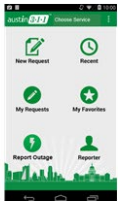
## Report Outage



Call Center/  
ADMS WebCC



2-way Text/  
Storm Center



311 App

AE Website



Total Customers with Power:  
**57.02%**

Active Outages:  
**154**

Total Affected Customers:  
**220,259**

Number of Hazards  
**0**

Last Updated:  
Feb 16 2021, 9:52 AM  
Information updated every 10 minutes.

Report Outage

Check Status

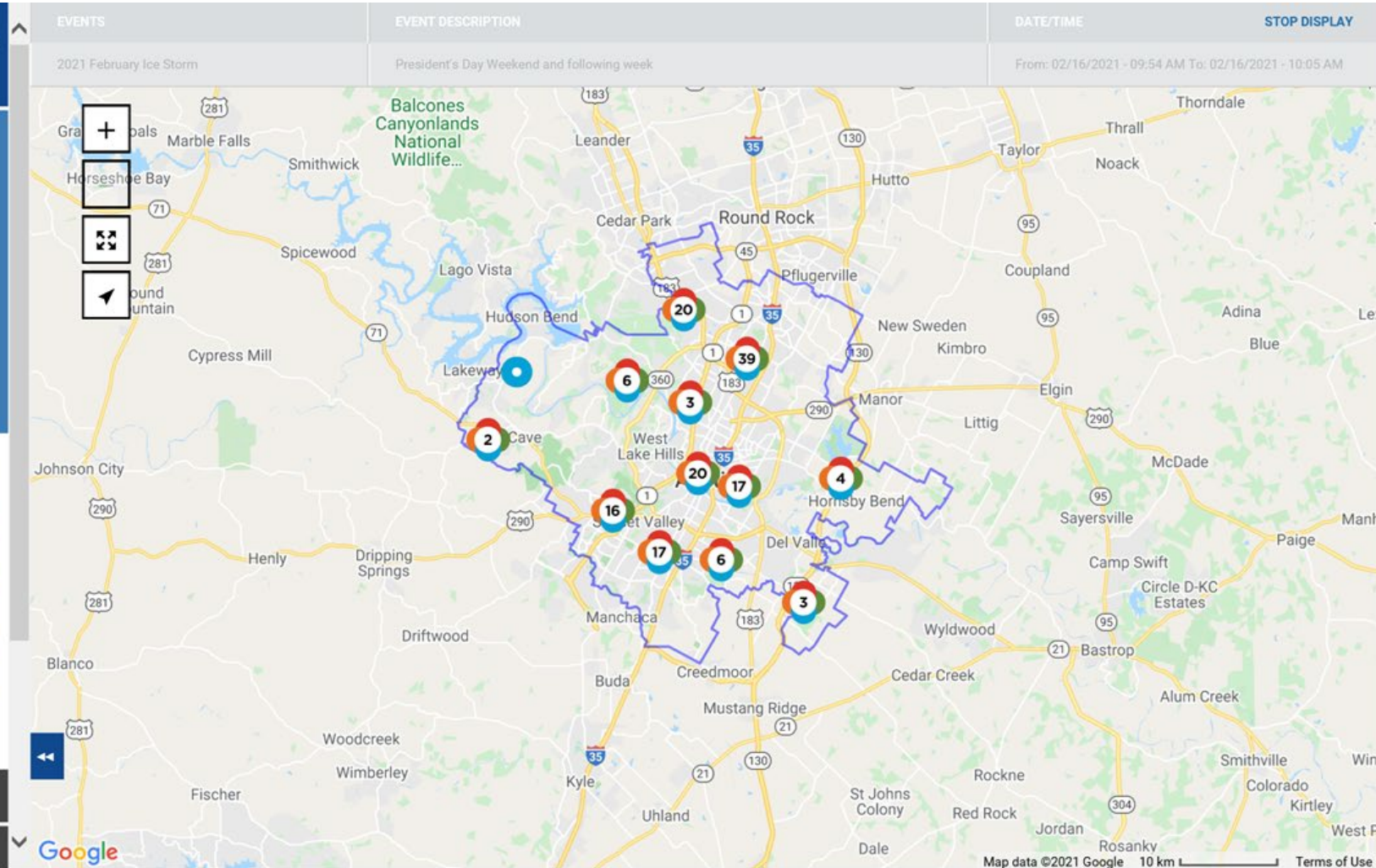
Get Alerts

More Information



Map Tools

Summary



# Internal Review Efforts

- **After Action Review:** Assessing what worked well and what did not work well leading up to, during, and after event with input from Austin Energy staff who supported our preparation and response
- **Recommendations for Improvement:** Identification of lessons learned and accompanying process improvements, policy changes, and other recommendations for implementation prior to the upcoming summer and winter seasons when ERCOT demand is highest
- **Stakeholder Input:** We will be seeking input from policymakers, customers, and other external stakeholders to help complete the above actions.





# Austin Energy Communications

Marissa Monroy  
Director of Communications



# Winter Storm Communications: Feb. 11-12

*Key messages: Incoming ice storm, energy conservation, outage preparation*

- Provided live media interviews on nearly every local morning news program to discuss incoming storm, energy conservation and outage preparation
- Responded to numerous media inquiries about incoming storm
- Shared social media messaging across multiple platforms
- Website updates



# Winter Storm Communications: Feb. 11 - 12

## Austin Energy prepared for extreme cold weather; tips for customers to stay warm

February 11, 2021

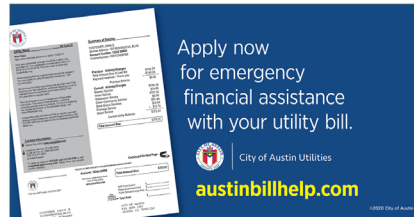
Austin Energy is prepared for extreme weather events all year long. With severe cold and possible snow and ice headed to our service area, the utility is ready to respond in the event of power outages. The utility supplies safe, affordable, reliable power to our customers every day, but power outages do occasionally happen. One out of three outages in our area are caused by vegetation and weather. During windy and stormy weather, heavy ice and snow can cause tree limbs to break and sway, rubbing against or hitting power lines. This can cause service fluctuations and widespread outages.

Restoring power is more than just flipping a switch. You may see line workers, forestry crews and trucks in your neighborhood, but employees throughout the utility are also working 24/7 to safely restore power. Our first priority is to keep our crews and customers safe so be aware that weather and other hazards may slow down the power restoration process.

We encourage Austin Energy customers to be prepared for power outages by signing up for our text Outage Alerts and checking our mobile-friendly outage map at [outagemap.austinenenergy.com](http://outagemap.austinenenergy.com). Customers can also report outages at 512-322-6100.

Other ways customers can be prepared and stay safe during a winter storm:

- Keep cellphones charged and backup chargers fully charged.
- If working or learning at home, save your work periodically and make sure your devices are on power strips. Using a power strip helps protect electronic device in case of a power outage. Consider using external power sources for your electronics.
- Assemble a storm preparation kit with flashlights, fresh batteries, snacks, water, and other necessities. Make sure everyone in your home knows where to find it.
- Keep your refrigerator and freezer doors closed, if possible. Food will stay good up to four hours.
- Do not drive over or go near a downed power line, it could be energized. Call 311 if you see a downed line to report it. If the line is sparking, call 911.



## News release: Feb. 11, 2021



\*\*en español abajo\*\*

With icy conditions blanketing our area today, please be prepared for possible outages due to the weather.

📱 Register for Text Outage Alerts: [austinenenergy.com/go/alerts](http://austinenenergy.com/go/alerts)

🗺️ Bookmark our Storm Center Outage Map: [bit.ly/ATXoutage](http://bit.ly/ATXoutage)

🔋 Keep your cellphone charged

###

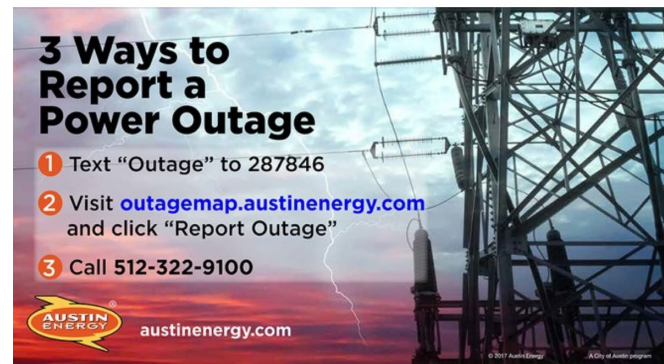
Con las condiciones heladas que cubren nuestra área hoy, esté preparado para posibles apagones debido al clima.

📱 Regístrese para recibir alertas de interrupciones por texto:

[austinenenergy.com/go/alerts](http://austinenenergy.com/go/alerts)

🗺️ Marque nuestro mapa de apagones: [bit.ly/ATXoutage](http://bit.ly/ATXoutage)

🔋 Mantenga su teléfono cargado



## Social media: Feb. 11, 2021

## Austin Energy warns customers to prepare for power outages amid ice storm



by CBS Austin | Adela Uchida | Jordan Bontke | Thursday, February 11th 2021

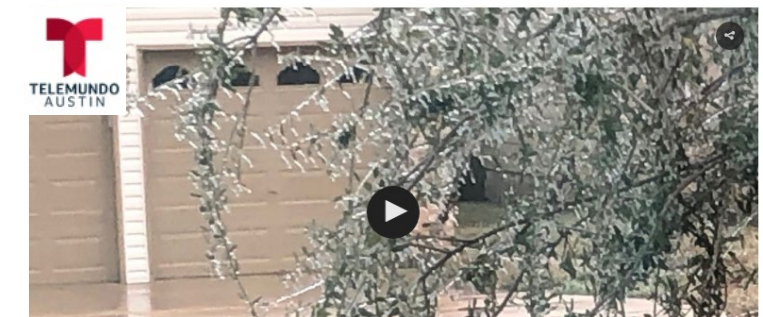


Icy conditions are expected to lead to power outages (Photo: CBS Austin)

## Media interview: Feb. 11, 2021

## Austin Energy advierte clientes se preparen para cortes de energía en medio de tormenta

by Telemundo Austin | Thursday, February 11th 2021



## Media interview: Feb. 11, 2021





# Winter Storm Communications: Feb. 13-14

*Key Messages: outage restoration, incoming winter storm, outage preparation, energy conservation*

- Facilitated virtual news conference and media Q&A - Feb. 13 and 14
- Provided Mayor & Council with communication about key messaging
- Emailed COA utility customers about energy conservation
- Emailed NewsFlash to Key Accounts customers to encourage conservation
- Messaging to 311 and City of Austin Utilities Call Center staff about conservation and preparation



# Winter Storm Communications: Feb. 13 - 14



Austin Energy's COO Sidney Jackson media availability on Feb. 13, 2021

Media Q&A: Feb. 13, 2021



Austin Energy

February 13 · 🌐

#SafetySaturday: Weather Round 2.

Winter Storm Warnings and Watches are in effect for our area today through Monday morning. Make sure you're prepared in case of outages.

- ✅ Review the supplies you have on hand
- 🔦 Have flashlights + extra batteries
- 🍲 Have enough nonperishable food/water
- 📱 Keep your cellphone + backup chargers juiced up

With energy use expected to peak due to the cold, help do your part by keeping your thermostat at 68° or lower. Here are other energy-saving tips during the winter: [austinenenergy.com/go/winter](https://austinenenergy.com/go/winter)

Remember, you can monitor outages at [outagemap.austinenenergy.com](https://outagemap.austinenenergy.com)



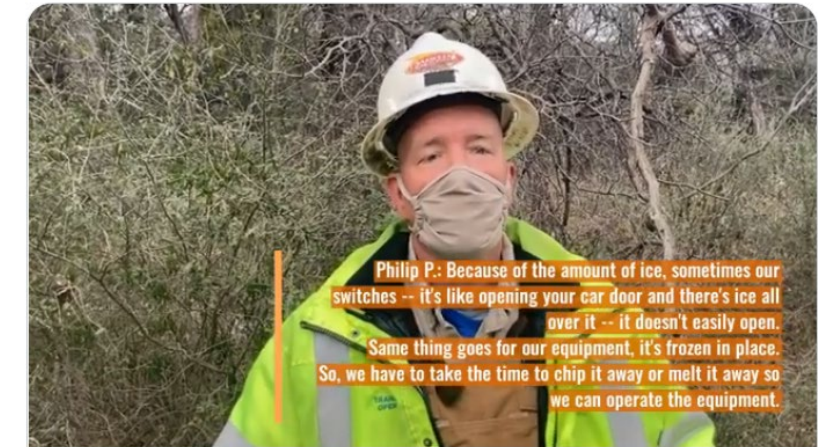
Social media: Feb. 13, 2021

...



Austin Energy @austinenenergy · Feb 14

Our crews are used to working in 100° weather, but this ❄️ ice and snow are on another level. Bad weather conditions + icy roads slows everything down. As the winter storm continues, check outages at [outagemap.austinenenergy.com](https://outagemap.austinenenergy.com)



Austin Energy field crews talk about working February ice storm  
Our crews are familiar with working in 100° weather, but this ❄️ ice and snow are on another level. Bad weather conditions and icy roads are ...  
[youtube.com](https://youtube.com)

🗨 15

🔄 28

❤ 89

📤

Social media: Feb. 14, 2021

# Communications: Energy Emergency Alert, Feb. 15

## EEA 1 – 12:15 a.m.

- News release
- Updated websites
- Sent NewsFlash
- Shared social media messaging
- Communicated update to HSEM, CPIO, Austin Water and 311

## EEA 2 – 1:07 a.m.

- News release
- Updated websites
- Sent NewsFlash
- Shared social media messaging
- Communicated update to HSEM, CPIO, Austin Water and 311

## EEA 3 – 1:23 a.m.

- News release
- Updated websites
- Sent NewsFlash
- Shared social media messaging
- Communicated update to HSEM, CPIO, Austin Water and 311
- **Email to Mayor and Council**
- **Warn Central Texas alert (English & Spanish)**

*All communication completed within 30 minutes of ERCOT issuing EEAs.*



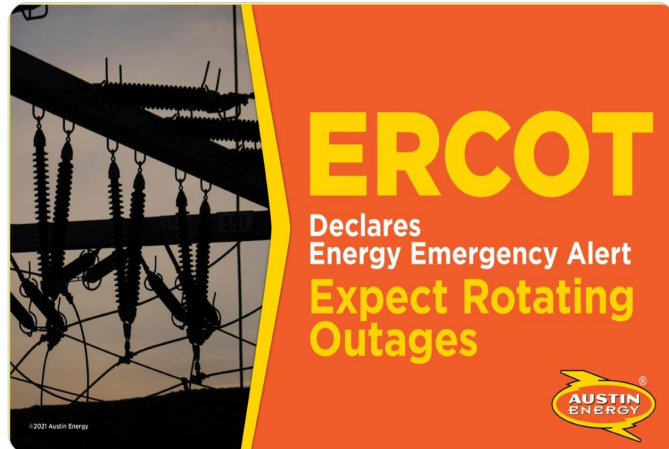


# Communications – Energy Emergency Alert, Feb. 15



⚠ Rotating outages are starting! ⚠

ERCOT has declared an Energy Emergency Alert (EEA) Level 3. Austin Energy, along with utilities across the state, have been instructed to begin rotating outages because there is not enough power available to keep up with consumer demand.



1:25 AM · Feb 15, 2021 · Twitter Web App

*Social media: Feb. 15, 2021*



Due to record electric demand, Texas electric grid operator is directing rotating outages to protect electric grid reliability.

Outages typically 40 mins or less. Length and frequency depend on severity of event. Prepare for possible power interruptions due to mandated rotating outages.

Para el mensaje completo, haga clic en el enlace. Debido a una demanda eléctrica récord, el operador de la red eléctrica de Texas... <https://evb.gg/n#1vzdddfnlc>

*Warn Central Texas Message:  
Feb. 15, 2021*

## Austin Energy prepared for extreme weather and continued restoration efforts

February 14, 2021

Austin Energy knows being without power is a big deal. When you rely on something as much as electricity, it can be unnerving when your power goes out. So, what should you do?

- Find more information about Austin Energy's current outages on the [Austin Energy Outage Map](#) and enter your address into the search bar at the top of the page.
- Customers with questions about their outage status, or who want to report an outage, can call 512-322-9100.

Austin Energy knows our customers are counting on us to restore power during extreme weather events like the winter storm we're currently experiencing. As of Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021, at 11 a.m., fewer than 200 customers are without power with four remaining active outages. At our peak, we had almost 50,000 customers without power. Since last Thursday, the average amount of time customers were without power was about three hours.

Thank you to Austin Energy customers for your patience as our crews work around the clock to ensure everyone's power is restored. Although most Austin Energy customers have power restored right now, we are still seeing outages occur because of ice accumulation on trees. It's important to know this is an ongoing event and outages may continue due to current conditions or worsen as additional severe weather moves into the area.

For customers experiencing longer outages, lights, electronics and thermostats left on prior to the issue can overload a circuit when the power is restored. This is called cold load pickup and may cause a second outage on that circuit. You and your neighbors can help us avoid cold load pickup by:

- Lowering your thermostat.
- Turning off or unplugging any fixtures or appliances.

*Website Updates: Feb. 14 and Feb. 15, 2021*

# Communications: Feb. 15 -21

*Key Messages: extended outages, ongoing winter storm, conservation, critical load circuits, billing, scam awareness, and more*

- News releases
- Daily news conferences with Austin-Travis County leadership
- Media requests
- 500+ social media messages about key messages and responding to individual questions
- Memos and email updates to Mayor & Council for inclusion in emails and social media
- Email to Key accounts about conservation and outages
- Website updates about winter conditions, conservation, controlled outages and restoration efforts
- Outage map updates with controlled outage information and banner alerts



# Communications: Feb. 15 -21

## UPDATE: What you need to know about Austin Energy's outage situation

February 15, 2021

### Why Some Customers Have Power

Because Austin Energy was mandated by ERCOT to shed so much load to help reduce demand, non-critical load circuits are without power. The parts of our service area experiencing outages are based on the status of the circuit they're on. Areas with power likely share a circuit with a critical load circuit. Critical load circuits include hospitals, control centers, 911, the airport and water/wastewater plants and are not subject to outages.

### Why We Can't Rotate Outages

The large amount of electricity demand we've had to reduce has impacted our ability to rotate outages among customers and some of our customers have been without power since early Monday morning. In normal emergencies, we rotate outages throughout our service area. Unfortunately, we are unable to rotate outages at this time because there are no other available non-critical load circuits to put into outage rotation. The bottom line is that electric load must be reduced statewide in order to fully restore service across the ERCOT grid, and Austin Energy is following ERCOT's direction.

### Record Energy Use Across Texas

This emergency stems from the ongoing, prolonged and widespread frigid weather occurring across the state. This is causing the state-wide electric system — managed by ERCOT — to be strained by high demand and low operating reserves. Operating reserves are low when the capacity of available resources, such as power plants, only slightly exceeds anticipated customer demand across the ERCOT system.

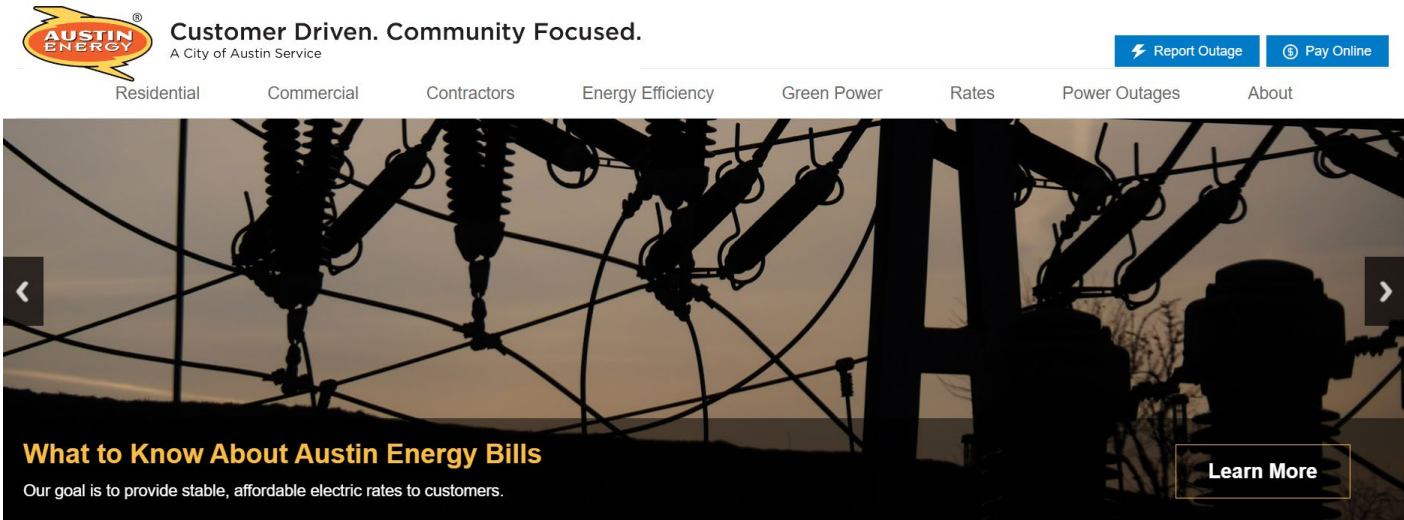
An emergency can also be caused by a sudden drop in generation, due to one or more sudden and unplanned power plant outages caused by extreme weather such as a severe freeze.

### When Power Will be Restored

ERCOT has stated outages may last through tomorrow afternoon. ERCOT will let utilities, including Austin Energy, know when we can start restoring power to customers. We will follow their guidance and will operate safely to restore as many customers as we can, being mindful of outage duration.

However, this is an ongoing weather emergency. The ice and road conditions are still a factor and the safety of our crews and customers is top of mind.

### Cold Load Pickup



*AustinEnergy.com Website*

*AustinEnergy.com Website*

## ⚠️ Restoration Efforts



## City of Austin Utilities Online Customer Care

Austin Water has lifted the boil water notice for all customers. Customers can return to regular water use. Find the latest information at [austinwater.org](https://austinwater.org).

Austin Energy has restored the majority of the outages related to this past week's winter storm. If you experience an outage, please report it to **512-322-9100** or [via the Outage Map](#).

Austin Energy is evaluating the financial effects of the emergency situation. The electric utility works to provide stable, affordable rates to customers, and Austin Energy customers should not expect to see massive electric bills as a result of this winter storm event. [Read the full release](#).



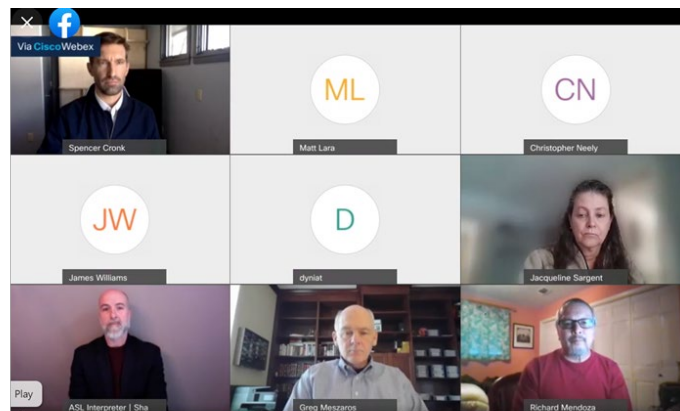
COAUtilities.com webpage



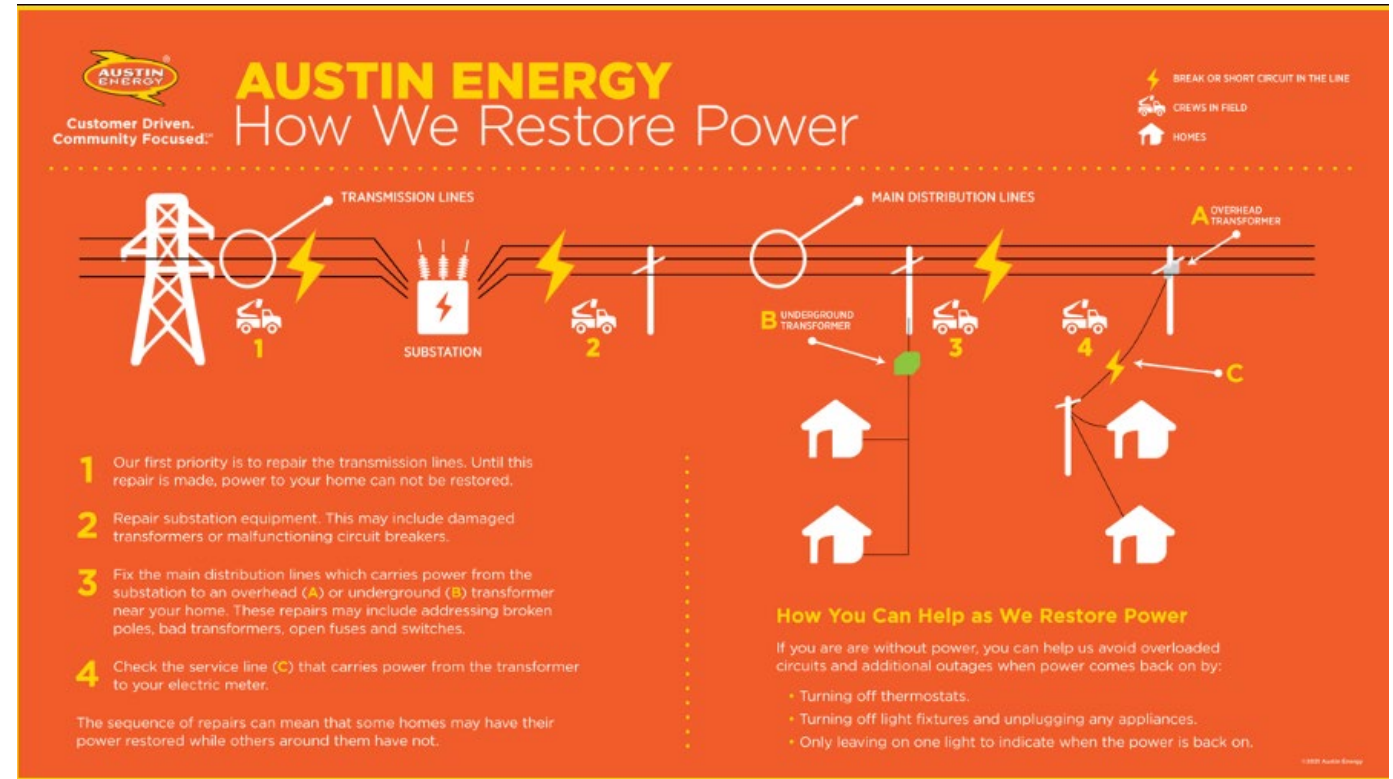
# Communications: Feb. 15 -21



*Social media: Feb. 18, 2021*



*City of Austin News Conference*



*Infographic shared on social media, Feb. 21, 2021*



# Communications: Mayor & Council



**Customer Driven.  
Community Focused.™**

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members  
**CC:** Spencer Cronk, City Manager  
**FROM:** Jackie A. Sargent, General Manager  
**DATE:** February 14, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** Austin Energy's Restoration / Electric Grid Emergency Proc



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members  
**CC:** Spencer Cronk, City Manager  
**FROM:** Jackie A. Sargent, General Manager  
**DATE:** February 15, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** ERCOT Grid Emergency

This memo provides an update about ongoing weather conditions and prepare our system, and crews are working as quickly as possible.

As of noon Sunday, February 14, more than 12 power. We continue to work existing outages and 12 vegetation management crews in working day and night in sub-freezing temperatures. Please keep them in your thoughts. Energy Control Center staff and other personnel that our system is stable and responses are being made.

The Austin-Travis County area is experiencing power outages. Although most customers have power restored, some are experiencing power outages. Most storms are discrete events that pass through. What we are currently experiencing with repeated outages often affecting the same area or worsen as additional severe weather conditions can cause frozen power lines and trees causing outages. We continue to move forward with tree pruning in preparation for future storms.

Below are photos showing our restoration crews as they move through thick ice and snow.

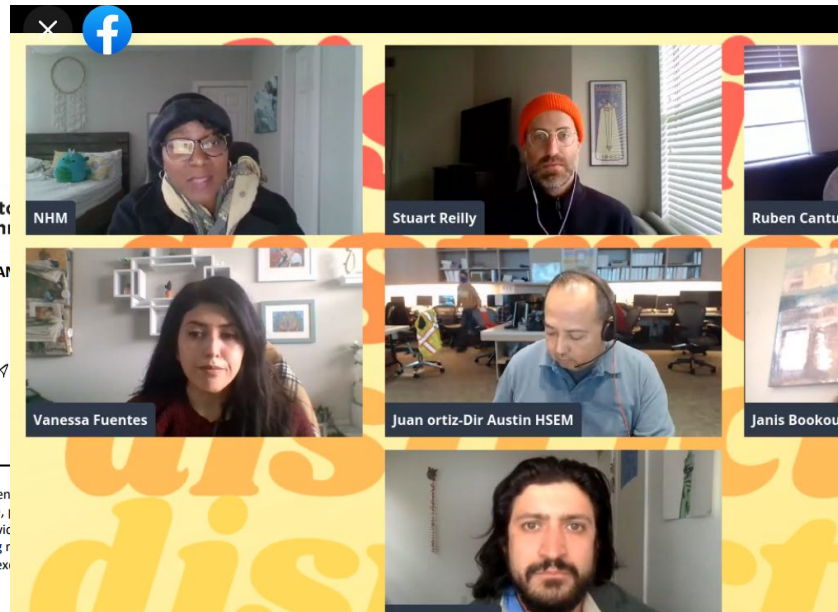
The purpose of this memo is to inform you of the emergency. This emergency stems from the extreme weather conditions occurring across the state. This is causing the state-wide electric grid to experience low or inadequate operating reserves. Operating reserves are the available resources, such as power plants, that can be called upon to meet the required amount.

Early this morning, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) declared an Energy Emergency Alert (EEA) Level 1. This was the first time in over 10 years that ERCOT has declared an EEA. By declaring an EEA Level 1, ERCOT is asking utilities across the grid to begin rotating outages to shed load due to a lack of power available to keep up with customer demand.

Rotating outages are typically short-term interruptions of electrical service implemented by utilities when it is necessary for ERCOT to reduce demand on the system. As is Austin Energy's standard procedure, leading up to the event, we communicated that rotating outages could be coming and they are typically limited to 10 to 40 minutes at a time — but may last longer depending on the severity of the event.

While Austin Energy, like other utilities, had anticipated the possibility of rotating outages due to weather conditions, we had not expected the immense strain on the electric grid that would require such a massive load shedding event. In addition, the large quantity of load shed ERCOT required of utilities increased rapidly.

As Austin Energy began deploying rotating outages, the amount of ERCOT-required load shed rapidly reached Austin Energy's maximum capability. Many electric circuits in our service area contain critical loads, such as hospitals and emergency responders, which rotating outages avoid. This means that only circuits available for rotating outages are those without critical loads. Because the quantity of ERCOT's load shed was so extraordinary, its requirements took up every non-critical electric circuit available. This is why the outages were not rotated. There are no remaining circuits to rotate the load.



Good afternoon Mayor and Council Members,

Austin Energy staff and crews continue to work towards safely providing full power restoration for all customers. In order to assist with some of the questions offices are receiving, here are some updates and information that may be helpful for you to use in your updates, or other messaging, to residents.

## CUSTOMER BILLING UPDATE:

Reports regarding potential bill spikes for non-Austin Energy customers are circulating and we want to make sure our customers have the most accurate information.

Our rates are fixed and must be authorized by Austin City Council.

Residential customers are billed for their actual energy usage at the current rate. Anyone without power during this time period had no electric use recorded during outage events.

We don't yet know the full financial impact of the winter storm, but it may affect the Power Supply Adjustment, which covers fuel costs for power plants, cost to provide power, dollar for dollar. When we have a better understanding of the financial effects of this event, we will go to the Austin City Council with any necessary recommendations to reduce the impact of this emergency on our customers.

Full Statement: <https://austinenrg.com/ae/about/news/news-releases/2021/austin-energy-customers-should-not-expect-to-see-massive-electric-bills-as-result-of-winter-storm>

## POWER RESTORATION EFFORTS CONTINUE:

Austin Energy has made outstanding progress on getting households back online. As of 4 p.m. today, we have fewer than 2,000 households without power and more than 99.6% of customers have power.

Of those still without power, we have become aware of issues hampering our efforts to bring the power back on for some apartment complexes. One of the main issues is cold load pickup at these buildings. When the power is turned back on, if the demand for energy is high, it can cause a circuit to trip again.

We're advising apartment residents and management without power to please:

- Turn off high-energy use items.
- Don't rapidly heat your home, set it at 68 or even lower.



**Council Member Alison Alter @ALTERforATX · Feb 20**

My office has received concerns about exorbitant Austin Energy bills. @austinenrg sent out the press release linked below assuring customers that they should NOT expect to see massive electric bills as result of winter storm.

## Austin Energy customers should not expect to see massive electric bills as result of winter storm

Austin Energy provides stable, affordable electric rates to all its customers. We are aware of media reports regarding potential massive electric bills for non-Austin Energy customers and want to stress to our customers that Austin Energy will not benefit financially in any way from this winter storm event.

The customers impacted by major bill spikes are seeing electric rates controlled by variable price billing and are therefore vulnerable to sudden price swings from the wholesale energy market, both increases and decreases. In contrast, Austin Energy's base rates are fixed and any changes must be authorized by Austin City Council.

AE customers will not see massive electric bills from winter storm

📧 mailchi.mp

## Council Member Pool

Dear Friends,

We continue to face an **unprecedented winter disaster** here in Austin, and I'm here to provide additional information on warming centers, important advisories, and additional resources in this dire situation.

**My team has put together a [winter weather emergency resource guide](https://tinyurl.com/D7coldweather), which is available [here](https://tinyurl.com/D7coldweather): <https://tinyurl.com/D7coldweather>. We will periodically update the guide as new information becomes available. Please check back often for updates, and share this with family, friends, and neighbors.**



# Customer Care

Kerry Overton

Deputy General Manager and Chief Customer Officer



# COA Utility Bills

- Austin Energy customers are charged only for the power consumed
  - Existing rates were approved in the November 2020 rate tariff
- AE and AW are working together on rate relief & billing adjustments
- Recent Council Action:
  - February 25:
    - Suspension of all COA utility late fees
- Upcoming Items for Council Consideration:
  - March 4
    - Waiver of \$20 service initiation fee for impacted residential customers
    - \$10 bill credit for residential customers
    - \$10 M (\$5M from each AE & AW) for Plus 1 Emergency Financial Assistance Program





# Where can customers go to get help?

- For Customer Assistance Online or via phone:

- [www.austinbillhelp.com](http://www.austinbillhelp.com) or call (512) 765-9721
- [www.COAUtilities.com](http://www.COAUtilities.com) or call (512) 494-9400



- For Customer Assistance in Person:

- North Austin Utility Customer Service Center  
8716 Research Blvd. Ste # 115



# Austin Energy is Actively Engaged in Policy Discussion and Regulatory Compliance Activities

Tammy Cooper

Vice President of Regulatory Affairs and Corporate Communications



# Austin Energy is Actively Engaging with Oversight Bodies





**Customer Driven.  
Community Focused.<sup>SM</sup>**

