

Editorial

Power Outage Shows Need For System Improvements

Someone once compared living in New York City to being a houseguest in the home of an elderly aunt who last redecorated during the second Eisenhower presidential administration (1956-1960). Residents of Long Island City, Hunters Point, Astoria, Woodside and Sunnyside could be excused for feeling themselves still further back in time last week when problems with the power grid that supplies these five neighborhoods had more than 40,000 households and businesses trying to function with reduced power—and in many cases, with no power at all.

Early on Monday July 17, Consolidated Edison asked its customers in these areas not to use appliances such as washers, dryers, air conditioners and other energy-intensive equipment and to turn off lights and televisions when not needed until feeder cable problems were resolved. Under normal circumstances, this would not have been an unreasonable request, but last week's heat wave was hardly normal circumstances. With temperatures soaring into the high 90s, air conditioning was not only a convenience, but in many cases a grim necessity. Even during daytime, many businesses must keep the lights on in order to function, as is also true of many homes. Many caregivers for young children, the elderly or infirm, of which there are many in Northwest Queens, must use washers and dryers several times a day. For many people,

the television is their only means of keeping in touch with news, including instructions from the city Office of Emergency Management. There is no way these appliances could be considered nonessential.

Northwest Queens businesses were hit even harder by the power failure. Shortly before 1 p.m. on Wednesday, July 19, Con Ed asked all its business customers in the five affected neighborhoods to immediately discontinue their use of all electric service. We do not know how many establishments complied, but we are acquainted with several that had shut their doors even before Con Ed made its request. They closed because low or nonexistent power had wreaked havoc on refrigeration and storage facilities, turned out their lights and rendered staying open a fruitless endeavor.

At this stage, it is impossible to tell how much money businesses will have lost through the closings and spoilage. We do know there were few that could afford to rent auxiliary generators at a going rate of \$10,000 a week. It is reasonable to surmise that the local economy has suffered a serious blow. The area isn't down for the count, but business proprietors and residents alike are reeling.

Consolidated Edison released a statement on Thursday afternoon that noted that damage to equipment in the area was severe and extensive. We're sure the utility is working as hard

as it can not only to restore power, but also to ensure as far as is humanly possible that this kind of catastrophe does not happen again, and we urge Con Ed immediately to take whatever steps are necessary to restore and keep electricity coming to all the affected homes and businesses. With all the generating facilities to which Northwestern Queens plays host, it does not seem to us unreasonable that continuing, adequate power can be supplied to the neighborhoods that are literally at the doorsteps of the plants that supply 60 percent of all the energy that New York City uses.

What's more, we must not let this happen again. It is completely unreasonable to expect any part of the United States to operate in such an archaic manner. The greatest nation on earth must keep the lights on. Con Ed should have had a better infrastructure and contingency plan in place.

Finally, we should have known how extensive the problem was much sooner than we did. Emergency response teams such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the city Office of Emergency Management and the various commissioners of the other relevant agencies could have alleviated the misery unduly visited upon thousands of people sooner, had they been made aware of the urgency of the situation. In the future, anything less than a more immediate response is unforgivable.

Power Outage Gave Rise To Heroes

Last week was one of the roughest experiences on record for many of our readers. As if soaring temperatures and humidity high enough to make it feel as if every breath were drawn through a wet cloth, Queens was hit with a power outage in many respects worse than the multi-state blackout of August 2003. Some 150,000 people had no or very little power for the better part of a week. Convenience stores, delicatessens, food stores and restaurants lost millions of dol-

lars in spoiled food that had to be thrown away. Other businesses lost customers when they were forced to close early or could not open at all; their employees lost wages as well.

This grim picture had some surprising, but still welcome, bright spots. Police and firefighters maintained public safety. Unlike the case with other blackouts in this city's history, there were no reports of looting or property destruction in the five neighborhoods afflicted most severely by the

power outage. Despite all the manholes exploding and candles burning in homes with no power, we heard no reports of homes, businesses or other property being destroyed by fire. Emergency Medical Services units took the infirm and elderly to hospitals quickly, efficiently and without incident. The men and women of the Sanitation Department performed the necessary but unheralded task of collecting and disposing of the tons of trash and garbage that accu-

mulates at curbside every day—a vital city function in any season, but especially so in a heat wave.

We're sure there are many more stories of unheralded heroism that have yet to surface, but for right now, we'll stay with saluting the army of city workers and civil servants who once again demonstrated their willingness to go far beyond their job descriptions to keep the rest of us safe and in rightful possession of our worldly goods. We're proud of them.

Sue Con Ed!

To The Editor:

I think that it's wonderful for Con Ed to pay \$350 to homeowners for their spoiled food and \$7,000 to food stores and restaurants for their spoilage. How about the "Mom and Pop" stores that were forced to stay closed? I hope it's true that a class action suit is being organized.

Renold Damiani
Bellerose

Events Dismay Her

To The Editor:

Usually I share feelings of elation and optimism when I write and share my views with the *Gazette* readers. However today, unfortunately, I must express my dismay as I comment upon three events that occurred this week.

Firstly, how appalled I was when I read in the pages of the July 19 issue of the *Gazette* that the governor vetoed the bill which would have extended Access-A-Ride five miles into Nassau County. I cannot understand the governor's reasoning for vetoing the bill. Senior citizens and disabled members of our population have the right to move and travel freely, to visit doctors, hospitals, visit family and even work outside the NYC area. This is a discriminatory and capricious act to deny the Access-A-Ride population their rights of mobility. It is wrong to compromise the health, safety and rights of movement and mobility of these very important segments of the population. Access-A-Ride users are not charity cases, and they are voters and taxpayers.

I am also dismayed about the electrical situation in Astoria. Astoria is the home of

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