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## **New ERCOT Report: Clean Energy Performs in Extreme Cold While Fossil Fuel Plants Fail**

*Poorly Maintained, Obsolete Plants are Unreliable in Extreme Weather Conditions*

AUSTIN, TX – On January 6, 2014, low temperatures caused multiple coal and gas-burning power plants across the state to malfunction and stop producing electricity, or to produce a lot less electricity than the grid was counting on. Altogether, over 3000 MW of fossil-fuel generation experienced weather-related malfunctions, creating an electric capacity crunch on the main Texas grid. Texas wind power and demand response resources, on the other hand, performed just as expected and enabled ERCOT to stabilize the grid, illustrating that clean energy and energy efficiency performs reliably and as predicted even in extreme weather events.

[Newly released information from ERCOT](#), the Texas grid operator, [provides detailed information about the plant shutdowns for the first time](#). The data was withheld from the public for 60 days for market confidentiality.

The ERCOT report shows that [the largest single plant to go down](#) was the Sandy Creek plant, a new coal-fired power plant partly owned by the Lower Colorado River Authority. The 900 MW plant failed due to frozen instrumentation under the extreme cold temperatures. Luminant Generating Company's Big Brown and Oak Grove coal plants and NRG's W.A. Parish coal-fired plant all were taken offline by equipment failures--adding up to nearly 1300 MW of lost generation. Units at Luminant's 40-year old Monticello and Martin Lake coal-fired plants had to curtail production multiple times during the emergency to avoid violating modern pollution control limits, causing losses of between 50 and 170 MWs each time.

**“This new report from ERCOT shows that clean energy solutions, especially clean, cheap Texas wind and demand response performed as expected and under pressure, whereas numerous coal-fired and gas-fired power plants across the state couldn't handle the January cold snap,”** said Al Armendariz, senior campaign representative with Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign. “Coal and gas generators aren't maintaining their plants, and even with new plants like Sandy Creek and Oak Grove, these companies must

not be willing to do the basic engineering to insulate pipes and weatherize equipment to keep their plants from freezing. ERCOT indicates in their report that they are investigating the reliability problems with the plants, and we hope that the generators are held accountable for their failures.”

In late 2013, ERCOT fined Luminant \$750,000 for failures to meet reliability requirements during the February 2011 cold snap that resulted in brownouts for some parts of Texas. The February 2011 cold snap was colder than the January 2014 event, suggesting that generators should have been prepared for even lower temperatures.

“We have all the electric capacity we need, but it doesn’t do Texans any good if more than 10% of our plants go down in August heat or January cold. Today’s new ERCOT report makes it clear that coal and gas generators aren’t doing enough to maintain reliable generation and should be held accountable,” remarked Cyrus Reed of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club. **“We should be investing in proven technologies like demand response and energy efficiency that ensure the reliability of the Texas grid, while saving ratepayers money and protecting our clean air.”**

In contrast to both older and new coal-fired generation, ERCOT’s demand response programs performed reliably, contributing 1700 megawatts (MW) of capacity to the grid during this time. Seventeen hundred megawatts is almost twice the capacity of the new Sandy Creek coal-fired power plant, or approximately enough electricity saved to power 340,000 homes during this period of peak demand.

One of the coal-burning units at CPS Energy’s JT Deely power plant also failed; CPS Energy has developed a plan to retire the coal-burning units at the Deely plant and replace them with local solar power projects built and maintained by local workers. Analysts predict that the proposal, once fully implemented, will create hundreds of jobs and generate hundreds of millions of dollars in local economic impact.

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