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The Failure of Fossil Fuels

LEARNING FROM
WINTER STORM URI



BY TY GORMAN, Beyond Coal Campaign Kansas Representative

One year has passed since Winter Storm Uri plunged Kansas and much of the United States into a blistering deep freeze. The storm resulted in rolling blackouts and skyrocketing utility bills, ending the gas industry's myth that its product is both reliable and affordable. "Natural" methane gas is actually a fossil fuel that is exacerbating climate change and turns out its price is highly volatile. [Sierra Club released a report on Winter Storm Uri](#) that focuses on the human impact of the winter storm, why it happened, and what people like you can do to help move us toward a sustainable energy future to prevent last February's catastrophe from happening again.

"Natural" methane gas proved to be unreliable during the winter storm. Operating the electric grid requires constant forecasting about available electric generation from wind farms, solar panels, nuclear reactors, coal plants, and gas plants. Wind met or exceeded its forecasts during the winter freeze last year in the Southwest Power Pool, the grid operator for all of Kansas and many of our neighboring states. Meanwhile, gas only delivered about 45 percent of the energy it would have under normal conditions.

“Natural” methane gas is not cheap. The massive failure of gas infrastructure saw supply dwindle as demand went up due to the extreme cold. Competition for gas during this time, including demand to heat homes and gas to burn at electric power plants, means prices skyrocketed because of the scarce supply. As a result, state regulators approved a plan that will have Kansas Gas Service customers paying as much as \$840 over the next ten years for the gas they used over the course of a week. Meanwhile, investigations are ongoing at the state and federal level into market manipulation by the gas industry during the storm.

Electrifying our state means we can remove the threat of unreliable and expensive gas in our lives. **We need to shift toward a smart, resilient grid that invests in energy efficiency, energy storage, transmission, and renewable energy in order to prevent another Winter Storm Uri catastrophe.** As we move toward electrifying everything, Sierra Club’s report on the freeze offers this path forward, for which we’ll need your active participation.

- **Increase Energy Efficiency**, to allow the same amount of electricity to go further;
- **Implement Demand Response**, to intelligently shift when and where electricity is used;
- **Protect and Improve the Grid**, to create a smarter energy system, ensure existing power generation can coexist with clean and distributed energy sources, and ensure that localized issues (such as outages due to extreme weather events) don’t spread across the entire grid;
- **Increase Access to Clean Energy**, to ensure that all communities can enjoy its benefits;
- **Foster More Public Input**, to guarantee that individuals and communities (not just utilities and large corporations) have a voice in any and all regulatory decisions; and
- **Learn from Past Mistakes**, so that the lessons learned from Winter Storm Uri—as well as from past extreme weather events like those in 2011 and 1989—are used to create a cleaner, more resilient grid.

The development of utility-scale solar energy is a critical part of creating a smarter energy system.

Johnson County Solar Update

- **We want Utility Scale Solar in Johnson County!**
- **Tell Johnson County Commissioners**



SUPPORT RENEWABLE ENERGY

DUMP EXCESSIVE RESTRICTIONS

Due to COVID restrictions, the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners has delayed its public hearing on the proposed large-scale solar siting guidelines until April.

Proponents of renewable energy can **contact Commissioners [now](#)** to express support for siting guidelines that do not discourage utility-scale solar developments. Sierra Club has a [fact sheet](#) to answer your questions.

We have a right to demand that Kansas utilities serve the public good by providing affordable, reliable, and safe energy. Commit to showing up in person or virtually to hold our leaders accountable by speaking truth to power. [Email me](#) to join these efforts.