

# Has Texas done enough to prevent another winter blackout?

BY MITCHELL FERMAN, | THE TEXAS TRIBUNE, AND JON SCHUPPE, NBC NEWS

(AUSTIN, TX) - After last winter's freeze hamstrung power giant Vistra Corp.'s ability to keep electricity flowing for its millions of customers, CEO Curt Morgan said he'd never seen anything like it in his 40 years in the energy industry.

During the peak days of the storm, Vistra, Texas' largest power generator, sent as much energy as it could to power the state's failing grid, "often at the expense of making money," he told lawmakers shortly after the storm.

But it wasn't enough. The state's grid neared complete collapse, millions lost power for days in subfreezing temperatures and more than 200 people died.

Since the storm, Texas lawmakers have passed legislation aimed at making the grid more resilient during freezing weather. Signing the bill, Gov. Greg Abbott said "everything that needed to be done was done to fix the power grid."

But Morgan isn't so sure. His company has spent \$50 million this year preparing more than a dozen of its plants for winter. At the company's plant in Midlothian, workers have wrapped electric cables with three inches of rubber insulation and built enclosures to help shield valves, pumps and metal

pipes. No matter what Morgan does, though, it won't be enough to prevent another disaster if there is another severe freeze, he said.

That's because the state still hasn't fixed the critical problem that paralyzed his plants: maintaining a sufficient supply of natural gas, Morgan said.

Natural gas slowed to a trickle during the storm, leaving the Midlothian facility and 13 other Vistra power plants that run on gas without enough fuel. The shortage forced Vistra to pay more than \$1.5 billion on the spot market for whatever gas was available, costing the company in a matter of days more than twice the amount it usually spends in an entire year. Even then, plants were able to operate at only a fraction of their capacity; the Midlothian facility ran at 30% of full strength during the height of the storm.

If another major freeze hits Texas this winter, "the same thing could happen," Morgan said in an interview.

The predicament in Midlothian reflects a glaring shortcoming in Texas' efforts to prevent a repeat of February, when a combination of freezing temperatures across the state and skyrocketing demand

shut down natural gas facilities and power plants, which rely on each other to keep electricity flowing. The cycle of failures sent economic ripples across the country that cost hundreds of billions of dollars.

The power and gas industries say they are working to make their systems more reliable during winter storms, and the Public Utility Commission, the state agency that regulates the state's power industry, finally acted on recommendations made by federal regulators a decade ago after another severe winter storm.

But energy experts say Texas' grid remains vulnerable, largely because newly written regulations allowed too much wiggle room for companies to avoid weatherization improvements that can take months or years. More than nine months after February's storm — which could exceed Hurricane Harvey as the costliest natural disaster in state history — a lack of data from regulators and industry groups makes it impossible to know how many power and gas facilities are properly weatherized.

For millions of Texans, that means there is no assurance that they will have electricity and heat if another major freeze strikes the state.

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Austin, Texas 78703

WHEN: 10 a.m. to noon | Saturday, Dec. 18

WHERE: East 7th Financial Center  
2421 East Seventh St.  
Austin, Texas 78702

WHEN: 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. | Sat., Dec. 18

WHERE: Lake Travis Financial Center  
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Scope of Work: Central Health seeks to obtain Proposals from qualified Consultants able to provide Perform high quality landscape and irrigation maintenance services.

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### Travis County Healthcare District d/b/a Central Health

1111 E. Cesar Chavez Street  
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Request for Proposal (RFP) 2112-001  
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Due Date: December 29 by 2:00 PM  
Scope of Work: To provide and prepare racial inequity training for Central Health and Sendero Employees that includes The Groundwater or similar Approach with a history of health inequalities in the United States. Ordering Instructions: All Solicitation Packages can be downloaded from:  
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