

UPDATE ON UTILITIES SERVICES AND OPERATIONS



Hello Boerne, we know it has been a difficult time for many and we want to provide additional information that we hope will allow everyone to understand what is going on locally, as well as across the state. The city of Boerne's electric, water and gas utilities continue to do everything possible to keep our customers in service in the face of this unprecedented winter storm event. It is crucial that each of us do all that we can to protect these systems from overload to avoid a much more impactful failure. Utility crews are working around the clock on these issues and have been for several days. The best thing we can each do to help ourselves, our friends, and neighbors is to conserve on all fronts, electric, water and gas.

What kind of control do utility providers have regarding outages and why are they happening?

When ERCOT (the state's power grid manager) says a provider must reduce consumption every utility provider has to participate. The goal of an outage is to prevent the entire grid from sustaining massive damage which would force extended and indefinite outages and take essential facilities, such as a hospital, offline. As bad as it is right now, not doing these mitigating measures would make things exponentially worse. In terms of which substations go offline and when, it is determined by the state's emergency power plan, and right now ERCOT is operating off that plan to keep the grid functioning. Both in Boerne and in the state, these utility systems are very interrelated and dependent on each other. The majority of power in Texas is produced using natural gas so to keep the plants running at the sustained maximum levels we have seen for day after day since Friday, the demand is high while supply, and very importantly, the ability to transport it, remains the same.

How are Boerne's systems interconnected and how are they handling this energy shortage?

On the local level, natural gas home furnaces use electricity to blow the warm air in the home. When a rolling outage occurs, heating stops even if it uses natural gas. When the power comes back on, everyone's heat comes on at the same time and the demand for electricity and gas spikes and is constrained by the size of electric lines and gas lines. Natural gas lines operate under pressure and are sized to meet both standard demand and extreme demand for short periods. We are presently in an extreme demand situation that has lasted for many days with more to come. Electricity is used to power pumps and motors that fill the city's water tanks and have been subject to rolling outages as well. Once the power is off, even for short periods, we run the risk of having motors frozen and unable to restart. This has occurred on some of the city's wells and the Guadalupe Blanco River Authority, our primary water supplier, is subject to the rolling outages as is their treatment plant at Canyon Lake. Sprinkler systems and pipes are bursting around town and these leaks can drain our water tanks.

How is my utility provider determined?

Much like county lines, electric service territories were established more than 75 years ago. Electric customers in the city limits of Boerne and those that have a "Boerne" address may be served by other entities than Boerne Utilities including Bandera Electric Cooperative (BEC), Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC), or San Antonio CPS Energy (CPS). Other utilities are faced with the same challenges we are in keeping up with demand. Each will have varying rolling outage schedules depending on the types of load served by a substation. We encourage everyone to have their utility providers contact information available and follow them on social media. We are all trying our best to keep everyone informed of what is going on, keep the lights on or get service restored as quickly as possible.

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Why is this winter power supply challenge more impactful than those we face in the summer?

The size and duration of this cold snap and its extreme nature is a big part of the issues we are facing. The weather is also greatly impacting power plants that generate energy. On two fronts, they are challenged to meet demand Texans are facing but also working to get the supply of fuels and keep equipment functioning. An air conditioner is in some cases three times more efficient than a home's heater. Also, the temperature difference to maintain a comfortable level is different. While it might be 103 degrees outside, you are cooling a home to 78 – that is a 25 degrees difference. Right now, we are experiencing temperatures in the single digits and trying to warm our homes to the low 60s – that is an almost 60 degrees difference.

Does one home making changes make a difference?

Yes. While city, county and the school district have reduced consumption by lowering building temperatures and closing during this time we need everyone to help. No matter our distance, we are all on the same power grid and use the same gas lines. In short, we are all interconnected. Think of your friends or family in other parts of the state without power still. Those with power are still using most of the power that is being produced, which means others cannot come back online to warm their homes. We are truly in this together and we all must do our part.

Tips for conservation:

Close off vents that serve unused rooms and close the doors to those rooms

Lower temperatures to 65 in your home if possible

Don't wash clothes or use dryer, whether gas or electric, unless absolutely necessary and if it is necessary do so overnight.

Keep cabinet doors under sinks open and continue to allow faucets to drip to avoid frozen pipes