



BRIEF

ERCOT board members to resign following mass outages

By Robert Walton

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UPDATE: Feb. 24, 2021: Five members of the Electric Reliability Council of Texas' 16-member board, including Chair Sally Talberg, will resign Wednesday, following widespread outages last week. Talberg had formerly served as chair of the Michigan Public Service Commission.

All five resignations — plus another candidate for the board who withdrew his application — lived outside Texas, a fact that angered some lawmakers in the state. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, R, said he "welcome[s] these resignations" and pledged to continue investigating "the disastrous events of last week."

"When Texans were in desperate need of electricity, ERCOT failed to do its job and Texans were left shivering in their homes without power," he said in a statement. "ERCOT leadership made assurances that Texas' power infrastructure was prepared for the winter storm, but those assurances proved to be devastatingly false."

Dive Brief:

- Millions of customers in Texas and Oklahoma are without power this morning due to an intense winter storm that sent electricity demand soaring while generator outages reduced available resources.

- The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) issued an emergency alert on Monday, calling for conservation and enacting rotating outages. The grid operator instructed transmission owners to shed approximately 14,000 MW of load.
- The Southwest Power Pool (SPP) on Tuesday morning declared an energy alert for its entire 14-state balancing authority area, after generating capacity dropped below system load of approximately 42 GW. The grid operator said it was forecasting a morning peak of above 44.6 GW, sometime around 9 a.m. Central Standard Time, and is implementing a strategy of rolling blackouts to deal with the matter.

Dive Insight:

Grid operators and utilities are scrambling to keep the lights on, as a brutal winter storm has hit Texas and the Midwest with frigid temperatures. Multiple deaths associated with the storm have been reported.

"We'll be working with our member utilities to implement controlled interruptions of electric service throughout our region," SPP said in a statement. "This is done as a last resort to preserve the reliability of the electric system as a whole."

Oklahoma Gas & Electric tweeted Tuesday that it had "initiated hourly rolling service interruptions throughout our service area. ... Interruptions should last 1 - 2 hrs. Customers don't need to report outages."

As of 4 p.m. Monday, ERCOT officials said approximately 2,500 MW of load was in the process of being restored. The grid operator said that along with frozen wind turbines and power plants facing limited gas supplies, "a significant number of additional generating units tripped offline when the weather worsened overnight."

Energy prices on the ERCOT grid have hit the system's \$9,000/MWh price cap.

According to Jesse Jenkins, an assistant professor at Princeton University, gas generators made up the bulk of 30 GW of resources offline in ERCOT. Ice on wind turbines made up 4 GW of the outages.

Austin Energy on Monday implemented rolling outages required by ERCOT and in a statement said the situation "continues to worsen."

"The required outages are more extensive than anyone expected and do not allow us to bring affected customers back online at this time," Austin Energy General Manager Jackie Sargent said in a statement. "We will continue working with ERCOT and working through our contingency plans to get power back on to customers as soon as the grid allows."

According to The Weather Channel, the winter storm brought six inches of snow to Oklahoma City and four inches to the Dallas-Fort Worth airport — both the highest totals in a decade. The frigid air is expected to ease up later this week, according to the web site.