

Investigators pin origin of blackout on FirstEnergy Corporation failures

By Josef Hebert
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The nation's worst blackout began with three power line failures in Ohio and should have been contained by operators at FirstEnergy Corp., a three-month government investigation concluded Wednesday.

The report by a U.S.-Canadian task force said the FirstEnergy operators did not respond properly, allowing the Aug. 14 outage to cascade, eventually cutting off electricity to 50 million people in eight states and Canada.

The task force also cited outdated procedures and shortcomings at a regional grid monitoring center in Indiana that kept officials there from grasping the emerging danger and helping FirstEnergy deal with it.

"This blackout was largely preventable," Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said.

The task force said it found "no computer viruses or any sort of illicit cyber activities" to blame. It also concluded that there was no deliberate damage or tampering with equipment associated with the outage.

Among the faults found at FirstEnergy was a simple failure to keep trees around power lines trimmed.

FirstEnergy, the nation's fourth largest investor-owned utility company, had no immediate comment on the report. The company, based in Akron, Ohio,

has maintained that its problems were but some of many in the Midwest power grid on the day of the blackout and that it should not be singled out.

The task force report cites the failure of a FirstEnergy line near Cleveland, follow by problems with two of its other lines, as the "initial events" of the blackout.

The loss of the three lines caused too much electricity to flow into nearby lines, causing an overload. Because those lines not prepared for the sudden increase in power, the system became unstable as the balance between available power and demand deteriorated, said the report.

It said the company's failure to adequately trim trees along the lines "was the common cause" for the lines tripping and said overall FirstEnergy "failed to ensure the security of its transmission system."

Abraham and Canadian Natural Resources Minister Herb Dhaliwal released the findings in the 134-page report on the causes for the blackout that spread across eight states, from eastern Michigan to New York City and into Canada.

It was the worst blackout in the nation's history, costing at least \$6 billion in economic and other losses. It prompted new calls for upgrading the nation's high-voltage electric transmission systems and giving the government power to enforce reliability standards.

Congress is expected this week to complete a massive energy bill

FirstEnergy blamed for failures

The U.S.-Canada Power System Outage Task Force identified three causes that led to the blackout on Aug. 14 and concluded FirstEnergy Corp. operators did not respond properly.

Inadequate awareness — FirstEnergy did not promptly restore grid balance when power lines failed; operators were not properly trained; operators did not have enough tools to monitor power lines when they failed

Inadequate tree trimming — FirstEnergy failed to manage tree growth near transmission lines, which was the common cause of the outage on three of the company's lines.

Inadequate support — The Midwest Independent System Operator (MISO) and PJM Interconnection, which oversee regional transmission systems, lacked procedures and timely information in order to help FirstEnergy.

SOURCE: Department of Energy; U.S.-Canada Power System Outage Task Force

that includes, for the first time, federal reliability rules for companies to follow to safeguard the grid system. Currently the industry regulates itself with no direct penalties for violations.

The report raises questions about the monitoring of the power grid by the Midwest Independent System Operator, or MISO, a group responsible for overseeing power flow across the upper Midwest.

The MISO operators, from a control center in Camel, Ind., were using outdated information and didn't have the means to identify significant transmission problems developing in the system, said the report. That pre-

vented MISO operators from assisting FirstEnergy control operators, who themselves were hampered by a faulty computer and other mechanical glitches.

The task force cited both human error and equipment failures, noting that FirstEnergy's ability to analyze its problems was hampered for nearly an hour and a half by a computer failure.

From the time the computer failed "to when they began to recognize their situation," (FirstEnergy) operators did not understand how much of their system was being lost "or that their interpretation of events did not reflect the system's true condition, the report said.



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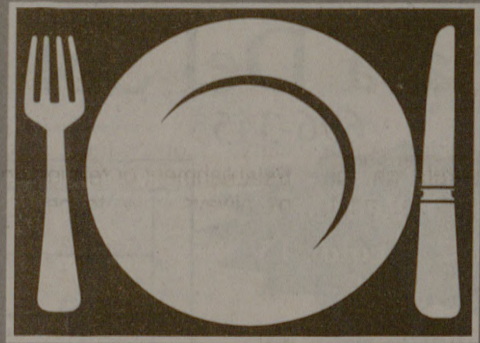
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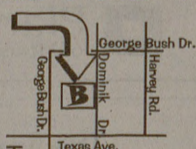
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Michael Jackson charged with child molestation

By Robert Jablon
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — Authorities issued a warrant for Michael Jackson's arrest on charges of molesting a child and asked the pop superstar Wednesday to turn himself in and surrender his passport. Jackson's spokesman called the allegations "scurrilous and totally unfounded."

The 45-year-old King of Pop was accused of multiple counts of lewd or lascivious acts with a child under 14. A decade ago, Jackson was also accused of molestation but was never charged because the youngster refused to testify.

"I am sad that there is another victim out there. I feel bad for the family. I feel bad for the victim. Beyond that, I feel it is a sad thing for all those involved," District Attorney Thomas W. Sneddon Jr. said at a news conference.

Jackson was believed to be in Las Vegas working at a recording studio.

"Get over here and get checked in," the prosecutor said.

Sneddon would not say when or where the alleged crimes took place or how old the youngster was. He said an affidavit outlining the details will be sealed for 45 days.

But Brian Oxman, an attorney who has represented the Jackson family over the years, told CBS that the case involves the alleged molestation of a 12-year-old boy at Jackson's Neverland Ranch, the storybook playground where the singer has been known to hold sleepover parties with children. Oxman is not representing Jackson.

CBS immediately pulled a Jackson music special planned for next Wednesday on his greatest hits and the impact on pop culture of the former child star who got his start with his

brothers as a member of the singing-and-dancing Jackson 5.

"Given the gravity of the charges against Mr. Jackson, we believe it would be inappropriate at this time to broadcast an entertainment special," the network said.

On Tuesday, as many as 70 law enforcement officers spent 12 hours searching for corroborating evidence. The \$12.3 million ranch has a mansion, its own zoo and amusement park.

Each of the sex charges is punishable by three to eight years in prison. Sneddon would not say how many counts Jackson faces. Bail will be set at \$3 million, authorities said.

Sheriff Jim Anderson said authorities have been in contact with Jackson's lawyers and the singer has been given the chance to surrender "within a specified period of time." Anderson refused to say how long that would be.

"I believe he's willing to cooperate with us," the sheriff said.

Jackson spokesman Stuart Backerman issued a statement saying the singer "has already made arrangements with the district attorney to return to Santa Barbara to immediately confront and prove these charges unfounded."

"Michael would never harm a child in any way. These scurrilous and totally unfounded allegations will be proven false in a courtroom," Backerman said.

The announcement of the arrest came at an often-jovial news conference with Anderson and Sneddon. The prosecutor looked sheepish after gesturing so forcefully he knocked over a news organization's microphone. At another point, he ridiculed a suggestion from Jackson that the allegations were timed to coincide with the release of his latest album.

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