

FRANCES' AFTERMATH

Plant from 18

Francis hatched the idea a southwest corner. The water, which Gordon likens to diluted fertilizer, streamed from a 60-foot opening at the top of the stack down its side and into a stormwater ditch that runs around its 40-acre base. Cargili decided to open a valve and release water from the ditch in to Archie Creek, after consulting with the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Releasing the water, Gordon said, prevents a break or overflow of the ditch, which could cause an uncontrollable flood of polluted water.

The company initially put the amount of the spill at only 10,000 gallons. On Monday, however, officials said more than 90 million gallons might be released by today.

In addition to the problem, the company ran out of neutralizing agents at several points Sunday morning, meaning treated water may have escaped, Gordon said. Additional truckloads of the agent, caustic soda, were delivered to the site late Sunday night.

At the point where Archie Creek meets Hillsborough Bay, the pH levels were measured by S.I. Ehrlich said. Normal levels are between 6.5 and 8.5.

In addition to treatment, Cargili took steps to limit the amount of wastewater it would have to release into the creek.

The company pumped some wastewater to a retention pond at the top of an old gypsum stack that has been inactive since 1964. Cargili also began pumping excess water to a 25-acre retention pond at its sprawling industrial site.

The acidic sludge stopped flowing from the top of the stack Monday, and crews temporarily closed the break in the dike.

Cargili makes fertilizer at the plant from phosphate. Cyanide is a highly radioactive byproduct of the process, and is stored in mountainous stacks. Retention ponds at the top of the stacks hold water used to make fertilizer.

Gordon said the wastewater contains a tiny amount of radioactive material.

The release is likely to result in fines and requirements for preventive measures from the Hillsborough County Environmental Protection Commission, the DEP and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said Rick Garity, executive director of the EPA.

Environmental experts said it may take days to know exactly how badly wildlife will suffer.

Waterways around the western Hillsborough County shore are part of a highly sensitive ecosystem, said Holly Greening of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program.

It is a breeding ground for many rare species, including manatees, tarpon, manatee, snook, snappers, snappers and crabs, as well as birds such as herons, cays and cormorants.

Acidic water can hurt or kill such wildlife. And even if the acidity doesn't prove to be a problem, Cargili's Gordon acknowledged that the spill probably will raise nitrogen levels along growth that can rob the water of oxygen or block sunlight needed for sea grass, an important food source for manatees, Greening said.

The Tampa Bay area has struggled for years with accidents at phosphate plants.

In 1997, a phosphate plant in Mulberry dumped 50 million gallons of untreated acidic water into the Alafia River, killing millions of fish.

After a heavy rain Aug. 18, about 4 million gallons of muddy water ran from a retention pond at the BMC Phosphate plant in Key West into a creek on the Alafia River.

Gordon said Cargili had been trying to reach weeks to reinforce the dike in anticipation of Hurricane Frances and then Hurricane Frances.

Donna Beck, president of the south Hillsborough-based environmental group Save the Bay, has expressed a problem like this might arise during a hurricane.

Power from 18

Francis' aftermath has left a trail of destruction across the Tampa Bay area, but it also helped delay the start of the restoration project.

"Please be patient," Hernandez said. "Give us two to three days and I think we'll get a significant number of these customers back on."

The lingering had weather not only slowed the dispatch of local crews, but it also helped delay the arrival of out-of-state workers who won't be in place and ready to work until Wednesday morning.

The sustained heavy winds made it unsafe to drive the large bucket trucks into the area, and in some cases crews were unable to arrange overnight lodging along the way because of the massive evacuation of Floridians that took place before the storm.

Sill, utilities said they are encouraged that the work will likely be completed quickly to restoring distribution lines — rather than the days of outages that have plagued other areas — rather than the days of outages that have plagued other areas.

Despite widespread flooding in Tampa, Hernandez said most of Tampa Electric's 25 substations that were taken off line by the storm were not damaged.

After losing power early Sunday in St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg resident David Johnson, his wife, assistant state attorney Cary Johnson, and their three kids were stuck inside a power outage.

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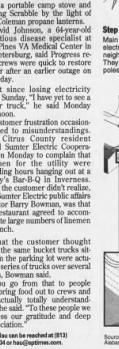
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How power is restored

With millions without electricity, it could be a long wait before power is restored to all customers. It's much more complicated than throwing a switch or pulling a lever of a line. Here's a look at how utilities go about getting the juice back on to the greatest number of customers in the shortest amount of time.



Work begins on damaged power lines, transmission lines and substations. Tens of thousands of customers could be served by one line of substations.

Local substations are also checked for damage.

Main distribution supply lines carry electricity from substations to towns, neighborhoods or housing developments. They can be damaged by falling trees or poles being blown over.

The final supply lines, called tap lines, carry power from the main distribution lines to individual homes and businesses. Line crews get to these lines last.

The line into your house could also be down or the connection to your house could be damaged. Tap crews get to these lines last.

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Outages by county

Hillsborough: 173,000; Pasco: 63,223; Pinellas: 195,000; Hernando: 22,200; Citrus: 47,702; Statewide: 2.8 million.

POWER OUT SYSTEMS: Tampa Electric Co.: 195,000; Progress Energy Florida: 164,982; Hillsborough Electric Cooperative: 36,800; Sunter Electric Cooperative: 58,000.

over a portable camp stove and stove. Scabbly, a 64-year-old infectious disease specialist at Bay Pines VA Medical Center in St. Petersburg, said Progress repair crews were quick to restore power after an earlier outage on Saturday.

But since losing electricity again Sunday, "I have yet to see a power truck," he said Monday afternoon.

Customer frustration occasionally led to misunderstandings. One Citrus County resident called Sunter Electric Cooperative Monday to report that "linesmen for the utility were spending hours hanging out at a Sonny's Bar-B-Q in Inverness."

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Wilf from 18

The world just melted away and we walked for hours that night," Mercedes Wilf said.

They were dating long before the terrorist attacks of 9/11. After that, Wilf called about joining the Marines.

"The night I told him I loved him was the night he told me he was a Marine," she said. "It was perfect. I realized the man I was in love with was going to fight a war."

Wilf was among the first U.S. troops to invade Iraq. He called once on a reporter's cell phone to tell Mercedes about one of Saddam Hussein's palaces. He marveled at the museum's pools and the giant wall suits.

In April 2003, he wrote about seeing a Marine shoot an Iraqi who had been shooting at them.

"But in the process, another Iraq was wounded. He died and was accidentally shot," she said. "While the Marines were securing the area, the innocent man that was shot came to the Marine base and told me, 'Thank you for killing that man and thank you for everything you've done.' He said, 'Now go to hospital.' Can you imagine that?"

Mercedes Wilf keeps his letters in a binder notebook. "I get a letter just about every day," she said.

When Wilf finished his first tour of duty in October 2003, he and Mercedes had a wedding with their friends and family. They had their honeymoon in Mexico, then moving to a home in California.

By the end of August, Wilf was deployed again. This time, Mercedes Wilf said, she was filled with dread.

"The last week before he left, I was a baby," she said. "On that last night, she ate a home cooked lasagna dinner and intended to a CD of love songs."

"He just talked and cried," Mercedes Wilf said.

When he returned, Mercedes Wilf said she missed everything to him.

"I'm glad we at least got an official goodbye," she said. "I at least had that."

In the next few days, Mercedes said she expected to get his final letter, which he wrote during the plane ride to Kuwait. He called on Thursday, asking if she was feeling better. He wanted to cheer her up.

Now, she said she doesn't know what to feel.

"I'm hurt, I'm numb, I'm just numb," she said. "They robbed me of my life with him, my mind and the man I wanted to have children with. I pray to God every night hoping I'm pregnant so I can see his face again."

Mercedes Wilf can be reached at MercedesWilf@optonline.com or 813-988-1212.

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SOME OF THE DAMAGE



1. Flooding closes Bayshore Boulevard from Gandy Boulevard to David Islands

2. Sewage boils on Davis Island

3. At least 4 million gallons of contaminated water spill from Cargili phosphate plant in Pinellas

4. Small manhole forms at 275 and Rome Avenue

5. Small sinkhole appears at West Martin King Jr. Boulevard

6. A retirement village is evacuated on Fowler Avenue near 15th Street

7. Road flooding occurs at Fowler Avenue and 62nd Street

8. House flooding occurs in Town 'N' Country

9. House flooding occurs in Inverness

10. House flooding occurs in Safety Springs

11. House flooding occurs in Town 'N' Country

12. House flooding occurs in Inverness

13. House flooding occurs in Safety Springs

rooms while Jeff Giannetti and his girlfriend, Donna Verrington, walked dry-footed through her home.

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SUNCOAST DEATHS

This list is extracted from detailed obituary pages published in other regional editions of the Times. For complete obituaries, please see www.timesonline.com.

PASCO: SANTAPPA, DR. DEANOR C. II, 65, of Pasco, died Sept. 5. Burial: Memorial Home, Fairview, Meigs.

NORTH PINELLAS: DREIBEL, VIRGINIA OPA, 87, of Dunwoody, died Sept. 5. Burial: Memorial Home, Fairview, Meigs.

SOUTH PINELLAS: JONES, LAWRENCE III, 51, of Pinellas Park, died Sept. 5. Burial: Memorial Home, Fairview, Meigs.

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