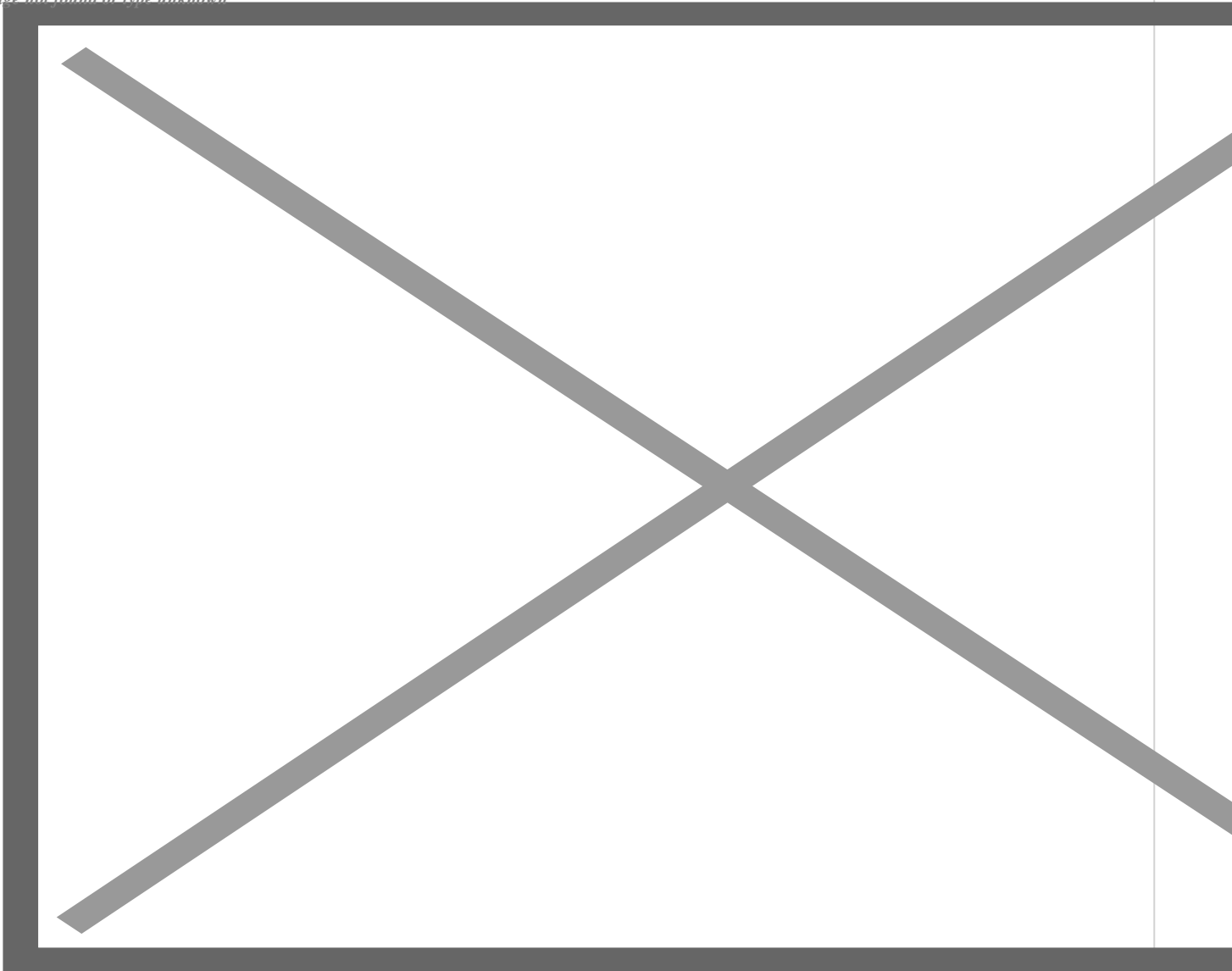


Louisiana grapples with power outages as Ida death toll rises

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New Orleans, September 5 (RHC)-- Still reeling in the wake of Hurricane Ida, people in the U.S. state of Louisiana now face the challenge of finding generators or fuel to power them amid continuing power

outages, as one energy company warned that it could take weeks to fully restore electricity to hard-hit areas.

The extreme winds from Ida, which made landfall in Louisiana as a category four hurricane last weekend, knocked out power to more than one million homes and businesses across the state before bringing torrential rains and flooding to New York, New Jersey and surrounding areas.

Many Louisiana gas stations remain without power, keeping them from operating, and making it harder for residents to fill generators. "I had to wait about 40 minutes (today)," Aaron Lowe, a 49-year-old construction worker, told the Reuters news agency in New Orleans, where he was lined up at a gas station to wait for gasoline for a third straight day. "I was waiting between two and four hours in the last couple of days," Lowe said.

Full restoration of electricity to some of the hardest-hit areas of the state could take until the end of the month, the head of Entergy Louisiana said on Saturday. Ida damaged or destroyed more than 22,000 power poles, more than hurricanes Katrina, Zeta and Delta combined. At least 5,200 transformers failed and nearly 26,000 spans of wire – the stretch of transmission wires between poles – were down.

"The level of devastation makes it quite difficult or near impossible to get in and fully assess some places," said Entergy President and CEO Phillip May of five southeastern Louisiana parishes facing the longest delays.

The company is estimating full power restoration by September 29 or even longer for some customers, although May said that was a "no later than" date with the hope of earlier restoration. As of Saturday morning, power had been restored to more than 327,000 customers, Entergy said.

"Restoration continues where it is safe to do so and where power can be received," the company said in a statement. "Damage assessments are nearly complete, with only the bayou region of Louisiana left to be assessed."

About a quarter of New Orleans residents have had power restored, including all the city's hospitals, and the city's 27 substations are ready to serve customers, said Deanna Rodriguez, Entergy New Orleans president and CEO. But hard-hit parts of the state are still struggling to restore any sense of normalcy.

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell said the city would offer transportation starting on Saturday to any resident looking to leave the city and get to a public shelter. It already began moving some residents out of senior homes.

Governor John Bel Edwards announced he would travel to St Tammany, St Helena, and Livingston parishes on Saturday to assess the damage from the storm.

Hurricane Ida's death toll in Louisiana also rose to nine on Saturday, with two more evacuated nursing home residents among the confirmed dead, authorities said. The new deaths were among evacuees at a Tangipahoa Parish warehouse now under state investigation after reports of squalid conditions.

"Sadly, we also can now confirm 2 additional deaths among nursing home residents who had been evacuated to the Tangipahoa facility," the Louisiana Department of Health tweeted. "This brings the death toll of nursing home residents evacuated to this facility to 6," it said.

Meanwhile, northeastern US states started the Labour Day holiday weekend digging through debris left by the deadly deluge that killed more than 44 people and caused public transportation in New York City to grind to a halt. Local operators promised to restore some lines before the start of the work week on Tuesday.

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