



## **Birds, squirrels and NB Power cause power outages in scorching heat**

Bird contacts are one of the largest contributors to power outages in the summer

Elizabeth Fraser | July 05, 2018



Most summer power outages are caused by birds coming into contact with NB Power equipment, NB Power says. ( CC0 (Pixabay))

Some residents are feeling the heat more than others this week as power outages spread across the province, and NB Power says wildlife should get a bit of the blame.

Bird contacts are one of the largest contributors to summer outages that aren't related to major wind events, said Jamie Calhoun, director of transmission and distribution and field operations with NB Power.

New Brunswick is experiencing a heat wave this week, and with temperatures hitting the mid-30s, and a humidex making things feel even hotter, NB Power said about 250 customers were without electricity on Wednesday morning.

In eight of those cases, birds, squirrels or other animals, got into the equipment.

Throughout the day, the number of unplanned outages rose to 50, affecting 550 customers.

Another 60 customers lost power because of nine planned outages.

Calhoun said there are more than 21,000 kilometres of distribution lines in the province and more than 7,000 kilometres of transmission lines.

Although NB Power can't protect all those lines, animal guards are placed on sensitive equipment and in areas where there is a lot of wildlife.



Jamie Calhoun, director of transmission and distribution and field operations with NB Power, points to a variety of reasons for power outages on Wednesday: equipment failure related to lightning, motor vehicles crashes, wildlife getting into equipment, and NB Power turning off the power. (CBC)

"You just can't cover the whole system, so you end up with some failures and some outages," he said.

As of Thursday morning, 11 customers were affected by power outages, mostly in the Moncton area. Calhoun said animal contact would likely be responsible for most of them.

### **Motor vehicle crashes**

Some outages on Wednesday were also caused by three accidents in which motor vehicles struck poles.

"We don't plan for those and nor do the people driving the vehicles," Calhoun said in an interview with *Information Morning Fredericton*.

There were also seven outages caused by an equipment failure in the aftermath of lightning.

"Lightning will go through, [but] it won't stress the system quite enough to cause a failure at that time," Calhoun said.

"The system can be stressed and you don't know it, you can't pick it up so it's close to failing, but you're not aware of it. If we knew about it we could go out and proactively change it out."

### **Planned outages**

Also to blame for some outages is NB Power itself.

A heat warning is still in effect for northern and southern New Brunswick, with a humidex of 42 in some areas.

But even during a heat wave, when the governments advise people to seek cooler indoor spaces, NB Power will sometimes cut the power on purpose.

Planned outages give the utility a chance to fix problems, preventing outages down the road and reducing their impact, Calhoun said.

"The goal of our staff ... is to identify the right equipment to be replaced and proactively go out and do it in as short a time as possible to minimize the outage impact," he said.

### **Heat waves don't affect plans**

"The reason we plan them, means they're predictable, we know when they're coming. Our crews are ready."

If planned outages are deferred, he said, the utility risks more unplanned, lengthier outages later, he said.

NB Power monitors the humidex and follows a corporate safety manual related to working in high temperatures, but it does not have a policy that would stop planned outages when temperatures are especially high.

"It's not an approach we take," he said. "We have crews that are ready to go do the work."