

A case study on experiencing a state-wide power outage

Maria is a retired Tasmanian school teacher, who relocated to Adelaide in 2016. Maria agreed to share her experience of being without power during a major power outage caused by an intense storm on 28 September, 2016. The electricity transmission structure was extensively damaged and resulted in almost the entire State of South Australia losing its electrical supply. While power outages are not uncommon during storms or severe weather events, it is not usual for the majority of homes, businesses and services of *a whole state* to be impacted.

Maria's experience

'On the 28 September, 2016, I was at my daughter's home and the lights going out was the first sign that something was amiss. My daughter's husband wasn't home at the time; he was running some errands at the local shopping area. He seemed to be taking ages to get home. It then became evident that the power outage was so severe that there were no traffic lights working in Adelaide city and across many suburbs. In a city the size of Adelaide, with high traffic volumes, this caused significant issues and along with all the other drivers, my son-in-law had to drive home incredibly carefully.

I too had to drive home in complete darkness, as the street lights had been impacted as well. When I arrived home, I wanted to know more about the outage. The TV was unavailable without power, resulting in no communication through that medium. The power to the Telstra towers had also been impacted, so even the internet was inaccessible. I initially didn't know how serious the outage was, how long it was going to take to repair, or how much of the city and indeed the whole state had been impacted.

It occurred to me that the only thing working that could provide me with information was my car radio. So every 30 minutes or so I went out and sat in my car and turned it and the radio on. The power in my home was out from 6:00 p.m. until about 11:00 p.m. This was quite scary when you live alone, but was most likely scary for everyone, especially as some outer city areas did not regain electricity for over a week.'

While this major power outage was caused by a storm in one state, it was the start of a conversation around the entire country (Australia) about power reliability and renewables.

Seek responses from students:

1. How would hospitals cope without power?
2. How would people keep warm or stay cool?
3. What sort of supplies do people need to have in case of a power outage?
4. Where would you least like to be in the event of a power outage?
5. Who might be some of the most vulnerable people likely to be effected by a power outage?
6. What other questions about power outages do you have?