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Power Finally Returning to Puerto Rico After Wednesday's Plant Fire Sent 1.2 Million Customers Offline

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Darkened streets of San Jaun, Puerto Rico. By. GETTY IMAGES

Electricity started returning to Puerto Rico on Friday, though about 200,000 customers were still without power on Saturday. The blackout occurred on Wednesday following what Lumar Energy, the private operator of Puerto Rico's public power utility, suspects was a failed circuit breaker at the Costa Sur power plant — one of the utility's largest — led to a fire.

The disruption led to canceled school classes and shuttered businesses that were unable to operate. It also led to protests across the island commonwealth of 2.8 million people.

Lumar Energy, the Canadian American group, vowed to reduce outages when it [took control of operations in June 2021](#). However, for customers whose power was restored over the weekend, intermittent outages were still occurring, leading Lumar to advise that sporadic disruptions would continue until the system is fully restored.

“We’ve been encouraging all of our customers to conserve energy through the weekend,” said Lumar CEO Wayne Stensby. “It’s in everyone’s interest that they be as careful with their energy as possible.”

Lumar said that while it suspects that a failed circuit led to the fire that caused the island-wide disruption, a report on the findings based on an investigation would not be available for weeks.

Mr. Stensby has described the outage as "very unusual," and said it demonstrated the problems the island's electric grid has faced following Hurricane Maria in 2017. Additionally, the Costa Sur power plant was damaged by earthquakes in 2020.

Puerto Rico residents protested in front the San Juan office of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority on Friday, placing spoiled meat packages on the floor, a representation of some of the losses customers suffered as part of the days-long outage.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency said on Thursday that while it had approved \$9.5 billion to Puerto Rico's power company in 2020, as of last week it had not received transmission or distribution projects to evaluate.

Senior Vice President for Engineering at Lumar, Shay Bahramirad, disputed the FEMA claims, contending that the company had submitted 180 preliminary projects to the federal agency, and that construction on the first one, which has not yet been fully approved, "will begin in a few months."

Mr. Bahramirad, like Mr. Stensby, the Lumar CEO, said the Puerto Rico power grid was no longer viable. He described the grid as "fragile" and "obsolete."