CONSUMER POLICY CENTER

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POWER OUTAGES ARE INCREASING, IMPOSING A WIDE RANGE OF ECONOMIC, HEALTH, AND SECURITY RISKS AND COSTS

Washington, D.C. – A background brief released today by the Consumer Policy Center (CPC) – "Power Outages: Current Costs, Future Threats, and a Needed Remedy" – documents an increase in these outages and the risks and costs they impose. Over the past decade, the minutes of non-momentary service interruptions more than doubled, with communities near the shore from Maine to Texas experiencing the most interruptions.

The economic costs of outages are substantial, estimated recently in the $100 billion range annually. Their adverse health impacts have also been considerable, especially on families who depend on in-home medical equipment including ventilators and heart, CPAP, and dialysis machines.

Power outages also have adverse psychological effects. "Lives are disrupted, stress levels rise, and especially during prolonged outages, anxiety about surviving grows," said Scott Sklar, a CPC senior fellow and the briefing's co-author. Sklar is also an adjunct professor at George Washington University and sustainable energy director of the university's Environment and Management Institute.

Because a large majority of outages are weather-related, experts predict that the outages will continue to grow. Their impacts may increase even more substantially since the current electrical system is not prepared for this increase because of age, anticipated retirement of essential equipment and difficulties replacing this equipment -- gas turbines, breakers, and transformers -- which face multi-year shortages.

The brief emphasizes energy resilience as a key strategy for addressing outage-related problems. Local and regional areas need to prioritize and maximize improvements in energy efficiency, reliance on one's own power sources, and battery storage of this power. "This energy self-sufficiency can be best attained through the expansion of local micro-grids – blended on-site energy and storage systems," said the CPC's Sklar. The next CPC electric power background brief will discuss these emerging microgrids more fully.

The Consumer Policy Center (CPC), launched in early 2025, is a think tank whose experts undertake research and commentary to advance the consumer interest. Many of these experts have led consumer or government organizations, held university appointments, and published scholarly research. The CPC does not take positions on policy issues; the analysis and views in CPC publications are those of their authors.