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'This is America': Some Dallas residents depend on fire hydrants, donations for water to flush toilets, drink

Power and water may have returned to most Texans after the bitter weather crisis, but thousands are still without essential utilities.



Ivan Garcia, a young resident of the Villas Del Solamar Apartments, fills his water bucket from a fire hydrant on Park Lane in Dallas, Monday, February 22, 2021. The residents of the Vickery Meadow apartment complex say they've been without water for a week now following the winter storm. (Tom Fox / Staff Photographer)



By [Dianne Solis](#), [Krista M. Torralva](#), [Charles Scudder](#) and [Nataly Keomoungkhoun](#)

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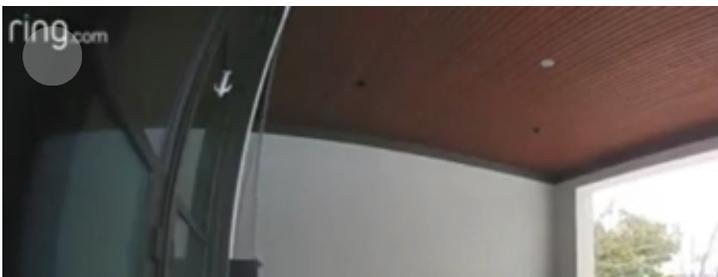
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Yesenia Flores and her 9-year-old son filled metal pots and plastic pails with chilly water from a silver-and-blue fire hydrant.

Last week's winter storm left them without water after pipes burst in their Vickery Meadow apartment building in northeast Dallas. Electricity and water are flowing now for most Texans but many, like Flores, still struggle for basic needs.



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Water scarcity has come to this. Three hours in line for a few pots of water from a fire hydrant to flush toilets and wash dishes.

"This is like Mexico," Flores said as her son watched the water flow. "They never fix anything here."



Dianne Solis
@disolis



Stunning to see desperate Dallas resident buckets w water from a fire hydrant. Epic and power outages burst pipes. This is seen in Vickery Meadow, largely an immigrant neighborhood.

'This is America': Some Dallas residents depend on fire hydrants, donations for water to flush toilets, drink



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What you need to know about coronavirus



Police drop charge against Black teen who was walking on Plano street during snowstorm



Texas grocers say the snowstorm shortages aren't like ones driven by pandemic last spring



5:33 AM · Feb 23, 2021 from Dallas, TX

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Some power and pipe failures from the bitter weather crisis are due to local system issues that utilities workers are scrambling to fix. Others are without water from household pipe bursts **that launched an army of plumbers to mend.**



WEATHER

**Got burst pipes?
Plumbers race to get
Texas' water flowing
again**

BY CHARLES SCUDDER

Outside, temperatures continued to climb Monday, with highs expected in the 70s Tuesday. The only remnants of the winter storm outside were a few scattered piles of

frozen ice and snow in the shade that hadn't quite managed to melt.

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water mains and the state's power grid, the ripple effects of the historic storm were still felt acutely.

Dallas officials said they received more than 4,000 water-related calls since last Sunday. City spokeswoman Catherine Cuellar said Dallas confirmed 307 water main breaks and leaks and made 147 repairs since last week.

In Vickery Meadow, water was still out at many apartment complexes. The neighborhood is full of apartment complexes filled with immigrants and refugees from around the world, including Myanmar, Eritrea and Mexico. More than two dozen languages are spoken there, complicating assistance.

"Agua, agua, agua," a woman yelled from the back parking lot of an apartment complex nearby.

Ram Mehta delivered cases of water Monday to an apartment complex there. He's a pizza restaurant owner who started a charity project during the pandemic called **Everyone Eatz.**

"Uno por familia so everyone can get it," said Mehta in a mix of Spanish and English. "Guys, tell your neighbors that we can give them water."

Mehta, an immigrant from India, said he was taken aback by what he saw in the labyrinth of apartments. People were taking swimming pool water to flush toilets at one complex.

"This is America," he said, his eyes wide.

Water distribution continues

The City of Dallas Office of Emergency Management set up four water distribution sites across the city to hand out cases of free water for three days. On Sunday, three of the four sites ran out of water.

At Kiest Park Recreation Center in Oak Cliff, water distributions moved steadily throughout the day, said John Patterson, senior emergency management specialist for the city's emergency management office. The distribution, which had a delayed start at 11 a.m. because of water deliveries, was on its second day of handing out water.

Kiest Park started the day with roughly 350 to 375 cases of water, and by 3 p.m. fewer than 100 cases remained. Each car received one case of water, and Patterson said he hoped that all cases would be gone by the end of the day. On Sunday, the rec center used up its supply by 3 p.m.



Jesus Muñiz loaded a case of bottled water in a pickup, Monday, February 22, 2021, during a water distribution organized by the City of Dallas Office of Emergency Management in response to snow storm Uri at Kiest Park Recreation Center in Oak Cliff. (Jeffrey McWhorter / Special Contributor)

Javie
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picked up Monday would last his family about a week. Because of last week's cold weather, a pipe at his Dallas home burst and he was without water for four days.

“We didn’t have any water, so we couldn’t shower or wash our hands,” he said.

Garcia said he managed to get the pipe fixed a few days ago, but he still picked up a case to make sure he had enough clean water for his family of four.

“Any little bit helps,” he said.

David Griffin, 70, said the storm not only left his house with power outages last week, but it also took out a water line, leaving him without running water.

“It happened Tuesday night,” he said. “When I woke up Wednesday there was water everywhere.”

Griffin grabbed a case of water Monday because the pipes were still broken at his Red Bird-area home in southern Dallas. He planned to use the water for drinking and washing his face.



WEATHER

Here’s how Texans can apply for FEMA disaster assistance for winter storm damage

BY CHARLES SCUDDER

He planned to return Wednesday for another case — not for him, but for a woman at his church who can’t leave her home.

“I’m all over the place and trying to do some good, while also trying to take care of

myself," he said.

In West Dallas housing complexes operated by the Dallas Housing Authority, the water was still out at some large complexes on Bickers Street, said Ann Harrington, a community leader who spent the day passing out food.

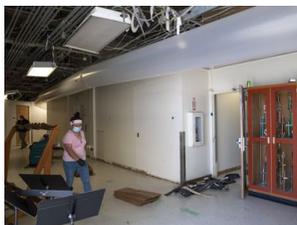
"We have housing projects still without water and we still have people living in hotels and we need food," Harrington said. One larger complex probably won't get its water pipes fixed until midweek, she said.

Other homes need water just to flush toilets.

"They have no water so these houses are getting really smelly," Harrington said.

In Oak Cliff, community volunteer Leslie Armijo brought water to people who pinged her cellphone. But said she felt frustrated by the city's limits of only one case of bottled water per family. Each case carries just 24 bottles.

Armijo said households needed gallons of water, not bottles.



EDUCATION

Some North Texas schools won't be ready to reopen this week because of winter storm damage

Most North Texas campuses will welcome students back for face-to-face instruction

BY TALIA RICHMAN, CORBETT
SMITH, EMILY DONALDSON
AND NICOLETTE WHITE

Power restored in D-FW

While Oncor still reported more than 350 customers were without power Monday afternoon, those outages are mostly in the Lufkin and Nacogdoches areas where a second winter storm overnight Wednesday brought a significant amount of ice, Oncor spokeswoman Connie Piloto said. Power there should be restored by late Tuesday.

Almost all power in Dallas-Fort Worth should be restored, she said.

Statewide, more than 4 million Texans were without power during the peak of the storm.

Officials with the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which manages the state's power grid, will have to answer to state lawmakers during **hearings on Thursday**. The Public Utility Commission, which oversees ERCOT, as well as the Railroad Commission, which oversees gas pipelines, will also be questioned.



POLITICS

'We were told they were prepared,' Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick says of officials before crippling winter storm

BY GROMER JEFFERS JR.

When ERCOT saw the grid losing power, around 1 a.m. Feb. 15, officials directed utility companies like Oncor to turn off power to homes and businesses in order to “shed loads” of energy.

Piloto, the Oncor spokeswoman, said the company initially began rotating outages, controlled outages that typically last 15 to 45 minutes and go from neighborhood to neighborhood. But ERCOT quickly asked Oncor to use even less power and those rotating outages became extended ones. Several times, ERCOT told utility companies to increase outages, so Oncor lost its ability to rotate, Piloto said.

ERCOT did not respond Monday to requests for comment. But last week, ERCOT CEO Bill Magness and Dan Woodfin, senior director of system operations, said they initiated more outages as energy generators like gas wells and wind turbines froze in order to “protect the system.” They said the grid was minutes or seconds from a total blackout.

“The amount of load that we were expected to shed made it impossible for us to do those rotating outages,” Piloto said.

Residents south of Interstate 30 were likely to experience longer outages than those on the north side because Oncor has 75% more feeders north of I-30, Piloto said. So when

ERCOT directed Oncor to reduce power use, the north side had more space to rotate power, Piloto said.

Staff writer Everton Bailey contributed to this report.



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