

When the power fails

Lives can be threatened by policy and criminality

Washington Times editorial, Jan. 1. 2023

Some like it hot, some like it cold, but the majority of humanity depends on middling temperatures for comfort — and for life itself. Climate change activism that threatens U.S. energy supplies callously places lives in danger. Whether as public policy or criminal behavior, Americans should agree that neither form of activity is in their interest.

While much of worldwide climate anxiety focuses on global warming, cold is more the cause of human suffering than heat. A 2015 study published by the journal Lancet that surveyed the cause of 74 million deaths in 13 nations found that cold-related deaths exceeded heat-related ones by a ratio of 18 to 1.

The Christmas “bomb cyclone” that dumped more than 4 feet of snow over portions of the Northeast highlights that grim fact. Dozens of people perished in the storm — many cut off from help in their cars or homes when impassable roads left them stranded. Nearly 2 million U.S. households and businesses lost electricity, and 65 million residents in 13 states were asked to lower their thermostats — despite single-digit outdoor temperatures — to avoid power failures.

All the while, the Department of Energy proceeds with plans announced in December “to electrify and cut emissions from new or newly renovated federal buildings.” By replacing fossil fuel sources — mostly natural gas — with electrical power, President Biden hopes to reach his goal of “net zero emissions by 2045.”

Natural gas is the nation’s predominant energy source, generating 38% of U.S. electricity in 2022. When the White House cuts off its flow to federal buildings, Americans have reason to fear similar restrictions on its use in their own houses.

Aggressive Biden energy policy can only encourage those wedded to even more extreme forms of environmentalism.

Andreas Malm, associate professor of human ecology at Sweden’s Lund University and author of “How to Blow Up a Pipeline,” is an advocate of next-level activism: “We shouldn’t engage in assassinations or terrorism, or use arms and things like that,” he tells Bloomberg’s “Zero” podcast. “But until that line or boundary, we need virtually everything ... all the way up to sabotage and property destruction.”

Correlation is not necessarily causation, but a recent phenomenon of culprits damaging power substations that supply essential electricity to U.S. communities raises suspicion. In December, two electric substations were damaged by gunfire in Moore County, North Carolina, knocking out power to 45,000 customers. More gunfire was reported a few days later at a hydroelectric station in Ridgeway, South Carolina.

Elsewhere, six attacks on substations in Oregon and Washington were recorded in October and November. Those incidents prompted the FBI to issue an alert to electric utilities in the Pacific Northwest describing the threat: "Criminal actors bypassed security by cutting the fence links, lighting nearby fires, shooting equipment from a distance or throwing objects over the fence and onto equipment."

Nature is fully capable of unleashing deadly suffering upon human beings stripped of the modern means of temperature control. Whether in the form of Biden policies or "criminal actors," Americans should have little patience for coldhearted deeds that would leave them exposed to the elements.