

69,000 left without power around Wilmington area

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Thousands of power line workers have come to the coastal counties to help restore electricity to more than 500,000 people who lost power during Hurricane Floyd.

But widespread flooding and fallen trees made restoration efforts difficult, and many could be without power for several days, officials said.

At 5 p.m. Thursday, 69,000 Carolina Power & Light customers in the Wilmington area were still without power. This includes homes and businesses in unincorporated parts of New Hanover County and parts of Brunswick County, said Debra Cobb, CP&L spokesman. At its height, 73,000 customers lost power.

"This storm has had two times the impact that Bonnie had last year," she said. The power failures could take several days to repair because of the difficulty in reaching the damaged poles and wires.

Getting crews into Wilmington has



Staff photo by DEBRA COBB

Water rockets from a water main that burst on Old Fayetteville Road in Leland Thursday morning.

been a problem because Interstate 40 has been blocked by high water.

Brunswick Electric Membership Corp. was making swift progress by comparison, restoring power to 25,000 of its 55,000 customers that

were left without power initially. BEMC customers in both Columbus and Brunswick counties lost power.

"Crews will work through the night in an effort to restore power to everyone," said Judy Gore, a BEMC

spokesman. The cooperative brought in 300 contract workers to help.

Four County Electric Membership Corp., which suffered a system-wide power failure to its customers in Bladen, Pender, Duplin, Sampson, Columbus and Onslow counties, restored power to about 1,800 of 28,000 customers Thursday.

"Our preliminary evaluation tells us that major damage occurred to our transmission lines," said Robert Harris, vice president of engineering and operations.

At 10 a.m. Thursday, about 27,500 of the 28,000 company's customers were left without power.

Jones-Onslow Electric Membership Corp. restored power to about 13,000 of its 25,000 customers by 6 p.m. Thursday. The company fought impassable roadways, which stranded 75 large pieces of equipment on the far side of storm-damaged areas, said Ken Jones, a spokesman for the cooperative.

"It's not as bad as we expected," Mr. Jones said.

Far fewer people lost telephone service.

As of around 10:30 a.m., more than 80 percent of customers in BellSouth's Wilmington service district had telephone service. BellSouth has about 150,000 service lines in the Wilmington area.

Telephone company officials urge people to limit their calls, especially if they have phone service but no commercial power. Mr. King said the distribution center is running on battery backup. More use means quicker depletion of the battery supply.

Sprint, which supplies phone service to parts of Onslow, Carteret and Columbus counties, reported 10,000 service failures in Onslow and Carteret and about 25,000 in Columbus for similar reasons. Portions of Columbus County got phone service by mid-afternoon Thursday, but much of the county still was without service in the evening.

Time Warner Cable Co. was attempting to restore cable to affected areas in Wilmington.