?? In the aftermath of the Sunday, September 14 high winds, local utility companies throughout Southern Indiana and Northern Kentucky have been scrambling to get residents back on the electrical systems.

The Category 1 hurricane strength winds that battered the area on that day played havoc with area trees and consequently electrical lines that provided power. At one point nearly 144,000 Duke customers were without power, over 300,000 in metro-Louisville, some 20,000 in the Harrison County REMC (nearly 90 percent of their total customer base), over 10,000 for Clark County REMC, and over 20,000 in the Jackson County REMC coverage area.

According to officials, the damage is the most widespread in recent memory, and exceeded that of the April 1974 tornados that tore through the region. Damage stretched from the Louisville area northward to near Cleveland, Ohio.

In most instances local school corporations (Providence, West Clark and Greater Clark County Schools) took the noble route and called classes off on Tuesday or Wednesday for the remainder of the week due to households still being without power, many roads still having debris on them, and downed power lines. Still other corporations opted to hold classes, but reported extensive absences. After canceling classes Monday through Thursday, East Washington resumed on Friday, but reported nearly 20 percent absence. New Albany-Floyd County Schools reported around 15 percent absenteeism corporation-wide on Friday, their first day back to class.

According to East Washington officials, the absences would not be counted against students. NA-FC officials said that an absence on Friday would be counted as an excused absence, however it would count against perfect attendance.

Many parents were upset that schools resumed on Friday, citing the fact that many were still without power, many had low water pressure and some without phone lines. In some instances residents reported roads that were still virtually impassable due to downed limbs or trees, and were concerned about busses being able to maneuver through to pick up students. Still other families with small children had relocated out of the area until power was restored, going to stay with family or friends in other communities who did have power. In those cases, they were unaware of the decision.

While the children may have enjoyed a few extra days of vacation from school, many worked with their family or friends to clear debris.

The remnants of fallen trees have kept homeowners and tree businesses hopping as they've filled trucks and in many cases lots with limbs, stumps and various construction material.

Delays in getting power on were two fold. Many of the local power companies had committed personnel to Texas coast to assist with restoration of power there following Hurricane Ike making landfall on Friday, September 12. Those crews took with them trucks, equipment, transformers and other parts to assist in restoring power to the devastated areas there. Forecasts for winds were not in the cards for our area when these crews were sent out.

It wasn't until conditions came together for the "perfect storm", as it were here that the utility companies realized the situation they faced. In some cases crews were recalled, but in others, crews from around the state and neighboring states, were called in.

When the winds of Hurricane Ike pummeled the area from Louisville to Cleveland Ohio it left over two million without power. Harrison REMC reported 20,000 or 90 percent of their customer base without service the first day.

Due to the severity of the wind, the damage to the power lines, poles and transformers was extensive, creating many obstacles in the attempt to restore service.

Assessment of actual damage could not be done until all areas were reached by crews. Crews began working immediately and by the end of Sunday, nearly 25 percent of Harrison REMC members had their power restored.

Restoration starting Monday was assisted by other contractors and Northern Indiana REMC line crews.

The outage is considered the area's largest and most damaging power outage in 30-plus years.

As of Monday afternoon, Harrison REMC had 450 homes still without power. Power is expected to be restored to them by Wednesday. The REMC appreciates the patience of those members who were without or are still without power.

Jackson County REMC is asking for any customer who is without power or who is aware of a downed power line, and who has not called in during the last two days, to please call and report the situation. The telephone number is (812)358-4458 or (800)288-4458.

More than half the system was without power on Sunday, in excess of 12,000 customers. Approximately 10 Jackson REMC customers remained without power as of 7 a.m. Saturday, September 20, across Jackson, Jennings, Scott, and Washington Counties. Service should be completely restored on Saturday.

"We wish to thank all of our customers who showed such patience and understanding throughout this trying week, as well as our employees and off-system line workers, who dedicated themselves to the restoration effort,' a spokesman said.

Clark County REMC reported steady progress with restoration in its five county service area. According to officials, the estimated number of households still without power is hard to pinpoint. The REMC believes that the number is under 1000, or 5 percent of its service area.

The Clark County REMC estimated that 75 percent or higher of its service territory was without power. Final numbers are to be totaled after the repair work is completed. With assistance to the REMC from northern Indiana REMC's and Pike Electric Contractors, steady progress continues to be made. Northern Lights has also been an asset in underground locates.

Additional crews from Kosciusko REMC (Warsaw), Steubin County REMC (Angola), Central Indiana Power (Greenfield), Whitewater Valley REMC (Liberty), and Johnson County REMC (Franklin), have assisted crews in the efforts.

Despite the efforts of all the utility companies to get power restored as quickly as possible, there are certain steps that have to be taken in order to safely and completely restore power to locations.

According to Clark County REMC their steps to restoring power are as follows:

Step 1 - Transmission lines seldom fail, but if they do, thousands of members could be served by one high-voltage transmission line. If there is damage there, it gets attention first.

Step 2 - Substations are next. A problem there could be caused by failure in the transmission system supplying the substation. If the problem can be corrected at the substation level, power may be restored to a large number of people.

Step 3 - Main three-phase distribution supply lines are checked if the problem cannot be isolated to the substation. When power is restored by this supply line, members could see lights come on, as long as there is no problem further down the line or individually.

Step 4 - The single-phase lines carrying power down your road is then restored. If there is no problem from the road to your house, you should have power. Sometimes damage will occur

on the service line between your house and the transformer on the nearby pole. This can explain why you have no power when your neighbor does.

Step 5 - The final sweep is making repairs from the road to your meter. These final sweeps are sometimes the most difficult to complete.

While all of the utilities understood the necessity of power to all households, their priorities must be to get the power on in a specific order. Since lines are generally linked, they must begin at one end and work their way down.

Although the majority of the area does have power, residents are cautioned to be careful around leaning trees or limbs still in tree tops near utility poles. While the majority of damage has passed, there is still the likelihood in the coming weeks that loose limbs sitting precariously in trees may still come down and again take power out, block roads or cause injury. Residents are cautioned to not try to remove these limbs themselves, but to contact their utility company as soon as possible.

Once the cover of leaves begins to lessen utility crews and homeowners will have a better idea of potential problems.

The power not only posed an inconvenience for residents in terms of light and television service, but it also cost in terms of foods. Many residents lost the majority of their refrigerator and freezer contents when power stayed out for the prolonged period. According to published reports, foods kept un-refrigerated for periods of longer than four hours should be disposed of. In many cases, that four hours turned into days, so there was little question as to the foods worth.

Many local stores (those without external refrigerated trucks) were forced to simply write off their frozen or perishable stock and throw it away. Some stores took the opportunity to remain open, but operated off solar calculators and cash drawers, selling dry goods and non-refrigerated foods.

Insurance companies have been kept busy too, as adjusters make their way from neighborhood to neighborhood assessing damage, reviewing coverages, and writing checks.

Contractors will likely have their hands full over the coming weeks as homeowners hurry to get roof and other repairs taken care of before cold weather sets in.

Final tallies of the overall costs in terms of damage and losses will not be known for some time, but according to many officials it could be excessive.