

When the Lights Go Out

Office of Housing and Residential Life

On August 24, 2007 the power to East and West Halls and WVA Buildings 2, 4, and 5 went out. The power outage started around 4:30 p.m., after a severe storm came through the St. Louis area. As soon as the power went out, the professional and student staff in the Office of Housing and Residential Life began contacting Public Safety, Ameren (the electrical power company), and other Webster University departments to discuss restoring power to the buildings, and ensuring the students safety. Students that were in the buildings at the time were gathered in the lounges on their floor to be informed about the power outage and provided with a timeline of events. Residential Life staff members also informed the students that entered the building about the situation and instructed them to find their RA for more information.

In many cases, Ameren is able to provide an estimate of when the power will be restored. In this case, Ameren would not provide an estimate, giving the impression that the power could be off all night. Due to safety and security reasons the Office of Housing and Residential Life determined that if the power did not return by 8:00 p.m., East and West Halls would need to be evacuated. Residents were immediately contacted by the Resident Assistants through floor meetings and phone calls to inform the students of the power outage, and planned evacuation at 8:00 p.m. if the power was not restored. Students were told that they could call Public Safety or the Housing Office to get the most up-to-date information about the situation and to find out when the power was restored. Student residents from the St. Louis area were asked if they would stay at their family's home for the night and they were asked if they would be willing to take someone from out of town home with them. Additionally, students in the Loretto Hall and the other WVA buildings that had power began to offer to house those students that lived out of town. Over 50 students volunteered to share their rooms with the residents of East and West Halls. A list of students from out of town was reviewed to ensure that everyone from out of town had a place to stay.

At 8:00 p.m. the power was still out and we proceeded to make sure that every student had a place to stay for the night. Residents living in WVA buildings without power were not asked to evacuate because the structure of the apartments is different and the power did not affect the security and safety of those residents. By 8:30 p.m., the halls were locked down. Students that needed access to the building were escorted to their rooms by an RA to get medicines and other necessities. Residential Life staff members and Public Safety were on hand all night to help any student that came to the halls. The power came back on at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 25, and the students were allowed to re-enter the buildings at 9:30 a.m.

During these kinds of situations, the Office of Housing and Residential Life is concerned first and foremost about the safety and security of the residents in the halls. Our plan in these situations includes the following:

- Work with University departments and local resources/agencies to review safety/security issues that could affect the residential spaces.
- Inform the students in the affected areas about the situation and the game plan in a timely and efficient manner.
- Help identify resources and alternative housing for any student that would need assistance during the evacuation.
- Set up a hotline that would be able to be accessed by residents/parents for current updates regarding the evacuation.

The Office of Housing and Residential Life would like to thank all of the parents and friends in the St. Louis area that opened up their homes to these students. We would also like to thank the residents for their patience and understanding throughout this process. We would also like to thank those students who offered to house students in their rooms and homes. Due to all of these efforts and everyone's patience and understanding all the displaced residents had a place to stay for the night. Thank You!

If you have questions about this power outage or other related questions, please contact the Office of Housing and Residential Life at (314)-246-4663, or housing@webster.edu.