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# After weekend outages, NStar vows to improve Allston service

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT AUGUST 07, 2012

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NStar pledged Monday to seek long-term improvements to electrical service in Allston, after two outages over the weekend knocked out power to hundreds of customers and angered merchants in a key business district.

“We know that our customers expect and deserve better,” NStar spokesman Michael Durand said by phone Monday. “We’re taking a closer look at how to improve service and reliability to the area.”

Around 11:30 a.m. Saturday, what the utility described as cable failures in an underground system affected about 1,200 customers in and around Brighton and Harvard avenues and Cambridge, North Beacon, and Linden streets. Power was restored to some customers within hours, while others had to wait until 8 a.m. Sunday, Durand said.

On Sunday, at about 12:30 p.m., 800 of the customers who lost power the day before were left in the dark again. For about 600 customers, the outage lasted just under three hours. The other 200 customers were without electricity until about 2 a.m. Monday.

That outage was also attributed to cable failures in NStar's underground system, but the company has not determined whether the two outages were related.

"The events of this weekend clearly told us that this circuit needs further analysis," Durand said. "Unfortunately, the reliability in this particular part of Allston does not meet our standards."

He said NStar officials are reviewing other outages that have hit the neighborhood in the past.

Last July, smoke poured from a manhole at Brighton Avenue and Linden Street as NStar crews worked to fix a problem with an underground cable that caused about 1,500 customers to lose power overnight.

In the weekend outages, Durand said, the hot weather may have strained the electrical system in that area.

Heat not only leads to an increase in power use, but also causes temperatures in and around underground electrical equipment to increase.

The utility came under sharp criticism from city officials over two major outages earlier this year.

In March, an electrical substation caught fire, cutting power for two days to a broad swath of the city.

An outage in May in the Back Bay affected about 12,500 customers, though it lasted less than an hour.

Marc Kadish, who owns two restaurants on Brighton Avenue, Sunset Grill & Tap and Big City, said his businesses lost valuable weekend income because of the recent outages.

"We lost so much business, and there's so much product in the trash barrel," Kadish said. "Our customers wanted to come in and drink some good beers.

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*'We lost so much business, and there's so much product in the trash barrel . . . We really took a beating from this weekend.'*

“We ended up throwing out food and not being able to serve people,” he said. “We really took a beating from this weekend.”

Kadish — who is also president of Allston Village Main Streets, which promotes and assists area businesses — said that in the 25 years he has been in Allston, he cannot remember a summer when the neighborhood was not hit with power outages.

While NStar representatives said they aim to find long-term solutions for the neighborhood, Kadish remains wary.

“It’s not like we can buy electricity elsewhere, which makes it tough,” he said.

“We’ll try to do what we can do, but it seems like it’s a lost cause because we don’t have any leverage.”

*Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com. For more news from Boston’s neighborhoods and surrounding towns, go to boston.com/yourtown.*

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