

In Storm’s Aftermath, 2 Million Still In Dark

WASHINGTON (AP) — From North Carolina to New Jersey, 2 million people without electricity are asking the same question: Why will it take so long to get the lights back on?

Nearly three full days after a severe summer storm lashed the East Coast, utilities warned that many neighborhoods could remain in the dark for much of the week, if not beyond.

Friday’s storm arrived with little warning, so utility companies have had to wait days for extra crews traveling from as far away as Quebec and Oklahoma. And the toppled trees and power lines often entangled broken equipment in debris that must be removed before workers can even get started.

Adding to the urgency of the repairs are the sick and elderly, who are especially vulnerable without air conditioning in the sweltering triple-digit heat. Many sought refuge in hotels or basements.

Officials feared the death toll, already at 22, could climb because of the heat and widespread use of generators, which emit fumes that can be dangerous in enclosed spaces.

Syrian Opposition Makes New Push To Unite

CAIRO (AP) — The Arab League chief urged exiled Syrian opposition figures to unite at a meeting Monday as a new Western effort to force President Bashar Assad from power faltered. Another 85 soldiers, including a general, fled to Turkey in a growing wave of defections.

Turkey’s state-run Anadolu news agency said the group of defectors also included 14 other officers, ranging from one colonel to seven captains. It is one of the largest groups of Syrian army defectors to cross into Turkey since the uprising against Assad began.

The stakes are high for calming the crisis in Syria, which NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on Monday called “one of the gravest security challenges the world faces today.”

But more than one year into the Syrian revolt, the opposition is still hobbled by the infighting and fractiousness that have prevented the movement from gaining the kind of political traction it needs to present a credible alternative to Assad.

“There is an opportunity before the conference of Syrian opposition today that must be seized, and I say and repeat that this opportunity must not be wasted under any circumstance,” Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby told nearly 250 members of the Syrian opposition at the opening of the two-day conference in Cairo.

Romney Hopes To Quiet Outsourcing Talk

WASHINGTON (AP) — The presidential race is entering the sultry summer, a final lull before the sprint to Election Day, with President Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney neck and neck and no sign that either can break away.

As both candidates take a breather this week — Romney at his lakeside compound in New Hampshire and Obama at the Camp David presidential retreat — each sees problems he’d like to cure before Labor Day.

Obama and his allied groups aren’t keeping pace with Romney and the Republican fundraising machine, and that places more pressure on the president to solicit huge sums himself. And the Supreme Court ruling that saved Obama’s signature health care initiative last week didn’t change the fact that most Americans don’t like the law.

Romney’s fundraising is impressive. But, in a sign of his hurdles, he’s spending heavily in North Carolina, a state he almost certainly must win to have a chance at the White House. And some voters in key states appear uncomfortable with his record at a corporate restructuring firm before he became Massachusetts governor.

National polls suggest that Obama holds a small, perhaps meaningless lead as he awaits a new jobs report Friday that could bring bad news similar to last month’s. Romney is offering few details of his own health and economic proposals for now, perhaps thinking outside forces will dislodge the president.

Egypt’s New President: I’m A Simple Man

CAIRO (AP) — Standing before tens of thousands of adoring supporters in Tahrir Square, President Mohammed Morsi opened his jacket in a show of bravado to prove he was not wearing a bullet-proof vest. The message was clear: He has nothing to fear because he sees himself as the legitimate representative of Egypt’s uprising.

In the week since he was named president, Morsi has portrayed himself as a simple man, uninterested in the trappings of power and refusing to take up residence in the presidential palace

His speeches reveal a populist bent, filled with generous promises many are skeptical he can keep. And although he began as an awkward and uninspiring speaker, Morsi appears to be striving to reinvent his uncharismatic public persona.

After eking out a narrow victory in last month’s runoff, Morsi has claimed the mantle of the revolution that ousted Hosni Mubarak last year.

But his Muslim Brotherhood did not join the uprising until it had gained irreversible momentum. And its critics say the Islamic fundamentalist group has hijacked the movement that was led by secular and liberal youths, and abandoned demonstrators during deadly clashes with security forces in the months that followed Mubarak’s February 2011 ouster.

McConnell: Odds Long Against Gutting HCR

ELIZABETHTOWN, Ky. (AP) — It’s on his to-do list, but U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell says the odds are against repealing the health care law championed by President Barack Obama.

The Kentucky Republican said Monday it’s hard to unravel something of the magnitude of the 2,700-page health care law, WHAS-TV reports.

“If you thought it was a good idea for the federal government to go in this direction, I’d say the odds are still on your side,” McConnell said. “Because it’s a lot harder to undo something than it is to stop it in the first place.”

McConnell discussed the law in comments to about 50 people at Hardin Memorial Hospital in Elizabethtown. The state’s senior senator was making stops at Kentucky hospitals discussing what’s next since last week’s ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court’s that the law was constitutional.

The high court upheld the law’s crucial mandate that individuals buy health insurance or face a penalty.

Researchers To Announce Evidence Of ‘God Particle’

GENEVA (AP) — Scientists believe the “God particle” that might explain the underpinnings of the universe is real, and they are about to present their evidence to the world.

Physicists at the world’s biggest atom smasher plan to announce Wednesday that they have nearly confirmed the primary plank of a theory that could shape the scientific understanding of all matter.

The idea is much like gravity and Isaac Newton’s discovery: It was there all the time before Newton explained it. But now scientists know what it is and can put that knowledge to further use.

The focus of the excitement is the Higgs boson, a subatomic particle that, if confirmed, could help explain why matter has mass, which combines with gravity to give an object weight.

Western Wildfires

Crash Of Plane En Route To S.D. Grounds Key Part Of Fleet

BY MEAD GRUVER AND DAN ELLIOTT
Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — The deadly crash of a military cargo plane fighting a South Dakota wildfire forced officials to ground seven other Air Force air tankers, removing critical firefighting aircraft from the skies during one of the busiest and most destructive wildfire seasons ever to hit the West.

The C-130 from an Air National Guard wing based in Charlotte, N.C., was carrying a crew of six and fighting a 6.5-square-mile blaze in the Black Hills of South Dakota when it crashed Sunday, killing at least one crew member and injuring others.

President Barack Obama offered thoughts and prayers to the crew and their families. “The men and women battling these terrible fires across the West put their lives on the line every day for their fellow Americans,” he said in a statement.

The crash cut the number of large air tankers fighting this summer’s outbreak of wildfires by one-third.

The military put the remaining seven C-130s on an “operational hold,” keeping them on the ground indefinitely. That left 14 federally contracted heavy tankers in use until investigators gain a better understanding of what caused the crash.

“You’ve basically lopped off eight air tankers immediately from your inventory, and that’s going to make it tougher to fight wildfires,” said Mike Archer, who distributes a daily newsletter of wildfire news.

“And who knows how long the planes will be down?” he said, adding that investigators will take time to make their conclusions.

Obama signed a bill last month hastening the addition of seven large tanker planes to the nation’s run-down aerial firefighting fleet, at a cost of \$24 million, but the first planes won’t be available until mid-August.

C-130 air tankers have crashed on firefighting duty before. In 2002, a privately owned civilian version of an older-model C-130 crashed in California, killing three crew members. The plane broke up in flight and an investigation blamed fatigue cracks in the wings.

The crash, in part, prompted a re-

Mexico’s Next President Faces Uphill Fight

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The apparent victor of Mexico’s presidential race, Enrique Pena Nieto, struggled Monday with the sticky bonds of his party’s notorious past, the limitation of his mandate and an opponent who has yet to concede defeat.

His long-ruling and now-retired Institutional Revolutionary Party, the PRI, won only about 38 percent of the vote and is unlikely to get a majority in Congress. In fact, it may lose seats.

He faces an old guard in the PRI that still exercises considerable power, an ongoing war against fierce drug cartels and a still sluggish economy. His closest rival, leftist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who polled a higher-than-expected vote of about 32 percent, has refused to accept the loss, and many of his militant followers are suspicious of the results.

President Barack Obama called Pena Nieto on Monday to congratulate him. The U.S. Embassy in Mexico City said Obama told him the United States “looks forward to advancing common goals, including promoting democracy, economic prosperity, and security in the region and around the globe, in the coming years.”

A C-130 equipped with the Modular Airborne Firefighting System dumps water during a practice run in 2007

C-130 tanker fleet grounded

In the wake of the crash of one of the planes in South Dakota Sunday night, the remaining seven similar air tankers have been grounded. A look at their operational specifics:

Pressurized tanks loaded into cargo area

Load dispersed by nozzles deployed through plane’s rear ramp, above

Or through fittings in the side of the fuselage

When rigged to fire fires, the C-130 can dump 3,000 gallons (11,356 liters) of retardant or water in five seconds; it can reload in eight minutes

Home bases of airlift wings from which tankers deploy

153rd Cheyenne, Wyo.
302nd Colorado Springs, Colo.
146th Port Hueneme, Calif.
Crash site near Edgemont, S.D.
145th Charlotte, N.C.

A C-130 dumps a load of retardant while fighting a fire in Oregon in 2006

The aircraft are typically used to target the leading edge of fires to keep them from spreading

Source: Charlotte Observer, U.S. Air National Guard, CAL FIRE
Graphic: Robert Dorrell
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view of the airworthiness of large U.S. air tankers and led ultimately to a greatly reduced fleet of large civilian tanker planes. The 44 planes in the fleet a decade ago has dwindled to nine being flown on U.S. Forest Service exclusive use contracts right now.

Another aerial firefighting plane, the Lockheed P2V, has had some problems in recent months. One crashed in Utah, killing the two pilots, and another one crash-landed in Nevada.

A military spokesman said he did not know when the grounded planes

would resume firefighting flights. They were used to fight fires in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and South Dakota.

The C-130s can be loaded with a device called the Modular Airborne Firefighting System, or MAFFS. The system can drop 3,000 gallons of water or fire retardant within seconds through a modified side door toward the rear of the plane.

The military planes had been filling up with fire retardant and flying out of Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs.

The U.S. Forest Service, which owns the MAFFS devices and coordinates the program with the military, expressed support for the decision to stand down the MAFFS.

However, as a result, the Forest Service now will have to prioritize fires and the resources allocated to fight them, said Jennifer Jones, a Forest Service spokeswoman at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho.

Fires threatening human life will be a top priority, followed by those threatening communities and community infrastructure, other types of property, and finally natural and cultural resources, she said.

“The bottom line is, we will continue to do our best to fulfill our responsibility to protect the public, communities and cultural and natural resources during wildfires with the assets that we have available,” she said.

Firefighters in the field also will adjust their strategy and tactics based on the availability of air tankers.

The plane that crashed was fighting a fire about 80 miles southwest of Rapid City, S.D. The terrain of the crash site is “very, very rugged, straight up and straight down cliffs,” said Frank Maynard, the Fall River County emergency management director.

Military officials declined to say whether anyone was killed, but they confirmed there were some crew members who were being treated for serious injuries at a hospital in Rapid City.

The family of Lt. Col. Paul Mikeal of Mooresville, N.C., said they were told early Monday that he had died in the crash. They said he was a 42-year-old married father of two and a veteran of deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

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