



Sandy-stricken states pitch backup generators for gas stations

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Haunted by the gas station lines that snaked through East Coast communities after last fall's Superstorm Sandy, some states are mulling laws that would ensure that service stations are prepared for future disasters.

Lawmakers and elected officials in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut are considering proposals that would require gas stations to be backup-generator ready to protect against power outages in future storms. Hurricane-pummeled Florida and Louisiana both already have requirements on the books.

Advocates say the requirements could help to stave off future gas shortages in the midst of worries that the warming climate will usher in more extreme weather events.

"In many of the cases that were observed in the aftermath of Sandy, individual gas stations had plenty of fuel in their storage tank, but they couldn't pump the gas because the electricity was down," said Irwin Redlener, director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University's Earth Institute.

In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) this summer unveiled an initiative that would prevent that problem in future storms by requiring some gas stations to install a transfer switch, which would allow them to use generators, by April 2014. The initiative also would require gas stations built after April 1, 2014, to be wired to sustain a backup generator.

"These transfer switches -- the wiring, in essence, that would allow the generator to be delivered and work -- is what needed to be in place" during Superstorm Sandy, Redlener said.

In Connecticut, lawmakers began offering legislation after Hurricane Irene and a subsequent winter storm struck in 2011, but nothing stuck. The state instead turned to a pilot microgrid program, which provides grants ([Greenwire](#), March 7). Last month, officials announced that one of the nine grant-winning projects would include a gas station.

"We're less focused on the mandate approach and more focused on finding innovative solutions that have allowed for folks that want to take actions," said Alex Kragie, deputy chief of staff at the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

State Rep. Matthew Lesser (D), one of the Connecticut lawmakers who has been pushing for backup-generator legislation in his state, said that in discussions about protecting critical infrastructure, gas stations are frequently overlooked.

"I think we often prioritize shelters, which obviously makes sense, but I think people forget just how important gas is to the economy -- and how a disruption in gas stations really disrupts everything else," he said.

But the gas station industry has been less enthusiastic about such laws. Indeed, state-level associations representing service station and convenience store operators pushed back against proposed legislation in New Jersey and Connecticut.

"Everybody just sees gas lines, and they see that a lot of stations are closed, and they assume that the stations don't have power," said Jacy Lance, director of communication and research at the New Jersey Gasoline, C-Store, Automotive Association. "But that was a false assumption."

In fact, Lance said, members of her organization reported that they had power after the storm.

"The refineries and terminals in northern New Jersey were completely shut down, and there was water everywhere," she said. "That was the main issue."

She said required generator upgrades would cost her members as much as \$40,000, a move that wouldn't guarantee a fix. "It's a pretty costly mandate to put on a small business," she said.

At the same time, Paul Molitor -- head of communications at the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, which supports state-level requirements -- said upstream supply problems would certainly be an issue for long-term outages, but gas stations typically have a few days of fuel supply on hand.

John Townsend, a spokesman for AAA Mid-Atlantic, said several factors contributed to the lines at gas stations last fall.

"After Sandy, we had thousands of gas stations in New York City, New Jersey and Long Island that were shut down due to power outages and shortages -- and also because of depleted fuel supplies," Townsend said.

Nonetheless, he said AAA supports the use of backup generators at gas stations.

"When you have these devastating events and you don't have these generators or things like that, you're at the mercy of nature -- and the power companies," he said.