

Almost 20,000 still without power in Collier

By Chris W. Colby

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Photo by Lexey Swall / Daily News

Ray Shands from the First Baptist Church in Orlando patches part of the roof at the East Naples Baptist Church on Davis Blvd. on Friday morning. Shands and a disaster response team from Highlands Baptist Church in Panama City, Fla. traveled to Naples, Fla. to help people clean up their property and repair roofs. The team of responders has helped with Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita and now Wilma.

Most of those who lost power as Hurricane Wilma pounded Collier County have their service restored, but about 20,000 customers remained without electricity Saturday night.

Since Monday's storm, Florida Power & Light has restored service to 150,000 residences and businesses, including Isles of Capri on Saturday morning. By 4 p.m. Saturday, 19,500 remained without power across the county, FPL officials said.

Marco Island lost its power Friday morning because of salt water deposits on power lines and equipment. But by 9 p.m. Friday, Lee County Electrical Cooperative had restored service to the island.

Lee County Electrical Cooperative officials reported 2,000 customers in Immokalee and 250 in Carnestown still didn't have power Saturday.

"More than 500 line and vegetation crews will continue to restore power to the remaining customers without power," according to a company press release.

FPL put a map on its Web site, www.fpl.com, showing where the outages are in each county. Collier's outages are near U.S. 41 North and East, with a lot of outages in the city of Naples and on the south side of Davis Boulevard between Airport-Pulling Road and Collier Boulevard.

Areas east and north of Interstate 75 will have service restored no later than Nov. 10. All other areas will have power by Nov. 8, according to the Web site.

FPL operators are telling customers there's no way to predict when an affected area will have its power back on, but those dates are worst-case scenarios, and customers should have their service before then.

Even if many customers had power Saturday, some had no cable television. Comcast spokesman Larry Schweber said 35 percent of Collier remained without service.

And as of the end of Friday, Sprint had restored telephone service to all but 7,000 customers in Lee and Collier counties combined. That's down from 125,000 who were without service Tuesday.

"If they're still having outages, customers should report them because we're getting most of ours taken care of. Some customers may not know they're out, if they've been using cordless telephones and they're out of power. So they should report it," Sprint spokeswoman Michele Pinnau said.

The city of Naples is still under a boil advisory for its water, but that may be lifted Monday afternoon, utility director Bob Middleton said. The water system is nearly fixed, although workers are still trying to restore service to the Moorings area.

"The big mains in the ground have water in them, but we just can't get the water to the houses. The trees ripped the small pipes out of the ground," Middleton said.

Middleton said he had no way of estimating how many customers remain without water. He said there may be outages in small pockets throughout the city, but those are isolated.

Jaime Sarbaugh, spokeswoman for the Collier County Bureau of Emergency Services, said no new deaths attributed to Hurricane Wilma were reported Saturday.

The death toll in Collier rose to seven Friday after a 68-year-old woman died in a generator accident on Third Street South.

"We're still very concerned about people with the chainsaws as they clean up and with their generators," Sarbaugh said. "We've had a lot of chainsaw injuries already."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency began its blue tarp program Saturday. Residents came to the Guadalupe Center in Immokalee and the Collier Community Development and Environmental Services building on Horseshoe Drive in East Naples to sign up.

"The (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) puts blue tarps on people's homes who need them," Sarbaugh said.

The roof must have less than 50 percent damage, and the structure must be sound, Sarbaugh said. Interested residents can register by calling (888) 766-2358.

The Corps took some 210 homeowners' completed forms Saturday for what is known as "Right of Entry" approval, which allows government and contractors' employees to enter the property of those asking help.

It has not set dates for actual roof tarping; registration today only allows the Corps to have it done. The Corps' informational site adds that the tarping is meant solely as temporary help while homeowners are waiting for permanent repair.

There's no charge for the services of Operation Blue Roof.

The Corps will provide and accept completed Right of Entry forms from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. today at these locations:

— Collier County Community Development and Environmental Services, 2800 Horseshoe Drive, off Airport-Pulling Road in Naples.

— Guadalupe Center, 209 S. Ninth St., Immokalee. No decision has been made about whether the Corps will return Monday.

For more information, call the Collier Information Center Hotline, 774-8444.

Staff writer Harriet Heithaus contributed to this report.

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