

# When Hell froze over

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News Editor

"Bitter cold days with record low nighttime temperatures have driven the demand for electricity beyond that which is available, causing power outages in many areas of the state," said Lt. Governor and chairman of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council, Mark S. Singel.

And with this announcement, Pennsylvania was thrust into one of its worst energy crises in 30 years, Pennsylvania Energy Company (PENELEC) Administrative Manager Carl Broff said.

Across the state, some businesses, schools and even city halls either closed early or shutdown altogether.

Even Erie's own City Hall could not escape the energy problems. With Mayor Joyce Savocchio out of town, Director of Public Works John G. Barzano was appointed mayor.

"We were asked to cut our power down as much as possible by PENELEC and the governor in his proclamation," Barzano said. "We decided this by considering those factors and the cold weather which was causing our boilers and furnaces to overwork."

Gannon University and Behrend closed early on Wednesday, at 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. respectively, while Edinboro University not only closed operations early but also remained closed all day Thursday.

University Park closed at 2 p.m. on Wednesday and did not reopen until 10 a.m. on Thursday.

Gannon University spokesperson Rebecca Martin explained that her school's

since we were not affected by the power grid closings."

Edinboro closed due to three major factors.

"The weather was not just a contributing factor in our decision, but it was also a reason for the (energy) crisis," assistant vice president for Public Information Bill Reed said. "The weather was square one, PENELEC two, and the governor's proclamation was third."

This proclamation that most people mention was put out by the governor's office on Wednesday.

**"In many classes, one day may be too much to miss"**

- Dean of Student Affairs Chris Reber

It stated, "All counties are now declared to be in a state of disaster emergency and are added to the previously designated disaster emergency area."

The proclamation went on to state that, "all reasonable efforts to achieve immediate energy conservation should be taken."

Lt. Gov. Singel said all Pennsylvania residents should reduce power to help end the energy crisis.

"How serious conditions become will be directly dependent on how we all cooperate to reduce this excessive demand for electric power," Singel said.

The governor's office was suggesting power reduction, but they made no specific demands, Deputy Press Secretary for the governor John Taylor said.

"There was no mandate of closing. We were urging to curtail use," Taylor said. "The governor does not have authority over state-related schools, but he urged conservation of electricity."

So how exactly did Behrend come to the decision to close early on Wednesday?

Under normal circumstances, the Dean would decide whether to remain open or not, but on Wednesday Dean Lilley was out of town. Because of this, Assistant Dean Jack Burke made the actual decision.

However, Burke did brainstorm with several other administrators early Wednesday afternoon in making the final decision.

The consulted group included Director of Operations John Ream, Associate Dean of Student Affairs Ken Miller, Manager of Housing and Foods James Bowen, Behrend heating and ventilation expert Gerald Kerner, Police and Safety Manager Bill

Donahue, and the three residence life coordinators.

The group took into account that classes were already in progress, the PENELEC notification of possible grid shutdown, and the effect that closing would have on residents and commuters, Dean of Student Affairs Chris Reber said.

Reber also said certain classes may be severely hurt by a cancellation.

"In many classes, one day may be too much to miss," Reber said.

On Thursday morning, the same group chose to wait and see whether the PENELEC emergency would be lifted and if there was any word from the governor, Reber said.

John Ream felt that the question of when Behrend would make up a cancelled day of classes was a key factor in keeping the campus open on Thursday.

"If we cancel classes, when do we make them up?" Ream asked. "Do we cancel a day out of a spring break?"

Ream said PENELEC sales representative Rick Holmes called on Wednesday to alert Ream about the rolling blackouts.

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-Dean John Lilley

"He advised us to reduce energy use but he did not request us to close," Ream said. "So, we reduced our electrical loads, especially lighting."

Two major sources of electricity use are the heating systems in Lawrence and Niagara Halls Ream said.

Behrend does not use up an enormous amount of energy, therefore the closing down of the college would not really make a significant dent in the energy crisis Dean Lilley said.

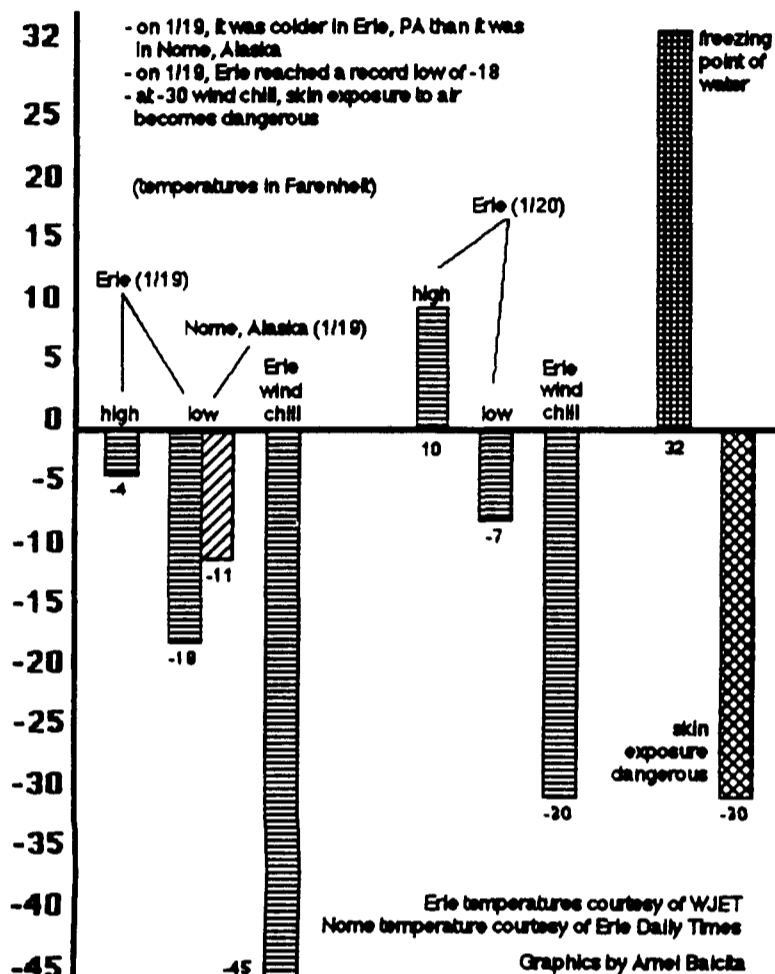
"We're not a major player," Lilley said. "When it comes to energy, UP has a much more significant role."

At Behrend, the most significant source of electrical energy is the residence halls Lilley said.

"The most significant change in energy output would occur if we would close the residence halls, but that is not an option."

As for a written policy for this type of emergency, Dean Lilley

## Brr...it was cold last week!!!



**"All counties are now declared to be in state of disaster emergency..."**

- Gov. Robert Casey

decision to close early was two-fold.

"The decision was made in cooperation with the PENELEC request to reduce power as well as the extreme cold weather situation," Martin said.

Mary Daly, vice president of External Affairs of Mercyhurst College, said her college's decision to remain open on Wednesday was made due to the percentage of students living on-campus (75%).

"We were not asked to close

said the decision to close is a judgement call.

"There is no formula. What was significant was that the rolling blackout mixed with the cold weather created a definite safety hazard," Lilley said.

In response to the decision to keep Behrend open on Thursday, three students organized a boycott of classes.

One of the organizers was Dan Sargent, a sophomore commuter majoring in English, creative writing.

Sargent said he and his friends called about 500 residents and told them of his plan for a boycott of classes.

"We told people about the governor's state of emergency, that UP was closed earlier than us on Wednesday, and that Erie was one of the coldest places in the state," Sargent said.

They decided to organize the boycott after they came into their house freezing cold even though they were wearing many layers of clothing. Another factor was that a couple of Sargent's friends were injured in car accidents.

"I saw cars wiping out everywhere on I-90 on Monday, including some of my friends. One of those friends went to the hospital after one such accident," Sargent said.

One personal concern the organizers had was what Sargent termed, "the abandonment of the commuters by the administration."

In response to the claim this Sargent and the other boycott organizers made that the administration ignored the concerns of commuters, Lilley said, "Whether we made the right decision is up for argument, but whether we ignored student concerns is not."

Along with calls to students, the boycott organizers also called Dean Lilley and Chris Reber.

Lilley came back from out of town on Wednesday night and received, as he said, "the most calls he has had in quite awhile."

"It doesn't guarantee perfection, but it does involve thoughtfulness," Lilley said.

PENELEC spokesperson Carl Broff summed up the severity of the energy crisis by looking back on his career at the electric company.

"This is the first time we have done load shedding in my 30 years at PENELEC," Broff said.

He explained that load shedding is the process by which PENELEC turned off certain grids of power in order for more critical areas to operate at near normal levels.

Two of the main reasons for the electrical problems were the freezing of coal piles for the generators and certain mechanical difficulties Broff said.

Chris Reber expressed a general feeling of the administration about their job through the crisis, including putting up notices of classes being canceled.