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Letter: Montrealers take métro and Hydro-Québec for granted



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Published on: January 19, 2015 | Last Updated: January 19, 2015 10:43 AM EST

SECTIONS



Hydro Quebec Building on René Lévesque Blvd. in Montreal.

Dave Sidaway / Montreal Gazette

Last Monday, Quebecers woke to the news that over 100,000 households had no power on a bitterly cold day. And then I watched in amazement as the numbers quickly went down by half, then another 25 per cent, and by late morning, all but a few thousand had their power restored.

To me, it seemed like an absolute miracle.

Quebecers may take their top-notch utility service for granted, but after a few years of living in the Washington, D.C. area, I certainly do not.

Power outages in the capital, and in Maryland counties also serviced by Pepco, are all too frequent, often coming with no warning and no immediate precipitating event, such as extreme weather or strong winds. It was not uncommon to have a lovely, sunny, cloudless day and for the power to go out suddenly and remain out for hours.

In these multiple crises, Pepco did very little to get power up and running, preferring to engage in public hand-wringing that there were too many trees in the area, rather than sending teams on site to fix the issue.

In the winter of 2010, Washington was hit by a moderate storm (by Quebec standards, anyway) which dumped two feet of snow on the area and resulted in Pepco's customers losing power for a full week.

Pepco took no responsibility for the outages or the delay in getting power running again. Even now, it continues to struggle with keeping the lights on. According to the Washington Post, Pepco customers suffer 70 per cent more power outages than customers with other utilities in big American cities (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/04/AR2010120403887.html>).

Having survived five days in the dark with no heat in 2010, I am incredibly impressed that Hydro-Québec's was able to get power back to their customers as quickly as they did.

Electricity is not the only feature of Montreal that puts other cities to shame: we should be proud of our métro system, too.

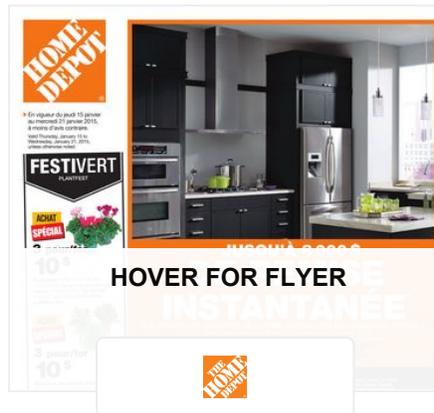
Last week in Washington, smoke filled the L'Enfant Plaza station,

resulting in one death. Eighty people were sent to hospital. In the days since, we've learned that WMATA officials did not learn of the smoke until 10 minutes after it began, a fatal delay. There have been several train collisions and accidents on WMATA lines since 2009.

We take a lot for granted in Montreal, but our safe métro system and efficient utility are amazing gifts.

Jax Jacobsen, Montreal

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