

One-two punch of Helene and Milton makes it harder for JEA to bring in outside crews

<https://www.jacksonville.com/story/weather/hurricane/2024/10/07/jacksonville-schedules-emergency-briefing-on-hurricane-milton/75556860007/>

David Bauerlein

Jacksonville Florida Times-Union

10/7/24

Jacksonville heads into its [second hurricane-related storm in two weeks](#) with city crews still picking up yard waste from Hurricane Helene's tropical force winds and JEA making a final-hours scramble to bring in contract crews that will help the utility's regular linemen restore power when Hurricane Milton hits Florida this week.

Gov. Ron DeSantis said Tuesday that Florida utilities are bringing in linemen from as far away as California in preparation for what will be a massive power restoration effort.

JEA hired 54 contract crews during Helene but had just 20 of those crews lined up as of Monday for Milton. But the utility's hunt brought the number to 50 contract crews by Tuesday, close to what JEA could deploy when Helene caused widespread power failures.

"JEA worked hard to acquire these additional crews at a time of limited external resources," utility spokeswoman Karen McAllister said Tuesday.

She said JEA anticipates the number of contract crews available to work in the JEA service territory will be a "fluid number" because Milton's impact on Florida, particularly in the Gulf Coast region, is creating a high demand for linemen.

During Helene, power failures left about 140,000 JEA customers without electricity at the peak of the damage to JEA's electric grid. JEA was able to bolster its own workforce by hiring 54 contract crews from outside Jacksonville during Helene. But those kinds of contract crews are spread thin helping with restoration in devastated North Carolina and other areas hit hard by Helene while also deploying to southwest Florida where the Milton could deliver its most destructive blow.

"In terms of JEA, these guys were rock stars that week," Mayor Donna Deegan said during a storm briefing Monday evening at the Duval County Emergency Operation Center. "They did a great job getting power back quickly and safely. And I want to tell you, they're really pressed this time."

JEA expects Milton will cause major utility disruptions.

"We are asking customers to be prepared for water and power outages and that there may be longer-than-normal service restoration times," McAllister said.

Many power failures during Helene happened when wind gusts toppled trees and sheared off limbs and branches. Deegan [said Sept. 26 after Helene passed through](#) that the amount of yard debris would require more than one pickup cycle for the city to collect it all. Deegan said Monday evening that pickup continues and any debris not picked up Tuesday should be secured by residents so it's less likely to get tossed around by wind gusts.

"The crews are working around the clock right now to get as much of that as possible," Deegan said. "This is a big job and the crews have really been working tirelessly since before Helene actually hit. It's just a matter of volume and getting as much as we can possibly get."

Unlike areas on the west side of Florida and in [St. Johns County where officials ordered evacuations](#) as Hurricane Milton powers across the Gulf of Mexico, Jacksonville did not call for any evacuations. Deegan said people who live in flood-prone areas, in manufactured homes or in homes with a large tree canopy near them should consider relocating to higher ground or one of the emergency shelters set up by the city.

The shelters are scheduled to open at 8 a.m. Wednesday at these locations:

- Arlington Middle School - (8141 Lone Star Rd), open for general population.
- Atlantic Coast High School (9735 R. G. Skinner Parkway), open for people with special medical needs. It is pet-friendly.
- Chaffee Trail Elementary (11400 Sam Caruso Way), open for general population.
- Landmark Middle School (101 Kernan Blvd. N.), open for general population and pet-friendly.
- LaVilla School of the Arts (501 N. Davis St), open for general population.
- The Legends Center - (5130 Soutel Drive), open for general population and special needs. It is pet-friendly.

Deegan said Tuesday that Jacksonville hotels are filling up as people hit the road from other parts of Florida that are in the forecasted path of where Hurricane Milton will cross the state. She said the city's emergency shelters are available for people coming to Jacksonville to flee the storm.

Jacksonville residents can get breaking updates from various social media accounts connected to the city.

On X, people can follow Deegan (@MayorDeegan) at <https://twitter.com/MayorDeegan>, the city of Jacksonville (@CityOfJax) at <https://twitter.com/cityofjax> and JaxReady (@JaxReady) at <https://twitter.com/jaxready>

Facebook accounts are Deegan (@MayorDeeganJax) at <https://facebook.com/MayorDeeganJax>, city of Jacksonville at <https://www.facebook.com/CityofJax> and JaxReady - <https://www.facebook.com/JaxReady>.

The city's YouTube channel is <https://www.youtube.com/c/cityofjacksonville> and its LinkedIn is <https://www.linkedin.com/company/city-of-jacksonville> Instagram accounts are city of Jacksonville (@CityOfJax) at <https://www.instagram.com/cityofjax/> and JaxReady (@JaxReady) at <https://www.instagram.com/jaxready/>