

# Critics Heard Over Hum Of Generators

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Like most Sunnyside residents, Rose Sullivan felt uncomfortable when her second-floor Sunnyside apartment lost power for four days during last month's blackout.

When Con Edison installed temporary generators outside her building, the Phipps Gardens apartment complex on Barnett Avenue and 50th Street, she thought her worries were over. Unfortunately, it was just the beginning.

"There was one generator outside my window and I had to keep my window closed because the fumes were strong," she said.

Sullivan is not alone. Many residents of Western Queens complained that the generators greatly disturbed their environment with odors, exhaust and loud noise. Sullivan said that the smell was so bad that she spent an entire week at her friend's upstate house just to get away from it.

Con Edison spokesman Chris Olert acknowledged the communities' complaints about the generators, but stated that the generators were beneficial not only to ensure that residents received power during repairs, but also to lighten the load on an already busy grid. "These are backups to ensure reliability," he said. "People want us to keep the lights on, and we will keep them on."

That reliability comes with a hefty price tag. The two most common generators—the small and large versions—which produce 200 or 400 kilowatts of power for up to 10 hours on 200 or 400 gallons of fuel—cost the power company \$2,300 and \$4,500, respectively, per week in rental fees alone. All ran on low sulfur diesel fuel, which burns relatively cleanly.

Many of the 50 temporary generators that were moved onto Western Queens



(Michael O'Kane)

**This generator on 39th Avenue in Sunnyside is one of about a dozen that remained on the streets in Northwest Queens early this week as Con Edison continues to repair the damaged underground network. Residents complain the generators bring unwanted noise and pollution to their neighborhoods.**

streets and patched into the electrical system after the blackout stood nearly two stories high. Others were smaller, and could fit on the back of a flatbed truck. By Monday, the number of generators Con Edison was operating—not including the ones that some private businesses continue to use at their own expense—was reduced to 11. Con Edison expects to remove all generators by the end of August after more repairs are made to the damaged electrical grid.

But even after Con Edison removed the generator from the Phipps Gardens apartment complex last Monday, the impact lingered. "The smell is still in the hallways,"

Sullivan said. "I have a neighbor who has children and she was complaining that it was bad for her baby."

The powerful generator left physical damage outside the complex, including broken windows where electricity cables ran into the basement, and soot stains on the outside walls and windows from the exhaust.

Pinder Paul, of Astoria, lives one block away from four generators on Ditmars Boulevard. He was mainly bothered by the loud humming noise emitted 24-hours a day. "The generator was constantly on and making noise," he said. "The noise was so loud that (my family) couldn't sleep at night."

The generators did not bother all residents equally. Phipps Gardens resident Lisa Nolte lives with her husband and young daughter six floors above one. "There was a gasoline smell and humming noise, but at least we had power," she said.

But Community Board 2 Chairman Joe Conley felt that the generators created a severe quality-of-life issue for Western Queens residents, because the smell and noise forced them to close their windows as the second heat wave hit after the blackout. "People who live that close have to suffer with the fumes and the heat," he said. "We're supposed to be conserving energy and this causes people to turn on their AC."

Conley added that the exhaust from the generators compounds the already growing problem of pollution in the neighborhood. "It's clear that there needs to be a better plan," he said. "People are asking, 'What if this happens again?'"

In addition to air and noise pollution, some residents, including Astoria Assemblyman Michael Gianaris, noted that at least one generator posed a serious safety risk. A unit on Ditmars Boulevard and 75th Street had its inside and wiring exposed and unprotected, which children could easily get at and possibly be electrocuted.

"The generators are very dangerous," Gianaris said. "It was only after I contacted Con Edison that they posted someone to keep a watch on it."

Gianaris, who is spearheading an independent task force to investigate the Western Queens blackout, plans to make recommendations to Con Edison regarding the generators as well. "There is a long list of things that Con Ed has to do to improve the community, and the generators are part of that," he said. □