

1998 AUCKLAND POWER CRISIS

New Zealand's worst recent infrastructure failure occurred in January and February 1998, when electricity supply to the Auckland central business district (CBD) was disrupted for almost 2 months.

Four cables supplied almost all of the Auckland CBD's electricity. One cable failed on 20 January, followed by another on 9 February. The two remaining overloaded cables failed on 19 and 20 February, leaving most of the CBD without power.

Generators were brought in to the CBD to power essential services, such as Auckland Hospital, but most shops and businesses could not operate. Around 6000 inner-city apartment residents had to find alternative accommodation. Sixty thousand of the 74 000 people who usually worked in the CBD had to work from home or in relocated offices elsewhere in Auckland or further away.

It was 5 weeks before an emergency cable was completed and electricity restored to the CBD. The long-term economic impact was estimated at 0.1–0.3 per cent of GDP, and many small businesses never recovered from the event.

Auckland, early morning, during the 1998 power crisis. The crisis left the city without power for five weeks. Photo: New Zealand.

