

North

N.W.T. MLA says power corp wrong to throttle power in winter for people who can't pay

Nunakput MLA asks power corp to stop the practice, says it lacks compassion

[Avery Zingel](#) · CBC News · Posted: Mar 02, 2020 6:00 AM CT | Last Updated: March 2



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Some people who can't afford to pay their power bills in the Northwest Territories are seeing the government-owned power corporation use limiter technology, which throttles their power and cuts it off completely every 10 minutes.

Nunakput MLA Jackie Jacobson says in the winter, using limiters should be illegal.

He says the use of limiters is "life-threatening" to his constituents in Ulukhaktok, Tuktoyaktuk and Sachs Harbour, all in the northern part of the territory. He says it's not "compassionate" and that in his region, where temperatures go as low as -50 C, some constituents have been on limiters for months.

"I've got people phoning me saying, 'Look, I can't cook for my kids,'" Jacobson said.

"Imagine trying to cook supper for a family of five or six with 10 minutes on, 10 minutes off."

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Jacobson says he gets complaints from people in public housing and privately owned homes who are trying to keep the heat on.

"[If] your furnace kicks in, it's going to kick itself out. Then your power is out for 15 or 20 minutes," he said.



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Nunakput MLA Jackie Jacobson says throttling power represents a danger to his constituents in the winter. (Sara Minogue/CBC)

He asked Shane Thompson, the minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation, to direct the company to stop using limiters between the months of October and April.

The corporation has 2,999 delinquent accounts and \$2.2 million in arrears on its books, said Thompson in the Legislative Assembly.

Still, limiters are a "last resort" and Thompson says he will meet with the power corporation's president, Noel Voykin, and the board.

Jacobson says if there isn't a commitment to end the use of limiters, he'll introduce a motion to make them illegal.

"We're put in these positions to lead and it's time to tell them that this is the way the mandate is ... and this is the way business is gonna go now," Jacobson said.

"That's what I'm wishing for the minister to do, but if I have to put it into the floor of the House and put it into a motion, I have no problem doing that," he said.



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MLA Shane Thompson, the minister responsible for the power corporation, said limiters are a last resort. (Mario De Ciccio/Radio-Canada)

Policy allows limiters

The power corporation's policy says it can "at its sole discretion acting reasonably" use limiters when a person fails to pay within 28 days of being billed. It's an "alternative" to disconnecting customers in the winter months, the policy states.

Jacobson says the policy and losing power puts people in peril, particularly if they rely on income support and are choosing between paying for heat, food and clothing.

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The CBC contacted the Northwest Territories Power Corporation to ask it to explain how it decides to use limiters. A spokesperson for the power corporation said it would not be able to provide a response in time for publication.

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