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# Getting a grip on nation's grid grind

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A little perspective, please, on the nation's grid anxiety.

"First, we have to accept there will be failures," said Ben Carreras, corporate fellow with Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and physicist specializing in chaos theory. He has been modeling the complex behavior of the nation's electricity grid for years.

He noted that it was over 15 years ago that scientists first suspected a major blackout would occur in the United States, yet "even as late as three months" prior to the Aug. 14 blackout, officials were saying "the grid is working fine."

Carreras said, "Our society hates risk, but to accept risk implies you have to work constantly. It implies we don't have to wait until something breaks before we try to fix it."

The power grid is a good example, he noted. While power generation has increased about 2 percent every year for the past 20 years, transmission has not changed substantially during that time.

"When you cram as much electricity as possible into the system, you can expect something to break," he said.

So, if society is going to constantly upgrade power use, society best stay abreast of transmission. While that seems intuitive, Carreras said the grid breakdown was a good example to the contrary.

"We are a consuming society, we take everything that is given to us," said Carreras. "And our society was built on top of the grid. We have to have society work with technology."

But, he warned, thinking there is a sure fix will lead the nation right back into the blackout blues.



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"There is not a fix," said Carreras. "I have many colleagues who are working to get the grid into good shape. But it is a complex system, there is no gadget that will fix the problem. What we want to do is minimize the problem, look at mitigating measures.

"We are taking for granted the grid, and we are paying a price for living in a technological society," he said.

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