

Bellagio plans to reopen Wednesday

The Bellagio remained closed today without power while the property installed and tested thousands of feet of power lines to replace damaged cables feeding the 3,000-room casino resort.

The property made plans to reopen Wednesday as tourists gawked at the idled Las Vegas Strip resort, subject of the longest single power outage on the Strip in recent memory.

Officials of Bellagio and parent company MGM MIRAGE said the problem began Sunday when a cable line shorted, causing damage to neighboring lines. The cause of that was still unknown as of this morning. The short could have been caused by water, though there was no evidence of a flood, MGM MIRAGE spokesman Alan Feldman said.

Feldman also said the company didn't know whether ongoing construction of a hotel tower on the property played a role.

Bellagio officials plan to restore power in phases tonight through Wednesday morning, with the expectation that guests would be allowed back to the hotel Wednesday afternoon.

Bellagio officials said they would accommodate existing customers with reservations before taking new bookings.

Feldman said some services would be open Wednesday, including some casual dining establishments and retail shops.

Feldman said the damaged cables have been repaired and testing will continue through today. The property plans to test the system by restoring full power this evening, then shutting it down.

Gaming Control Board officials will be on hand Wednesday to

supervise the reopening of the casino.

Bellagio officials don't expect many disputes because the property informed gamblers to take their money from play during a controlled shut-down procedure on Sunday.

Feldman said it may be weeks before the property can determine what caused the power failure. He declined to speculate how much the Bellagio would lose during the incident.

The Bellagio is conducting its own investigation into the cause of the blackout, and Nevada Power Co. is assisting in the repair process, Nevada Power spokeswoman Andrea Smith said.

None of the equipment that failed at the hotel belonged to Nevada Power, Smith said. Nevada Power records show that there was no power surge or spike that caused the cable to fail.

The Nevada Public Utilities Commission isn't involved in the investigation because it involves Bellagio equipment, which isn't regulated by the agency, spokeswoman Rebecca Wagner said. Nevada Power, which is regulated by the agency, is responsible for equipment leading up to a property's substation but not equipment that leads from the substation into the property, she said.

Like several other major resorts on the Strip, the Bellagio has redundant power available through a backup system that is capable of running the entire resort should the main source of power be cut, Feldman said.

„The backup power kicked in as it was supposed to Sunday,“ he said.

The Bellagio was forced to shut down its backup power generator in order to fix the damaged power lines, however, he said. Shutting off the backup power meant the resort reverted to emergency power, which maintains a minimum amount of power

for safety purposes, he said.

„Clark County code requires everyone to have a certain amount of backup power. We and others go beyond that,“ he said.

Some lights and elevators were working on emergency generators Monday. Only two health issues arose during the outage, Feldman said: one man who reported chest pains was taken to a local hospital and another man said he chipped a tooth after slipping in the shower.

By Sunday, about 2,000 guests were directed to other MGM MIRAGE properties or other resorts on the Strip. A few rooms still remained occupied Monday, primarily by guests who had left the property on golf outings or day trips and had not yet been redirected to other resorts, Feldman said.

„I think things are going very smoothly,“ he said. „Obviously customers are disappointed but certainly people have been understanding and appreciative.“

Security officers had blocked off the Flamingo Road entrance to the property Monday but were allowing cars, taxis and other vehicles to enter from Las Vegas Boulevard. Guests were allowed to drive in or walk into the property while visitors were turned away. Many of the vehicles entering the property Monday were airport shuttles and taxis picking up departing guests.

The security detail was part of a slimmed-down staff of about 2,000 people who were on hand Monday to help redirect customers and maintain the property. They also included front desk workers and engineering staff.

The Monet art gallery exhibit, which contains millions of dollars' worth of fine art, and other parts of the building are operating under emergency backup power, company officials said today.

Hourly workers who have not been called in to work – both union and nonunion employees – are not being paid, they said.

A room reservation employee, who declined to be named, said her entire department would be working Monday and today to help handle incoming calls from customers and others seeking rooms and information about the power outage.

Though a few customers have been openly upset about the outage, most have been sympathetic to the hotel and willing to be flexible, the employee said.

Feldman said the Bellagio has „fortunately been able to find a room for everybody“ in spite of a busy week for the Strip and a major convention in town next week.

Monday kicks off the National Association of Broadcasters Convention at the Las Vegas Convention Center. The event, one of the city’s largest conventions, is expected to draw some 90,000 people.

Visitors continued to walk up to the property’s front entrance Monday, only to be turned away. Others lingered around the edges of the resort, taking photos of the facade and the fountain pool. Several said they would still consider staying at the Bellagio in the future in spite of the power outage.

Helen Limtao, who is staying at the Aladdin across the street, paused for a group photo with her family in front of the resort Monday afternoon. „I still want to stay here someday. The rooms are very nice and big and it’s gorgeous inside,“ she said.

The Bellagio has handled the situation with customers as well as could be expected, observers say.

„From a crisis standpoint, I think they did a lot of things right,“ said Lori Nelson, a spokeswoman for advertising and publicity firm R&R Partners. „They’ve been trying to

accommodate guests and the staff is trying to remain positive, which instills confidence in their guests. When an unexpected crisis hits that's outside of your control, that's all you can do."

Other resorts say they are aware of the threat of power outages and are prepared.

Caesars Palace, like some other major resorts, has a redundant source of power from a second power substation that can supply the resort with „the same amount of power“ should the first source be cut, Caesars Entertainment spokeswoman Stacy Solovey said.

The backup power source provides seamless service so customers wouldn't know the difference between the primary and secondary source, she said. The property has a third power backup in the form of emergency generators that only supply a minimal amount of power for safety purposes, she said.

„We maintain our equipment and we hope that something like this would never happen. We have sufficient emergency systems so that we should be able to handle (a power outage) to the best of our ability,“ she said.

The company has so far has filled about 600 rooms across its Caesars Palace, Paris Las Vegas and Bally's hotels – which are now filled to capacity – with displaced Bellagio customers. Some customers are anticipated to stay over Tuesday night, while the resort will try and book additional nights for displaced guests, Solovey said.

The room reservation worker said competing hotel properties came together for a „rare moment“ of cooperation Sunday and Monday to place guests on the Strip.

„I wouldn't call it a rare moment,“ Solovey said. „The bottom line is that it could probably happen to any of us and we would hope that if we were in the same situation they would

help us out as well.“