

# Huge Solar Storm Could Shut Down US

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<http://news.aol.com/article/solar-storm-warning/437777?icid=webmail|wbml-aol|dl1|link3|http%3A%2F...>

(April 21) - A massive solar storm could be catastrophic for the United States and other countries, scientists warn.

Such a storm could knock out power nationwide, **ABCNews.com** reported, leading to a nightmarish scenario that could include failures of transportation, communication and financial systems; shutdowns of government services; and a lack of safe drinking water, food and medication.

Solar storms form when intense bursts of plasma erupt from the surface of the sun, creating what's called a coronal mass ejection (CME). These eruptions can produce electromagnetic interference that wreaks havoc with electricity-dependent technology on Earth.

Although the probability of a worst-case

scenario solar storm event is low, researchers say that our increasing reliance on technology makes it crucial to be prepared for such a calamity.

“The consequences could be extreme,” Roberta Balstad, a research scientist with Columbia University’s Center for Research on Environmental Decisions, told ABCNews.com.

In 1859, a powerful solar storm fried telegraph systems around the world.

Another one caused a blackout in Quebec, Canada, 20 years ago.

Michael Kaiser, project scientist for NASA’s Solar TERrestrial RELations Observatory (STEREO) mission, told ABCNews.com that even if a big solar storm were to hit the nation, power grid operators could minimize the damage if they had enough of a warning.

Kaiser said he and his colleagues are working to refine their ability to better predict solar storms before they happen. “We’re getting smarter now,” he added.