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On Tuesday, a powerful stream of energized particles from the sun resulted in blackouts across the U.S. The event occurred at approximately 12:51pm ET, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), causing communication disruptions across North America.

The solar flare, classified as an X8.8, is the most intense of the current solar cycle that began in mid-December 2016. NOAA rated it as a radio blackout level 3 (R3) on a scale from one to five.

The flare originated from sunspot AR 3664, which has been active over recent days. This sunspot is comparable in size to the one responsible for the 1859 Carrington Event, the most severe solar storm recorded in history.

Space weather physicist Dr. Tamitha Skov remarked that though the flare reached the extreme classification, it could have been an R4-level blackout if it had not been partially obscured by the sun. The sunspot has now rotated out of Earth’s view.

NOAA had predicted a 60% chance that subatomic debris from the event could hit Earth, potentially disrupting satellite communications, affecting power grids, and posing a radiation hazard for astronauts.

Additionally, NOAA issued a Severe (G4) Geomagnetic Storm Watch last Thursday, the first of such alerts in two decades. High-energy particles from solar flares can affect GPS systems, evidenced when recent solar activity disrupted equipment used by farmers in the American Midwest.

Despite the challenges, the storm also produced visible natural phenomena, with the Northern Lights reported across numerous states from Maine to Alabama.