

Gov. Newsom declares emergency over heat wave, threat of California blackouts

By Dale Kasler

In the Fresno Bee, Friday, September 4, 2020

Gov. Gavin Newsom, trying to avoid another round of rolling blackouts this weekend, on Thursday declared a state of emergency for Labor Day weekend and said the state would ease some air-pollution rules and other restrictions to get free up electricity supplies.

With California bracing for a major heat wave, the governor's proclamation allows power plants to generate more electricity "by suspending certain permitting requirements," Newsom's office said late Thursday. Among other things, Newsom directed the California Air Resources Board to "exercise maximum discretion to permit the use of stationary and portable generators or auxiliary ship engines to reduce the strain on the energy infrastructure and increase energy capacity during the Extreme Heat Event."

Newsom's order is similar to one he issued in mid-August, after California was hit with two nights of rolling blackouts as temperatures hit 110 degrees or higher in much of the state.

On Thursday, the California Independent System Operator, which manages the electricity grid, issued a voluntary call for energy conservation running from 3 p.m. Saturday to 9 p.m. Monday.

"We'll need help," said Eric Schmitt, vice president of operations at the ISO.

Power demands this weekend are expected to be slightly lower than the peak demands seen in mid-August. But Schmitt warned supplies are expected to be tight, in part because the heat wave is expected to engulf much of the West and California won't be able to count on as much imported power as it usually enjoys.

The National Weather Service said temperatures could hit 111 degrees in parts of the Sacramento Valley on Sunday. The weather will cool only slightly on Labor Day.

Last month's rotating outages — the first since the 2001 energy crisis — exposed problems in California's power grid. The state has done away with many of its fossil fuel plants and now relies heavily on solar and wind power. Wind power can die down suddenly and solar power fades as the sun sets.

Newsom and other state leaders say California won't retreat from its ambitious green-energy goals but must do a better job of managing the transition to renewable energy. State law says California must get 100% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2045.

California Labor Day weekend brings heat, fire, virus fears

By John Antczak, Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Friday, September 4, 2020

California is calling people to conserve electricity as the state faces dangerously high temperatures through the Labor Day weekend, which also is sparking concerns that people will pack beaches and spread the coronavirus.

Temperatures were expected to be 10 to 25 degrees above normal beginning Friday and heading into Monday as an enormous ridge of high pressure builds over Western states.

Downtown Los Angeles could see a high of 108 on Sunday, while Napa in the wine country could reach 113, according to the National Weather Service. Palm Springs could reach 120 degrees.

Triple-digit temperatures are likely over a vast stretch of the state, and even coastal areas could see higher temperatures, forecasters said.

Many heat records are likely to fall, and there is a chance that all-time record highs will be recorded, the Los Angeles regional weather office said.

The California Independent System Operator, which runs California's power grid, issued a "Flex Alert" for the hours of 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. Saturday through Monday, asking people to conserve power by not using

washing machines and other appliances during the period and keeping their air conditioners at 78 degrees or above.

“We’re not forecasting any blackouts” at the moment because of the heat, but the power system could be strained by unforeseen problems, such as a fire that disrupts a power line, Cal ISO Operations Vice President Eric Schmitt said.

Cal ISO also ordered power generators to postpone routine maintenance and restore any out-of-service transmission lines.

Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency Thursday night, temporarily suspending certain pollution regulations and permit requirements for power plants so that they can produce more electricity.

The power concern follows a mid-August heat wave that strained the grid to the point where Cal ISO ordered utilities to implement brief rolling blackouts for the first time since 2001. Officials said customers’ conservation significantly helped.

“It was an important factor indeed,” Schmitt said. “We’re asking for that kind of support again as we go into this weekend.”

The heat also was expected to hike ozone levels, resulting in poor air quality throughout a Southern California area that is home to nearly 20 million people, air regulators warned.

Authorities, meanwhile, hoped to prevent a surge in COVID-19 infections that could occur if people engage in traditional Labor Day weekend activities.

Labor Day holiday-goers were urged to wear masks, avoid large gatherings and practice social distancing.

COVID-19 infections spiked in many counties after the Memorial Day weekend and again over the Fourth of July weekend as people held social gatherings without social distancing or packed recreational areas.

Los Angeles County, the nation’s most populous, did not plan to close beaches. But health authorities warned that could happen if they become too crowded, and masks will be required when people are out of the water.

Up the coast, Santa Barbara County planned to allow use of the water and active uses of the beach such as running or walking but no sunbathing. Monterey County said people could cross the sand to reach the water but otherwise barred the use of beaches.

Such measures were not in place on the entire coast. Surfing mecca Huntington Beach, for example, was keeping its famous shoreline fully open.

The brewing heat wave was also expected to bring another challenge to thousands of firefighters who have been making progress on numerous wildfires, including massive complexes of multiple fires ignited by lightning last month in the San Francisco Bay Area and wine country.

The fires have destroyed more than 3,200 structures, including homes, and there have been eight deaths.

The high pressure system could produce hot, gusty winds that along with the heat will produce “elevated or near-critical fire weather,” according to a weather service forecast for Southern California.

In the San Bernardino Forest east of Los Angeles, fire crews will be on 24-hour shifts, and extra crews also will be placed where they can quickly respond to fires, a U.S. Forest Service announcement said.

Forest officials were especially concerned with the threat from illegal campfires.

“We are expecting large crowds escaping the heat in the forest this holiday weekend,” Acting Deputy Fire Chief Scott Howes said in the statement. “It is extremely important visitors abide by fire restrictions to avoid starting a large fire that could prompt evacuations and endanger firefighters during the heat wave.”

Labor Day Weekend will see record-breaking heat throughout the Central Valley

Cassie Dickman

Stockton Record, Friday, Sept. 4, 2020

Record-breaking temperatures are likely returning to Northern California just in time for Labor Day Weekend, weather officials say.

On Thursday, the National Weather Service upgraded an excessive heat watch to an excessive heat warning for Saturday through Tuesday throughout the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys up to areas past Redding and into the foothills.

“If you have outdoor plans for the holiday weekend, make sure you are properly prepared for the heat,” the weather service advised in a Twitter post Wednesday.

National Weather Service meteorologist Robert Baruffaldi said Stockton is forecaste to break heat records on Sunday and Monday with 107 degrees and 108 degrees, respectively. Those temperatures would defeat by several degrees the current records set in 1977 for the same days.

Weather officials are cautioning people to drink extra water, plan to be in air conditioned buildings and avoid strenuous activities between the hours of 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., as well as keep an eye on children, pets and the elderly.

The extreme weather warning comes only just a few weeks after Northern California was hit by another heat wave last month that brought about a week’s worth of consecutive triple-digit days, with some areas in and around cities such as Stockton, Modesto and Sacramento soaring past 110 degrees.

The month of August also saw thousands of lightning strikes that sparked hundreds of wildfires, two of which that have become the second and third largest in the state’s history, and caused poor air quality throughout the Golden State as it continues to grapple with the COVID-19

With temperatures predicted to be 10 to 20 degrees above normal in California and high heat elsewhere in the West potentially limiting the availability of power to import, the manager of the state electrical grid issued a Flex Alert calling for voluntary conservation Saturday through Monday between the hours of 3 p.m. and 9 p.m.

The California Independent System Operator also ordered power generators to postpone outages for routine maintenance from 6 a.m. Saturday to 8 p.m. Sunday. Cal ISO also noted that high overnight temperatures don’t allow electrical infrastructure to cool down.

The power concern follows a mid-August heat wave that strained the grid to the point where the Cal ISO ordered utilities to implement brief rolling blackouts for the first time since 2001.

Baruffaldi says it’s not unusual to see high temperatures during this time of year and that historically it’s even possible for 100-degree days to occur up until the second week of October.

This next heat wave is being brought into the area by a strong, high pressure weather system, Baruffaldi said. There will also be a light north wind, he said, which tends to heat things up in contrast to the cooler so-called “Delta breeze” that comes off the many river systems in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys.

“The one good thing is the later we get into September it will cool off at night,” Baruffaldi said, adding that as the days get shorter it’s more difficult for temperatures to reach such high extremes. “We’re slowly losing daylight.”