

Hot Spells Could be Bad for Texas

By Steven Johnson / ECT Staff Writer Published: December 30th, 2011

An untimely snap of extreme weather next summer could lead to serious problems in the Texas energy market, the state's grid operator says.



Officials in charge of the Texas grid are warning of dwindling reserve margins by next summer. (Photo By: ERCOT)

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The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which manages the wholesale market in the state, cautioned that power reserves used to avoid rotating blackouts will be at a dangerously low level by summer.

“We are very concerned about the significant drop in the reserve margin,” said CEO Trip Doggett. “If we stay in the current cycle of hot and dry summers, we will be very tight on capacity next summer and have a repeat of this year’s emergency procedures and conservation appeals.”

In an assessment of generation needs released this month, ERCOT said it expects about a decrease of about 2,600 megawatts of available power by summer 2012 because of increased demand, construction lags, and mothballed plants.

ERCOT wants a reserve margin of 13.75 percent of capacity to ensure reliable operations during peak demand, but that number currently is projected to be about 12 percent, officials said.

Doggett said ERCOT is working with state regulators to expand its emergency demand-response program as a way of reducing peak demand.

The council also is checking with transmission operators to verify the dates for planned generation projects that might ease the crunch, he added.

ERCOT has more than 59,000 MW of generation currently under review in various stages of the interconnection process, but many of those projects are speculative and might never be completed, Doggett said.

“ERCOT’s role in the competitive market is to inform policymakers and the market of the need for increased generation resources, energy-efficiency measures, or demand-response efforts,” he said. “But ultimately ERCOT does not control the supply of electricity needed to meet the demands of our growing economy.”