

Power use in heat wave nearly led to blackouts

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This week's heat wave set a September record for electricity demand, coming precariously close to levels that might have led to blackouts.

The heat, combined with planned maintenance at some power plants, contributed to an electricity-system emergency in parts of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania, according to PJM Interconnection, the company that manages the power grid in a 13-state region.

To meet demand, PJM ordered selected companies across the region to cut back on their power use for part of a day. The companies had previously agreed to do so in these situations in exchange for a lower electricity rate.

On Tuesday, power demand in PJM's territory peaked at 144,370 megawatts, the highest ever recorded in September. It was well short of the summer's peak, 157,509 megawatts, which occurred on July 18.

For perspective, last year's September peak was 129,959 megawatts. In normal weather conditions, a megawatt provides for the electricity needs of about 1,000 houses.

By asking certain companies to reduce their power use, a process called "demand response," PJM freed up about 6,000 megawatts of capacity that was used to provide power to the areas under stress.

"Generation performance and demand response played significant roles in balancing the supply and demand on the grid during unusual conditions this week," said Andy Ott, PJM's executive vice president for markets, in a statement.

There were brief and isolated blackouts connected to the emergency, representing about 150 megawatts across several states. None was in AEP's Ohio territory, said Tammy Ridout, a spokeswoman for the utility.

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