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Texas among U.S. regions at elevated risk of summer power shortfalls, Energy Department says



Paul Takahashi, Staff writer

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Workers in the control room of the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which operates most of the state's power grid, must keep a balance between electric generation and demand to prevent transmission lines from overloading.

Ryan Holeywell / Houston Chronicle

The Energy Department said many U.S. regions, including Texas, are at an increased risk of potential power shortages this summer as extreme heat waves cause air conditioning use to soar.

Energy officials, citing a seasonal report from the nonprofit regulator North American Electric Reliability Corp., said above average temperatures are forecast across much of North America this summer, raising the risk of rolling power outages like those seen during the California wildfires or the February freeze in Texas. The Energy Department warned that electricity supply shortages may occur along the West Coast Texas New England and parts of the Midwest

power plant outages or reduced output stem from heat-related issues," the Energy Department said Wednesday. "Wide-area heat waves can challenge grid operators and may limit electricity transfers because the electricity is needed to meet local electricity demand."

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These forecasts are already bearing out as heat waves have struck Texas, the West Coast and New England this month, putting a strain on power grids across the country. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which oversees the power grid for most of the state, [enacted emergency measures this month](#) that called on consumers to conserve electricity by turning up their thermostats and to avoid using large appliances.

Although the highest risk of an electricity emergency is in California, which gets about a quarter of its power from other states, the Energy Department warned that ERCOT typically has one of the smallest anticipated reserve margins among the nation's grids, giving it little buffer if demand exceeds expectations.

ERCOT said it expects to have sufficient power reserves this summer, because its anticipated reserve margin has increased to 15.3 percent, compared with 12.9 percent last summer. The grid operator, however, warned that a rare scenario of higher-than-expected power plant outages, extreme heat and reduced wind power could result in an electricity emergency.

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the forecast, which already anticipates record peak demand levels, EERC said in its report. "Thermal outages may increase during severe and prolonged drought conditions due to cooling water supply and temperature issues."



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