Heat wave saps power

Utilities report peak levels as temperatures hover near 100

From staff and wire reports

Hold off on running the dishwasher, washing machine, clothes dryer or any other major appliances during the day, electric utility companies are advising. That's because North Carolina's largest electric utilities approached record demand Wednesday as triple-digit temperatures across the Southeast strained electricity grids. Progress Energy, which expected a record-breaking day for demand, asked its 1.6 million

megawatts. On Wednesday, power demand peaked at 334 megawatts, she said. "Although we exceeded our optimum level for demand, we can still handle that," Governor said.

In Burgaw, Pender County Electrical Membership Corp. spokesman Gary Johnson said the cooperative was hitting demand records, though numbers weren't available.

The company also is asking its customers to conserve energy where feasible.

Systemwide, usage usually lowers around 9 p.m. when it gets cooler in the evening, but that hasn't been happening," Johnson said.

Four County serves about 30,600 customers in Pender, Duplin, Bladen, Columbus, Onslow and Sampson counties.

Across the state, North Carolina Electric Cooperatives, a network that serves 2.5 million customers in mostly rural areas of the state, asked customers to turn off unnecessary electronics and to use electricity and air conditioning sparingly. It expected to break a record set in January 2005.

"With more people and higher heat, we have the formula for high demand," said June Pritchard, speaking for the cooperatives. "We're trying to be prudent."

Duke Energy did not ask customers for conservation, but suggested that people monitor their usage. Spokeswoman Paige Sheehan said the company would not know until today if it hit record usage but said the Charlotte-based utility neared its July 2005 usage record Thursday.

"We're meeting the power demand, and we've got the adequate supply," Sheehan said. "But any conservation that people can realize certainly better our situation."

Duke provides service to 1.8 million retail customers in North Carolina and is the largest electricity supplier in North Carolina and South Carolina.

Raleigh-based Progress serves a total of 3.1 million customers in North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida.

Record demand also was a possibility for Richmond, Va.-based Dominion Power, which added 2 million customers in Virginia and northeastern North Carolina "to allocate excess demand on the grid," said spokesman David Botkins.

Power 4A

Wilmington ties 128-year high

By Veronica Gonzalez

Staff Writer

Wilmington tied a 128-year-old record high temperature of 99 degrees on Wednesday. And it's not over yet.

It was 88 degrees at 2:53 p.m., tying the record high temperature for Aug. 8 set in 1913, according to the National Weather Service. The normal high temperature for Wilmington on Aug. 8 is 89 degrees.

Today, oppressive mugginess as

Witherling Wednesday Temperatures

High in Wilmington

98

(Leaves the record set in 1979)

102

High in Raleigh, Lumberton, Rocky Mount

105

High in Fayetteville

106

High nationwide, recorded in Franklin, Va.

98

Power Continued from 1A

95,000 in New Hanover County.

"We are asking customers to conserve energy right now," Evans said. "Limit use of major appliances until after 9 p.m. Try to run the dishwasher after 9 p.m."

The heat also drove peak power demand to new levels at Brunswick Electric Membership Corp., which serves Brunswick County and parts of Columbus, Bladen and Robeson counties.

Judy Gare, BEMC spokeswoman, said the cooperative issued a request that customers conserve energy.

Last year, the company's peak power demand occurred in July, hitting 321

megawatts. On Wednesday, power demand peaked at 334 megawatts, she said. "Although we exceeded our optimum level for demand, we can still handle that," Governor said.

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Gov. Mike Easley also sought energy conservation by asking state agencies to adjust thermostats to between 78 degrees and 80 degrees.

The National Weather Service put more than two-thirds of North Carolina under a heat warning or heat advisory Wednesday, and forecasts expected temperatures to break 100 degrees both Wednesday and today.

The heat index, or how the air feels because of the combination of heat and humidity, was expected to exceed 110 degrees.

All of the utilities said they should be able to manage the spike in use.

Staff writers Veronica Gonzalez and Paul Jeffers contributed to this report from the Associated Press.

& Sun Heating and Air Conditioning: "This is probably our busiest week."

Cuesta recommended that people get their units serviced before problems happen and to make sure filters are clean and drain lines are clear.

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