



Chris Somerset (left), Amber Somerset, Justin Methvin and Elliot Register take a big leap off an abandoned bridge in Castle Hayne into the Northeast Cape Fear River to beat the hot weather Wednesday.

Heat wave saps power

Utilities report peak levels as temperatures hover near 100

Wilmington ties 128-year high

From staff and wire reports

Hold off on running the dishwasher, washing machine, dryer or any other major appliances during the day, electric utility companies are admonishing. 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 1.2 million

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North Carolina customers to reduce consumption to help ease the strain, said company spokeswoman Tanya Evans. Progress Energy set its previous record on July 27, 2005.

The company serves about 115,000 customers in Southeastern North Carolina, with nearly

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By Veronica Gonzalez
Staff Writer

Wilmington tied a 128-year-old record high temperature of 98 degrees on Wednesday. And it's not over yet.

It was 98 degrees at 2:53 p.m., tying the record high temperature for Aug. 8, set in 1879, according to the National Weather Service. The normal high temperature for Wilmington on Aug. 8 is 89 degrees.

Today, oppressive mugginess as

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Star News Online

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WITHERING WEDNESDAY TEMPERATURES

98 High in Wilmington (ties the record set in 1879) **102** Highs in Raleigh, Lumberton, Rocky Mount **105** High in Fayetteville **106** High nationwide, recorded in Franklin, Va.

POWER

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95,000 in New Hanover County.

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

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 Gore, BEMC spokeswoman, said the cooperative issued a request that customers conserve electricity.

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," Gore said.

In Burgaw, Four County Electric Membership Corp. spokeswoman Gay 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 8 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 services 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 Jane 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 had hit record usage but said the Charlotte-based util-

ity neared its July 2005 usage record Tuesday.

"We're meeting the power demand, and we've got the adequate supply," Sheehan said. "But any conservation that people can realize certainly betters 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 asked its 2 million customers in Virginia and northeastern North Carolina "to alleviate excess demand on the grid," said spokesman David Botkins.

Gov. Mike Easley also sought energy conservation by ordering 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 forecasters 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 Jefferson contributed to this report from the Associated Press.

RECORD

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well as the excessive heat warning will continue as the high is expected to hit 98 degrees, and the heat index will make it feel more like 110 degrees in Southeastern North Carolina, including New Hanover, Brunswick

and Pender counties, according to the weather service.

The heat combined with humidity has resulted in heat index values of 110 degrees or higher, according to the weather service. The heat index at the time the record was tied Wednesday was 111 degrees, according to weather service data.

An excessive heat warning

means that a prolonged period of dangerously hot temperatures will occur, making heat illnesses likely.

Area hospitals felt the heat as patients continued to show up in the emergency room to be treated for related symptoms.

Three new patients at New Hanover Regional Medical Center and Pender Memorial Hos-

pital each were treated for heat illness, according to hospital representatives.

The weather service recommends drinking plenty of water, staying in an air-conditioned room, staying out of the sun, and checking on relatives and neighbors.

Outdoor pets and livestock also should be provided with plenty of drinking water and shade, the

weather service says.

As people take refuge from the heat indoors, a local heating and air conditioning company said it has received twice the number of calls this week.

"The units are running 24 hours a day, so basic failures typically happen," said Greg Cuesta, residential and commercial replacement manager for Brinson

& Sons 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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