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## ELECTRICITY

### Calif. sees risk of summer blackouts

Anne C. Mulkern, E&E News reporter • Published: Thursday, May 13, 2021



California's grid operator said yesterday the state could be at risk of power outages this summer if hit with a heat wave similar to last year. The Sonoma area is pictured during 2019 power outage. Shaw/Getty Images

Power shortages could hit California again this summer if extreme heat arrives as it did last year, the state's grid manager warned yesterday.

Golden State power officials spent the past year trying to ensure last year's rolling blackouts don't happen again. The California Public Utilities Commission ordered utilities to procure more power for the coming months. The California Independent System Operator, the grid manager, put advanced communications modes in place. The ISO "is guardedly optimistic," according to its "2021 Summer Loads and Resources Assessment" [report](#).

But the potential for more major heat waves has officials worried, with the power grid facing possible supply shortages and emergency conditions. The situation will worsen if nearby states have similar high temperatures. California typically imports about a quarter of its power supplies.

"We have taken the lessons learned from last year to make modifications to our market and operations," Elliot Mainzer, president and CEO of the ISO, said in a statement. "But there are remaining risks to reliability, such as an extreme prolonged heat wave affecting wide swaths of the West, or serious wildfires."

A record-shattering heat wave across the state last August triggered a surge in California's electricity demand. The Golden State lacked about 500 megawatts of electricity to meet demand. The ISO told utilities to start rolling blackouts. Those lasted about two hours on Aug. 14 and 30 minutes the following day.

The state faced the possibility of more blackouts several more times that month, prevented largely because residents and businesses responded to calls to cut back electricity consumption ([Energywire](#), March 16).

An analysis of the causes said that among other factors, California failed to adequately plan for extreme weather events ([Energywire](#), Jan. 14).

The summer assessment said California expects to have roughly 2,000 megawatts of additional resources coming online to serve net peak demand in June through September. It includes battery storage expected to absorb extra renewable energy during the day, for use after sunset when solar generation ends. The state and ISO also are looking for ways to add an additional 1,000 to 1,500 MW of new resources by summer.

But there are obstacles as well. For the second year in a row, hydropower conditions aren't great. Last winter marked the second straight year of below normal precipitation. Snowpack water content peaked at 60% of normal. Reservoir levels have decreased to 70% of normal, the ISO report said.

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There's an increased possibility of extreme weather events, the analysis said. NOAA recently reported that "conditions in the West are getting hotter and drier," the ISO summer analysis said.

State regulators earlier this year considered allowing "repowering" of closed natural gas plants to add power generating capacity. Advocates for disadvantaged communities forced a change in direction. They warned it would increase pollution for residents near those power plants. And teaming up with environmental group attorneys, they also argued it would set back the state's ambitious efforts to limit climate change ([Climatewire](#), March 29).

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