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California begins rolling blackouts after first Stage 3 emergency since 2001



Los Angeles Times

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Electricity distribution lines are seen at Southern California Edison's grid control cen

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By LEILA MILLER | STAFF WRITER

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The body that runs the electric grid for most of California declared a statewide Stage 3 emergency Friday evening for the first time since 2001 due to excessive heat driving up electricity use and ordered utilities to implement power disruption programs.

The California Independent System Operator had issued a statewide flex alert earlier Friday, asking residents to conserve electricity between 3 p.m. and 10 p.m. That alert asked consumers to set air conditioner thermostats to 78 degrees or higher, turn off unnecessary lights and not use major appliances.

We “were monitoring the flex alert to see if consumers would answer the call to lower the energy use so we wouldn’t have to go into Stage 3,” said Anne Gonzales, a public information officer for the corporation. “We are in Stage 3 now and hopefully demand will keep going down.”

In the wake of the decision, there were a scattering of power interruptions in Southern California, but it was unclear how widespread they were. The emergency notice was issued at 6:36 p.m. and lifted at 8:54 p.m. One thousand megawatts of electricity were taken out of service, the corporation said.

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The power shortage is being driven by what officials say is one of the worst statewide heat waves in years. The broiling conditions that [began Friday](#) in California [may rival the deadly seven-day heat event of July 2006](#), the National Weather Service said.

The valleys, mountains and deserts of Southern California are likely to see daytime and nighttime temperatures challenge records through at least Thursday, and humidity will make conditions feel 2 to 5 degrees warmer during the day.

Air quality officials also issued an advisory Friday warning that the heat wave is pushing lung-damaging ozone pollution to “very unhealthy” levels and that much of Southern California will experience elevated smog through Monday. On Friday afternoon, ozone pollution in some areas reached its highest levels in a decade as a result of high temperatures and wildfires, according to the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

David Song, a public information officer for Southern California Edison, said that approximately 132,000 of the utility’s 5 million customers were without power as of 7:30 p.m. because of rotating power outages it had put in place. The outages were scattered throughout Southern California Edison’s service area and were set to last about one hour for each outage group. These groups include customers from a cross section of cities so that an entire city is not affected, he said.

Song urged customers to take steps as simple as turning off the lights in a room once they leave in order to save power, emphasizing that “every little bit helps.”

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mindful to customers and what they're going through right r
home."

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The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power said its customers were not affected by the declared emergency because it generates and imports its own electricity and was able to meet the city's demand.

Spokesman Joe Ramallo said the DWP had in fact provided excess power Friday evening to the California Independent System Operator. The DWP, he said, has never had to institute rotating outages due to not having enough power to meet demand.

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Times staff writers Tony Barboza and Sammy Roth contributed to this report.

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Leila Miller is a reporter for the Los Angeles Times. Before joining the newspaper in 2018, she was a reporting fellow at PBS’s “Frontline.” Originally from Los Angeles, Miller is a graduate of Oberlin College and Columbia University’s School of Journalism. She is fluent in Spanish.

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