

Were Calif. officials 'crying wolf' with electric alerts?

By Ivan Penn, Los Angeles Times

As record-setting temperatures surged into the triple digits in parts of California last week, the manager of the state's electrical grid put out an urgent plea: Turn down the AC and conserve power to avoid rotating outages.

The two-day flex alert by the California Independent System Operator drew headlines from dozens of media outlets across the state and country. It also sent electricity prices on the wholesale market soaring four to five times higher than normal – a cost that will be passed on to utility customers.

There was no statewide shortage of electricity – not even close, according to a *Times* analysis of federal and state energy data.

Even as the mercury climbed, consumers used 44,184 megawatts Tuesday – 3,656 fewer than the forecast. But the system can generate about 71,000 megawatts, which means there was 38 percent unused capacity. That's well above the 15 percent reserve required by the state for emergencies.

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