

Commissioner urging utilities-security review

By Max Jarman
The Arizona Republic

After state utilities worked to overcome a looming power shortage by building new power plants and transmission lines, two freak accidents have brought back the threat of blackouts and pleas for conservation.

While there is no indication that either incident was caused by anything but mechanical failures, Arizona Corporation Commissioner Kris Mayes said she plans to call for a review of the security measures used by the state's utilities to keep vital infrastructure such as power lines, pipelines and power plants safe.

On June 7, a transmission line short shut down the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station, a critical electricity source for the Valley, for almost a week.

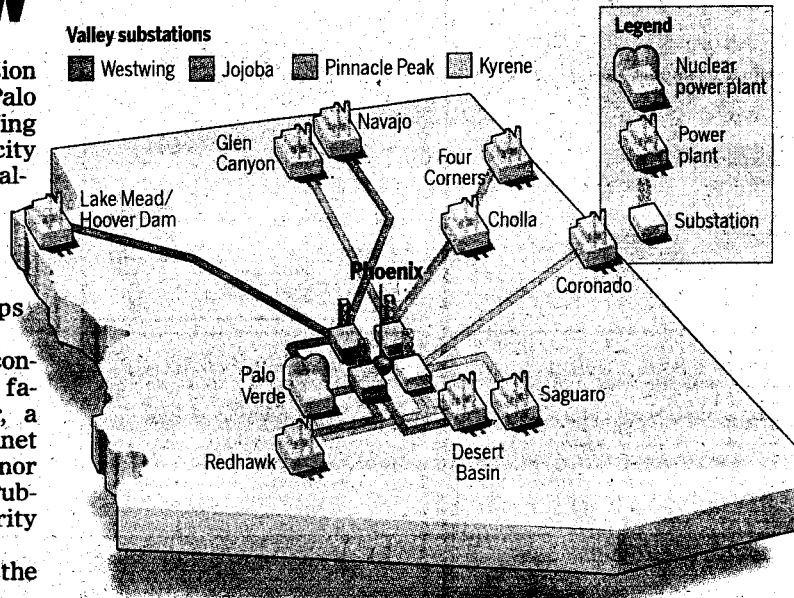
On Sunday, a fire at a key power substation cut the Valley's power supply by up to 20 percent, perhaps indefinitely.

While Mayes says she is concerned about safety at the facilities, Jeanine L'Ecuyer, a spokeswoman for Gov. Janet Napolitano, said the governor was confident in Arizona Public Service Co.'s security measures.

Cool temperatures and the

Valley power grid

Westwing substation is the entry point for electricity flowing to the Valley from Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station, Navajo Generating Station and Lake Mead Hydro-Electric Generating Station.



Source: SRP/APS

Mark Waters/The Arizona Republic

See **POWER** Page D2

From Page D1

availability of outside power prevented the Palo Verde outage from mushrooming into forced outages and blackouts.

But the fire at the Westwing power substation near Happy Valley Road and Loop 303 has produced pleas for voluntarily conservation and a real threat of involuntary blackouts.

Conservation by consumers, state and local governments and many businesses helped get the state's two largest utilities, APS and the Salt River Project, through the day Tuesday without having to cut anyone's power.

"The conservation really made a difference," said Alan Bunnell, a spokesman for APS.

But today, Thursday and Friday could be even bigger challenges.

Bunnell explained that power demand typically escalates during the week.

The Westwing station, jointly owned by APS and SRP, is one of four portals where outside power enters the Valley. The utilities estimate that the fire cut the Valley's import capability by up to 20 percent at a time when demand typically soars.

The fire came during the season of peak power demand and will send both APS and SRP, the area's two major electricity suppliers, scrambling to find alternative sources.

The utilities have boosted power imports into the other portals, but as demand grows, transporting the additional power becomes difficult.

APS and SRP have asked consumers to voluntarily conserve energy and have contacted businesses that either have agreed to reduce consumption in such emergencies or are on interruptible contracts.

Such companies pay lower

rates with the understanding that their power supply could be cut or reduced to prevent a large-scale blackout.

The measures got the utilities through the day without having to resort to involuntary or rolling blackouts. During such blackouts, power is temporarily cut to areas on a rolling basis to prevent a more widespread outage.

"So far there have been no problems," said Patricia Garcia Likens, a spokeswoman for SRP. "Nobody lost power."

Napolitano ordered thermostats in state-owned buildings turned up to 82 degrees and non-task-oriented ~~lighting~~ turned off.

Scott Phelps, an aide to Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon, said that thermostats in all city buildings, including Sky Harbor International Airport, have been set at 82 degrees and cannot be overridden.

Most lights at City Hall were

off from 2 to 6 p.m. Tuesday and will be off in the afternoons for the rest of the week.

Chandler cut air-conditioning at its library and community arts center by as much as 60 percent and instructed employees to turn off all unnecessary office equipment, including lights, radios and fans.

APS was still assessing the damage caused by the fire that was fueled by close to 100,000 gallons of mineral oil used to

cool the transformers.

The blaze was extinguished late Monday.

The transformers destroyed in the fire could be difficult to replace, prolonging the shortage and voluntary conservation. Arizona Public Service has been contacting other utilities around the country and internationally in an effort to locate existing spares.

The manufacturing lead time for new units, which are

produced in Italy and Mexico, is substantial, Bunnell said.

And with power supplies as tight as they have been since 2000 and 2001, any unexpected loss of transmission lines could be disastrous.

"It would require immediate action," Bunnell said.

That could come sooner rather than later; wildfires in northern Arizona both have transmission lines in their paths.