

Saturday, April 9, 2011

Curbs on summer power use in offing

Kyodo News

The government said Friday that it plans to set a legal curb on power consumption by large-lot users to cope with electricity shortages expected this summer in the Kanto and Tohoku regions, while asking households to reduce their use by about 15 to 20 percent during peak hours.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano told a government task force that the measures are intended to avoid the rolling blackouts introduced by Tokyo Electric Power Co. after the March 11 catastrophe.

Tepco separately said it is basically terminating the scheduled area-by-area blackouts as of Friday.

The government's power-saving plan was formally proposed for implementation in the service areas of Tepco and Tohoku Electric Power Co., which both had power generation facilities damaged in the quake-tsunami disaster.

The plan will be fleshed out so the government can compile a policy package by the end of this month.

Under estimates in the plan's outline, a power shortage of up to 18.3 million kw is expected this summer, of which 5.5 million kw are to be made up by boosting the two utilities' power generation capacities. The government intends to cover the remaining 12.8 million kw through demand curbs.

The outline also said rolling blackouts should be terminated in principle as they are an "unavoidable emergency measure taken so as not to trigger unpredictable massive blackouts."

To address the supply-demand gap, large-lot customers with contracts to use over 500 kw would be expected to reduce their maximum power consumption by about 25 percent from past peaks between 10 a.m. and 9 p.m. on weekdays during the three months starting from July.

Companies and other entities would be advised to craft a plan that will lead to "a change in (employees') lifestyles," the outline said, suggesting efforts such as reducing or shifting operating hours.

But given that such voluntary power-cutting measures may not be enough to deal with the anticipated shortage, the government will invoke legal curbs on power consumption based on the Electricity Business Law for the first time since the 1974 oil crisis.

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda told a news conference that such compulsory power consumption restrictions will play a "supplementary role" to the voluntary efforts of large-lot customers.

Small-lot customers would be asked to strive voluntarily to cut power use by about 20 percent and households by around 15 to 20 percent.

An official at the industry ministry who briefed on the plan said the margins for reduction are so far "rough indications" and discussions are expected to be held between the government and companies to make a final decision on the target figures.

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The government will also step up efforts to cooperate with local governments and schools to ensure energy-saving efforts are implemented by households, the outline said.

Meanwhile, Tepco and Tohoku Electric intend to restore thermal power facilities damaged in the quake and take other measures with a view to boosting their supply capacities.



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