Chinese Factories Shut Down To Curb Power Use

Joe McDonald, AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Some Chinese factories were ordered Tuesday to shut down to ensure sufficient power to heat homes as demand surged amid record-setting winter cold, a utility company said.

No outages were reported, but coal supplies were running low at power plants in central China, said Liu Xinfang, a spokesman for State Grid Corp., which operates most of China's power-distribution network.

A weekend storm blanketed much of China with snow, sending temperatures plunging, snarling traffic and prompting some cities to close schools.

"Power demand is greatly increased because people need to stay warm," Liu said. "Our facilities are in excellent shape, but we lack coal. It's like cooking without rice."

Temperatures in Beijing were forecast to plunge to 3 degrees Fahrenheit (-16 degrees Celsius) overnight, the lowest in 33 years, the China News Service reported.

Last winter, some areas of China suffered blackouts after power companies let coal stockpiles run low due to high costs and snowstorms disrupted supply efforts. China relies on coal for about 70 percent of its power.

In Hubei province in central China, some factories were ordered to shut down because power demand outstripped supply, said Liu. He said State Grid was moving power to Hubei from other provinces.

"We are putting a priority on residential power consumption," Liu said. "We are asking factories to take turns cutting power use. Then we will ask commercial facilities to limit power use."

Coal shortages were worst in southern China's Jiangxi province, where power plants had a total of 1 million tons, well below the "alarm level" of 1.6 million tons, CNS said. It said that would meet Jiangxi's power needs for 10 to 11 days.

Adding to the power crunch, authorities shut down six generators at a dam on the Yellow River in China's north over the weekend to contain a diesel spill in the river, according to the local water agency.

River levels are low after a dry year, so the giant Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River cannot generate extra power to fill the gap, said State Grid's Liu.

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Associated Press researcher Bonnie Cao contributed to this report.

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