

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **Where can I get a copy of the Department of General Services (DGS) Energy Management Memos?**

All Energy Management Memos may be downloaded from the DGS Energy Website at [www.dgs.ca.gov/energy](http://www.dgs.ca.gov/energy)

### **What about Employee Leave and Safety Issues during a blackout?**

Refer to the Department of Personnel Administration/Department of General Services memo, which may be downloaded from the DGS Energy Website at [www.dgs.ca.gov/energy](http://www.dgs.ca.gov/energy)

### **Should I send staff home during a Stage 3 alert?**

No. Staff can perform many normal duties under lower lighting conditions, and with out computers. For example, filing, organizing and scheduling are relatively simple tasks that require little light. This is also a good time to make and return phone calls that have not been attended to. Staff can also seek out additional ways to save any energy around the office and ensure that the requirements of the Stage 2/3 alerts are being met. Ensure that staff are cognizant of physical hazards, such file boxes or other materials, in walkways that may be tripping hazards under low lighting conditions. For further details, on Employee Leave and Safety go to DGS Energy Website at [www.dgs.ca.gov/energy](http://www.dgs.ca.gov/energy)

### **Are you going to have people come in later during a Stage 3 alert?**

No. State owned and leased buildings will be operational from 6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. On critical demand days some staff may be sent home a little early; other staff will be working late to ensure that essential concerns are dealt with immediately.

### **Should State employees come to work if they start their shift after 5 PM?**

Yes. Mission critical employees such as health, security, and related employees should always come to work. At the discretion of the shift manager, other employees may stay or not. It is recommended that they stay, and continue business after the blackout has ended.

### **What does firm load curtailment mean?**

It means that firm load customers may experience a rotating outage. Customers are categorized as either firm load or voluntary interruptible. Voluntary interruptible customers have limited agreements with their utility to allow their electricity to be interrupted when necessary. Voluntary interruptible customers are called on first to help avoid the need to cut electricity to firm load customers.

### **What do I do if we experience a blackout?**

Refer to your Department's Emergency Preparedness Plan. The appropriate response will vary building and location. You must use your judgement as you would in any emergency. In general, you should make sure that all appliances and equipment are switched off to reduce power demand as the local circuits are reenergized. Leave one set of lights on so that you will know when the power is back on. Since rotating blackouts are controlled events, you can count on them lasting for approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. Under these circumstances

you may want to try to keep everyone in the building and wait it out. Additional information may be obtained from the DGS Energy Website at [www.dgs.ca.gov/energy](http://www.dgs.ca.gov/energy)

**Are rotating outages a labor union meet-and-confer issue?**

No. Rotating outages are planned, controllable events managed by the Independent System Operator to avoid an even greater emergency. Rotating outages last approximately 1 hour and fifteen minutes. They are a part of what every California resident should expect to handle until the crisis passes. For additional information on personnel actions during a rotating outage, please refer to the DGS Energy Website at [www.dgs.ca.gov/energy](http://www.dgs.ca.gov/energy).

**I'm in leased space – what can I do?**

Almost all of the actions that apply to state buildings described in the Management Memos also apply in leased space. State offices in leased spaces should contact the building management to involve them in the effort.

**Will I be able to do business in a DMV, EDD, or other state office?**

Under a Stage 2 alert, DMV, EDD and other state offices will be able to conduct normal business. However, during a Stage 3 Phase 2 alert many computers may be off or go off without advance notice. Under these conditions, these offices will be able to conduct little or no regular business.

**Are hospitals and prisons going to be affected?**

This depends on the agreement the hospital or prison has with their utility. Some hospitals or prisons may have their own back-up generation they could use in an outage.

**Will the campuses of Universities of CA, CA State Universities and Community Colleges be affected?**

Yes. There are some accounts at these institutions that are designated as “essential”, but generally these institutions are subject to planned rotating outages.

**Has State government ever done any of this before?**

Yes. The Office of Emergency Services, the Resources Agency, and the State and Consumer Services Agency have extensive experience in dealing with emergencies. The appropriate subject experts will be activated, and action plans will be employed to mitigate the problems.

**How much electricity does the entire State of California use?**

According to the California Energy Commission, California's energy peak demand in the winter is 30,000-32,000 megawatts daily. Daily energy peak demand last summer was 52,000-53,000 megawatts.

**What are the peak hours?**

Winter peak hours are 5 AM to 9 AM and again from 4 PM – 7PM daily. Summer peak hours are generally from 12 Noon to 8 PM daily. However, Stage 3 alerts can continue until late in the evening.

### **How much does the state government save during a Stage 3 emergency?**

We will be saving over 20% of the state government's peak load.

### **Who is the CAISO (California Independent System Operator)?**

Prior to deregulation, the electric industry was vertically integrated, i.e., the utility that provided service to a particular area was responsible for everything: generation, transmission, distribution, and customer service. The utility was responsible for (its) system reliability.

With deregulation and the creation of a new entity, the CAISO, utilities are only responsible for distribution and customer service. The CAISO is responsible for system reliability and for directing the operation of the Transmission System.

If insufficient energy is available, the CAISO, as the "buyer/provider of last resort", purchases energy to try to fill the gap between available scheduled energy supply and electrical demand (plus operating reserve margins). When reserves drop or are expected to drop below 1.5% (Stage 3 level) and insufficient capacity is available, the CAISO issues a curtailment order to utilities that begin the process of rotating outages. The curtailment order impacts different utilities differently. Some factors involved are the regional availability of power (north, south), the ability to move power over the intertie(s), and through some congested transmission corridors (such as Path 15, in the middle of the state). In addition, there may be other local factors that affect the distribution of outages on the system.

### **What's all this talk about Groups, Blocks and Blackouts?**

When the CAISO determines it is necessary to curtail firm load to maintain the stability of the overall grid, the curtailment is allocated to the utilities. It then becomes the utility's responsibility to implement the curtailment order (begin the rotating outages). To manage their rotating outage programs, utilities combine customers into approximately 100 MW (this can vary significantly from utility to utility) blocks or groups (PG&E and SMUD call them "Blocks" and SCE calls them "Groups"). A rotating outage typically lasts 1 hour and fifteen minutes, but it can vary. Customer Blocks or Groups are cycled off/on by the utility for the duration of the curtailment order to meet its curtailment obligation. Groups are cycled on/off in sequential order. A block that comes up on the rotation scheme would not be cycled again until the utility has gone full circle on the list and its Block/Group number comes up again.

### **Is anyone "protected" from rolling blackouts?**

In a 1980 Decision, the CPUC established a priority scheme for Rotating Outages. This decision is applicable to Investor Owned Utilities (IOU) but not to municipal utilities. Under this system, certain end-users are exempt from the rotating outage process. Not included in the exemption from rotating outages are those facilities that have adequate back-up generation. For example, a police station having adequate back-up generation would not be exempted from the rotating outage scheme while a similar police station without adequate back-up generation would be exempt from rotating outages.