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New England's Electricity Use Sets New All-Time Record

Holyoke, MA—July 19, 2005—New England's electricity use reached an all-time high today, but the power system operated under normal conditions, according to ISO New England Inc., the operator of the region's bulk power system and wholesale electricity markets. Preliminary data collected by the ISO shows that electricity use reached 26,749 megawatts (MW), eclipsing the previously established record of 25,348 MW set on August 14, 2002.

"The combination of heat and humidity drove New England's electricity use to new levels today," said Stephen G. Whitley, ISO New England's Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer. "Despite record-breaking electricity demand, power supplies were adequate throughout the day and the regional power system operated reliably." ISO New England did not have to resort to emergency measures, or issue public calls for conservation.

"The New England power system was able to withstand this latest heat wave, because of improvements made to the system over the past several years," Whitley said. Billions of dollars in private investment have financed more than ten new power plants increasing electricity supply by more than a third. In addition, participation in various conservation programs has more than doubled over the past three years, reducing electricity use during peak periods.

ISO New England expects electricity use to drop tomorrow and level off for the remainder of this week. Whitley said there would be enough power available to meet demand until the hot weather subsides, unless there are unexpected outages of power plants or transmission lines. Weak transmission systems in some areas of New England, such as Southwest Connecticut, could also pose problems and require the implementation of emergency measures to help maintain power system reliability. Should power system problems occur, ISO New England has a series of longstanding emergency measures to help keep supply flowing and electricity use in check.

"We have to remain vigilant during extended periods of hot weather such as this one, because there's always a risk that a power plant or transmission line could go out of service unexpectedly," Whitley said. "We do not anticipate issuing emergency calls for conservation, but consumers should always use electricity wisely under these conditions. We will continue to monitor the situation and keep the region updated on system conditions."

The new record is indicative of the continued growth in electricity use in New England and the need for a well-functioning “capacity market” that would compensate generators for maintaining and continuing to operate existing plants while attracting private investment in additional resources to meet the growing energy needs across the region. While electricity use keeps climbing, the growth in supply has stagnated. ISO New England predicts that as early as 2008 the region may not have enough electricity to meet demand during these types of heat waves.

ISO New England’s summer forecast, released in April, predicted that electricity use would set a new record this summer. The forecast called for summer electricity use to reach 26,355 MW on at least one day this summer under normal peak weather conditions of around 91 degrees Fahrenheit. Extreme weather conditions, such as an extended heat wave of approximately 95 degrees Fahrenheit, could drive peak use to 27,985 MW. Summer demand in New England usually ranges between 19,000 and 22,000 MW, but temperatures in the 90s results in dramatic increases in electricity use as residents and businesses turn on their fans and air conditioners.

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