

French nuclear plants fight long heat wave

Reliable electricity generation can be hampered by unreasonable regulation.

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The heat at which water is discharged into rivers is controlled by law to protect freshwater plants and fish, but the heat wave was threatening to force some reactors to shut down.

"The electricity grid manager has identified minimum production requirements at some reactors which are needed to guarantee the network's balance and continued supplies to consumers," France's Ministry of Industry said in a statement Saturday. "In these conditions and as a preventative measure, the government has decided to respond favorably to the request from EDF."

Which reactors benefit from the waiver will be decided by the electricity grid manager – itself a unit of EDF – as the conditions arise, the ministry said.

EDF warned that without action the two-week-old heat wave – forecast to last around another week – "could threaten the balance between supply and demand in electricity."

The electricity company, which took similar measures during France's last major heat wave in 2003, said that it was closely monitoring the impact of the discharges on the environment.

EDF also said it would continue spot purchases in the European power market and postpone planned nuclear plant maintenance in order to cope with current demand.

The heat wave has so far claimed the lives of an estimated 22 people in France.

The national weather service said on Sunday that temperatures in many areas had cooled, but it maintained a hot weather alert in 26 of the 96 administrative departments in France proper, mainly in the south and east of the country.

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