

Editorials & Opinion

Blackout anniversary a chance for real action on conservation

PETER LOVE

The first anniversary of the August 14, 2003, blackout is an excellent opportunity to look in the rear-view mirror and examine how Ontario has responded over the past year and look forward to determine how we can reduce the likelihood of this event happening again.

Immediately after the blackout, the public reaction to pleas from the provincial government to conserve electricity was tremendous, resulting in a 20-per-cent reduction in demand for all sectors. However, as time passed, commitment to energy conservation waned.

Clearly, Ontarians respond well to a crisis, but we must do more in order to have a stable long-term electricity supply.

Since the 2003 election last fall, the new government's response to the blackout included the following initiatives: replacing the price cap with temporary two-tiered pricing; by 2007, reduce overall electricity consumption by 5 per cent and achieve a 10-per-cent reduction by the Ontario government; have 800,000 "smart meters" installed in households by 2007 and in all Ontario households by 2010; announcing initiatives such as a major role for Local

Distribution Companies (LDCs) in delivering conservation programs and establish a new Conservation Bureau. It has also announced an RFP for 2,000 megawatts of new electricity supply that will include conservation measures.

While this is an impressive list of activities and accomplishments in a short period of time, today Ontario's electricity supply is at a critical juncture. We are only one hot day away from having a spike in demand that could trigger another blackout. If this is to be avoided, the province must initiate a number of activities to protect our supply. If the province is to meet its goal of achieving a five-per-cent reduction in electricity demand by 2007, the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance would expect the following by this time next year:

★ Ensure the majority of LDCs have active conservation programs that engage their customers (such as EnerGuide for New Homes, Cool Shops, which retrofits businesses for energy efficiency, and Energy Smarts, which promotes Energy Star appliances).

★ Increase the minimum energy efficiency levels for appliances and products sold in the province such as refrigerators, air conditioning and windows.

★ Increase the minimum energy effi-

ciency standards of new buildings, starting with commercial construction and government buildings.

★ Expand the commitment of a 10-per-cent reduction in electricity demand for the provincial government to include municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals.

★ Have electricity prices reflect the actual cost of generation so that prices are adjusted to different seasons and times of the day.

★ Accelerate the phase-in time of interval or smart meters, which measure the amount of electricity and the time when used, and make this a requirement for all new homes.

★ Initiate aggressive province-wide market transformation campaigns coordinated through the new Conservation Bureau in association with external delivery agents.

If Ontario is to get serious about reducing its electricity demand and protecting its energy supply into the future, we must all make an effort or expect to be left sitting in the dark again.

Peter Love is president of the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance, an independent, non-profit group that promotes energy efficiency and its benefits to the economy and the environment.