



international news

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Japanese dress down to save energy

Japan – Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has proposed an unusual solution to rising energy demands.

Koizumi will encourage Japanese businessmen to abandon their jackets and ties over summer in a bid to reduce air conditioning usage. Cabinet ministers will lead by example, hoping the effects will flow on down the bureaucracy.

Energy usage is a major issue in Japan, as the country imports more than 80% of its energy. Electricity used rose by 3.7% in 2004, largely due to a summer heat wave. If Japan is to meet its commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, major steps will need to be taken to combat energy demands. Along with the push toward casual summer dress, the re-introduction of daylight savings time is also under consideration.

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Americans sign up to shut down

USA – Thousands of American residents are giving permission to their electricity providers to shut down their air conditioning systems for short intervals when energy usage nears total capacity this summer.

The schemes, which are run by power companies throughout America, have operated for many years, but with the increasing energy demands, soaring prices and major electrical blackouts suffered in recent years, more and more residential homes are signing up to the schemes.

With a small device installed to the home, the power company can remotely control the operation of residential central air conditioning units, as well as other major appliances such as swimming pool pumps. While the payback for the consumer is moderate (a discount or credit on their electricity bill), such schemes are expected to help America get through the summer without major blackouts.

Similar schemes directed at business are also operating, with over 2000 New York businesses on call to cut a combined 1500 megawatts of power usage if required this summer.

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China looks to energy efficiency during heat wave

China – As temperatures rise across China, driving the demand for power and water close to capacity, the government has set up a national energy leading group, headed by Premier Wen Jiabao, which will promote energy development and conservation.

As July daily temperatures reached 39°C in Shanghai, power consumption was reported to have reached in excess of 16 million kilowatts, coming close to the city's total capacity of 17 million kilowatts.

With the State Power Grid Corporation warning of an electricity shortfall of some 25 million kilowatts per hour in summer, the Chinese government has warned the public to economize their power consumption, while air conditioning systems in government buildings have been set at 26°C or higher.

The Beijing City Government has also moved to allow staff to dress casually in an attempt to reduce air conditioning requirements.