

German cities turn off lights, impose cold showers amid fuel crisis

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Pipes at the Reckrod gas storage plant near Eiterfeld, central Germany. The Nord Stream 1 pipeline was shut down for 10 days in July for maintenance.(Photo by AP)

Berlin, July 29 (RHC)-- Amid the worsening fuel crisis, German cities are switching off spotlights on public buildings, turning off fountains, and imposing cold showers on municipal swimming pools and sports halls to reduce energy consumption.

Hanover, in northwestern Germany, became the first major city on Wednesday to announce energy-saving measures, including cutting off hot water in showers and bathrooms in municipal buildings and leisure centers.

Municipal buildings in the state capital of Lower Saxony are only heated to a maximum room temperature of 20 °C (68 °F) from October 1 to March 31, and the use of portable air conditioning units and fan heaters is prohibited. Kindergartens, schools, care homes and hospitals are exempt from these measures.

“The situation is unpredictable,” the city’s mayor Belit Onay of the Green party was quoted as saying. “Every kilowatt hour counts, and protecting critical infrastructure has to be a priority.” The measure is aimed at reducing energy consumption by 15 percent in Hannover, Germany.

The European Commission this week asked member states to ensure they can withstand a complete gas cut from Russia. Germany is more dependent on Russian gas than other European countries, which has put added pressure on it in the current situation.

In the German capital Berlin, around 200 monuments and municipal buildings plunged into darkness on Wednesday night as the city turned off spotlights to conserve electricity. Monuments that used to be lit up at night include the Victory Column in Tiergarten Park, the Memorial Church in Breitscheidplatz and the Jewish Museum.

Germany uses most of its imported gas to heat homes and power its large industries. But while an energy emergency plan that began in June enables utilities to pass on higher gas prices to customers, most private households in Germany pay their gas bills in fixed installments and are not yet to see those kinds of increases directly that could change significantly consumer behavior.

On Thursday, the German government confirmed that gas surcharges for customers could be much higher than previously expected to save energy companies from bankruptcy in the coming months.

“We can’t say yet how much gas will cost in November, but the bitter news is it’s definitely a few hundred euros per household,” said the economy minister, Robert Habeck.

Inflation has risen in Germany due to the rising cost of energy prices, exacerbated by Russia’s ban on gas supplies to Europe, with politicians and senior officials already warning that energy needs to be conserved ahead of the cold season this autumn.

Germany also uses gas to produce about 15 percent of its electricity needs, now the municipal authorities in the country have decided to make significant savings in this area.

The city of Munich, in southern Germany, announced this week that it would turn off lights in its municipal building on Marienplatz square, which is usually on until 11 p.m., and only have cold water in the municipal offices.

Nuremberg is closing three of its four indoor city pools and keeping its outdoor lidos open until September 25.

In April, Berlin decided to set the water temperature of its public swimming pools two degrees lower than the standard temperature in different seasons to save fuel.

Germany halted the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project, which was designed to double the flow of Russian gas heading directly to Germany, in response to Russia’s military campaign in Ukraine. Europe

is heavily dependent on Russian energy resources, and the West accuses Moscow of using energy as a weapon in retaliation for its sanctions.

Politicians in Europe have repeatedly warned Russia could cut off gas this winter, a step that would thrust Germany into recession and lead to soaring prices for consumers already faced with painfully high energy costs. The Kremlin, however, has said Moscow is not interested in a complete stoppage of gas supplies to Europe.

Rising energy prices and a global wheat shortage are among the most far-reaching effects of the Ukraine conflict. They have caused a cost of living crisis in Europe amid rising inflation, leading to growing dissatisfaction.

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