

Wind Rescues New York Power After Nuclear Plant Shutdown

Naureen Malik

December 15, 2015 — 12:57 PM EST Updated on December 15, 2015 — 2:12 PM EST

- Indian Point 3 reactor closes after electrical disturbance
- Two natural gas plants also stepped in to cover shortage

A nuclear reactor that supplies Manhattan unexpectedly went offline Monday night, though you wouldn't know it to look at power prices.

The Indian Point 3 plant, 27 miles (43 kilometers) north of New York City, automatically shut down at 7 p.m. because of an electrical disturbance, owner Entergy Corp. said in an e-mailed statement late Monday. The last time that happened, spot power more than doubled. Tuesday, wind turbines in the state came to the rescue, running close to capacity and compensating for the loss of the reactor.

While renewables make up a small portion of U.S. generating capacity, wind and solar have subdued prices and at times curtailed the need for plants that rely on coal and natural gas. Meanwhile, Entergy is facing political and economic pressure as Governor Andrew Cuomo seeks to shut the plant while power prices in December head for the lowest monthly average on record.

“It is a lot windier than yesterday,” said Ben Chamberlain, an analyst with Gencap Inc. in Boston. “Additional strong unplanned wind generation is helping to cover the loss of the Indian Point reactor.”

Spot wholesale power for New York City fell \$27.34, or 56 percent, to \$21.33 per megawatt-hour in the hour ended at 1 p.m. compared with the same period Monday, according to grid data compiled by Bloomberg.

Price Surge

Spot prices surged briefly Monday after the 1,012-megawatts reactor shut down. The last time Unit 3 was shut, on the evening of Sept. 14 for planned maintenance, average spot power more than doubled the next day to \$39.60 and then rose even more to \$54.76 the following day.

“Because of the number of recent unplanned outages, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's requirements will result in increased inspections and scrutiny of the plant,”

Cuomo said in an e-mailed statement Monday. “A thorough investigation of this shutdown is underway and we will make sure the safety of New Yorkers is not compromised.”

Cuomo as recently as October said the two reactors at Indian Point should be shut because evacuating the plant would be impossible in a major emergency. Entergy has received approval to operate Unit 3 as it seeks to extend its license, which was set to expire at midnight on Dec. 12, the company said in a statement last week.

Electricity consumption in Manhattan and its four neighboring boroughs was 6,190 megawatts at 11 a.m., 4.9 percent lower than the forecast for the hour, according to the New York Independent System Operator Inc.’s website.

New York’s 1,500 megawatts of wind generation is operating near capacity Tuesday, up from 40 percent to 50 percent Monday, Chamberlain said.

Two plants fueled by natural gas also ramped up quickly to make up for any shortfalls, Chamberlain said. These include the 1,200-megawatt Roseton plant about 43 miles north of the city in Orange County, and a plant in Athens, he said.