

Charleston Daily Mail & Charleston Gazette

July 18, 2008

Associated Press

Friday July 18, 2008

Industry leaders call for new plants, power lines

by The Associated Press

SHEPHERDSTOWN -- The aging and long-ignored infrastructure that provides power to homes and businesses across the Mid-Atlantic region is nearing the breaking point because of growing demand, a group of electricity experts warned at a forum in West Virginia.

"I don't want to be an alarmist here, but the window within which we can act to maintain reliable power supplies is getting to be tighter and tighter," said Daniel Larcamp, spokesman for the Edison Electrical Institute, an association of publicly held electric companies representing about 70 percent of the U.S. industry.

Larcamp and others painted a grim picture at the conference sponsored by West Virginians for Reliable Power on Wednesday, talking mainly about the need for upgraded power plants and transmission lines. But they also said the region needs more alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power.

West Virginia's rapidly growing Eastern Panhandle, a haven for people fleeing the congestion of Baltimore and Washington, D.C., has seen peak summer demand grow by about 4.1 percent a year in the last decade, four times the state average, Larcamp said.

Wintertime demand has grown more than 6 percent per year, with more than 4,200 new commercial connections, 450 new industrial connections and more than 23,000 new residential connections in the past decade.

West Virginia is on a grid run by electricity wholesaler PJM Interconnections, which covers parts of 13 states and the District of Columbia. Many transmission lines operate close to their limits and may not be able to meet demand in as little as five years, said PJM spokesman Robert Hinkle.

The conference comes as a new high-voltage line, the Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline (PATH), is under consideration.

PATH would carry power 290 miles from a substation near St. Albans, near Charleston, W.Va., to another substation in Berkeley County.

From there, twin transmission lines would run to a substation to be built in Kempton, Md., on a path that Pennsylvania-based Allegheny Power said has not yet been drawn.