

The Herald

Friday, November 20, 2009

Zesa Holdings explains increased load shedding

Herald Reporters

ZESA Holdings has said the increased load shedding being experienced in the country is due to reduced electricity imports, low generation capacity and heightened vandalism that have left many areas without power.

Many parts of Zimbabwe, particularly urban areas, have in the past few weeks experienced unscheduled load shedding.

Some areas have gone for over 12 hours at a time without power.

The Southern Africa region has suffered from output deficits and Zimbabwe's traditional suppliers have been providing only half of what they normally do.

The situation has been compounded by the fact that only three of the six generation units at Hwange Power Station are operating, while scheduled maintenance work is still in progress at the Kariba power plant.

Maintenance of Kariba Power Station is due to be completed this weekend and the situation will likely improve, albeit slightly.

Zesa spokesperson Mr Fullard Gwasira yesterday said the maintenance programme and lack of generation from some units at Hwange had reduced the capacity by over 600 megawatts.

This means Zesa is presently producing 640MW.

There has been increased industrial demand for power owing to increased production levels.

Vandalism, which the utility says has reached unprecedented levels, is retarding Zesa's drive to expand the national electricity grid.

"The current load shedding that is being experienced in the country is a result of the annual maintenance at Kariba Power Station, depressed generation at Hwange and low imports.

"Owing to power generation challenges being experienced by our traditional suppliers, Zimbabwe has only been able to secure half of its import needs from the region.

"The maintenance of Kariba Power Station is, however, expected to be completed by this weekend and will slightly increase generation," Mr Gwasira said.

Last Friday, vandals pulled down 10 Zesa pylons between Mwenezi and Beitbridge plunging large swathes of the southern region into darkness. Zesa moved quickly and restored power in the affected areas.

Mr Gwasira said: "The scourge of vandalism and theft has become one of the retrogressive factors, which have negatively affected electricity service provision of power to domestic, mining and industrial consumers.

"To that effect, the expansion of the national electricity grid has been hampered as most materials and equipment are channelled towards replacement and not connection of new customers."

Mr Gwasira said their estimates put Zesa's losses due to vandalism at over US\$2 million between January and September this year.

"Three hundred and forty-nine tonnes of copper conductors were stolen, 21 tonnes of aluminum conductors were also pillaged from the electricity network, while 49 500 litres of oil were drained from transformers country wide," Mr Gwasira said.

Mr Gwasira bemoaned the hazards posed by vandalised Zesa property, saying members of the public had been exposed to electrocution.

"Zesa has been using the local media to communicate its safety awareness campaigns as well as encouraging consumers to form neighbourhood watch committees to safeguard the electricity infrastructure," he said.

Mr Gwasira commended police for their support and the judiciary for their tough stance on vandals.