

BUSINESS

Nation sets new electricity usage record

Surge in demand came amid sweltering heat

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USA TODAY

Americans cranking up their air conditioners, fans and swamp coolers over a single hour in late July consumed more electricity than ever before as sweltering heat spread from the Midwest to the East Coast.

The federal Energy Information Administration said that from 7 to 8 p.m. ET on July 28, Americans consumed

758,149 megawatt-hours of electricity – a national record. While the numbers are subject to change, the EIA said Americans might consume even more power.

An average American home consumes about 10,791 kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, meaning the energy consumed on July 28 would be enough to power a single house for 70,000 years.

The demand for electricity came as large, heavily populated parts of the United States suffered under high temperatures.

Where you live plays a significant

role in how much you pay for electricity: On average, people in Utah pay the lowest electric bills, at about \$95 a month, whereas, in Connecticut, the average monthly bill is \$218, according to Save-OnEnergy.com, a Texas-based electricity broker.

Natural gas remains the backbone of our electricity supply, providing 45% of the total, according to the EIA.

Coal is the next-largest source, at 17%, while nuclear represented 13%. Solar accounts for 11%, while wind and hydropower each provide 5%.

The previous hourly demand record for the continental United States was

745,020 megawatt-hours on July 15, 2024, the EIA said.

The United States has been consuming more electricity per person as an increasing number of homes have air conditioners, along with demands from AI computer centers.

The EIA noted that electricity consumption had been relatively flat from 2010 to 2020 as increased efficiency offset population growth, but demand has been rising since then.

President Donald Trump has called for significant increases in natural gas and oil drilling, along with the expansion of coal-fired power plants.

Ford deal secures \$3B line of credit

Move comes amid tariff, economic uncertainty

Jamie L. LaReau
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

DETROIT – Ford Motor Co. is securing access to cash as economic uncertainty and increased costs related to tariffs cloud the horizon in the months ahead.

Ford has taken out a \$3 billion term loan credit agreement, basically a line of credit that acts like a credit card, meaning the money is there if Ford needs it. The loan is with several lenders and it will be administered through JPMorgan Chase Bank, according to a government filing on July 28.

The Dearborn, Michigan-based automaker said lenders have provided \$3 billion of commitments, which are available to Ford to draw upon through July 28, 2026. Any loans drawn under the credit agreement during that time will mature on Dec. 31, 2028.

As part of the loan conditions, Ford must maintain a minimum of \$4 billion in its own cash. Companies usually enter into loan agreements when they see economic uncertainty ahead, but still desire to invest in and grow the business. Experts have noted in recent weeks many signs that raise concerns across the auto industry.

For example, President Donald Trump’s recent trade deal with Japan has raised concerns with the group representing General Motors, Ford and Chrysler-parent Stellantis because the deal could trim tariffs on auto imports from Japan to 15% while tariffs on Canada and Mexico remain at 25%.

Matt Blunt, who heads the American Automotive Policy Council that represents the Detroit Three automakers, said on July 22 they were still reviewing the trade agreement but “any deal that charges a lower tariff for Japanese imports with virtually no U.S. content than the tariff imposed on North American-built vehicles with high U.S. content is a bad deal for U.S. industry and U.S. auto workers.”

There also have been some economic indicators that point to a possible recession, which have kept some new-vehicle shoppers on the sidelines, slowing auto sales in June and forcing more new-car discounts to move inventory in July.

Then there is the concern over paying for Trump’s 25% tariffs on all vehicle and auto parts imports. Ford warned that it expects tariffs will cost it about \$1.5 billion from its earnings before interest and taxes for the year. GM said tariffs would cost it \$4 billion to \$5 billion for 2025.

GM experienced the impact of tariffs when it reported recently that its second-quarter net income plummeted 35% compared with the same quarter in 2024. Stellantis reported a preliminary \$2.7 billion first-half loss as it faces revamping its product ranges in Europe and the United States.

On July 25, auto parts supplier Detroit Axle said it will close its warehouse in Ferndale, Michigan, and sever the jobs of 102 people on Aug. 25 because of disruptions in its automotive parts supply chain connected to the U.S. import tariff policy.



The Dawn Aerospace Mk-II Aurora spaceplane takes off during a flight test. Aurora is capable of reaching the edge of space and providing several minutes of microgravity for research payloads. PROVIDED BY DAWN AEROSPACE

Oklahoma is reaching for outer space – again

Rocket-powered craft part of spaceport rebirth

Dale Denwalt
The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

Outer space has never been closer to Oklahoma.

For more than two decades, the state government struggled to market Oklahoma’s largest runway as a spaceport. Officials envisioned it as the hub of a soaring space industry, generating business for local companies that design, build and operate the technology needed to conquer Earth’s gravity.

But the failure of promising companies and lingering maintenance issues dampened those dreams. Now, a new crop of leaders has inked a deal meant to refuel the vision for the Oklahoma Spaceport.

If everything goes as planned, Oklahoma’s government will host a rocket-powered spaceplane doing microgravity science missions by 2027.

The partnership with New Zealand-based Dawn Aerospace will bring Dawn’s reusable Mk-II Aurora spaceplane to the Oklahoma Spaceport at Clinton-Sherman Airport in western Oklahoma, the site of one of just 14 licensed spaceports in the nation.

“We were trying to get to the starting line for years and years; we could not attract a company that was in the trade space. This is a win in that regard,” said retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Don Wetekam, now deputy director of the Oklahoma Aerospace and Defense Innovation Institute at the University of Oklahoma.

According to the contract between Dawn Aerospace and the Oklahoma Space Industry Development Authority, the state will pay up to \$17 million for the company’s first commercially produced spaceplane. That includes the equipment and personnel costs of operating Aurora for one year after delivery or 100 launches, whichever comes first.

The payments will be made quar-

terly. About \$8 million is due by the end of 2025. The state will earn back a portion of revenue for every client-paid flight that Dawn Aerospace makes. A typical launch would cost clients about \$100,000.

The rocket-powered Mk-II Aurora is capable of reaching the Kármán line, widely accepted as the edge of Earth’s atmosphere and the beginning of outer space. The Kármán line is about 62 miles (100 kilometers) above sea level, nearly 10 times higher than commercial aircraft usually fly. By comparison, the International Space Station orbits the Earth at about 250 miles up.

Aurora is a suborbital craft, however. Once it reaches the edge of space, the craft and its payload will experience microgravity for several minutes – just long enough for clients to get valuable data about how their products or processes might work in space. Then it’s back to Earth.

The vehicle has already been launched dozens of times from the Dawn Aerospace base in New Zealand.

In November 2024, Dawn Aerospace launched its 57th test flight and achieved supersonic speeds for the first time while flying to an altitude of 82,500 feet, breaking the record for fastest ascent to 20 kilometers in an aircraft.

There aren’t many companies offering this kind of service. NASA allows third-party research payloads on its launches to the International Space Station, but that is extremely competitive. Blue Origin also hosts small science payloads on its suborbital rockets, which are primarily meant for crewed and space tourist excursions.

The Aurora distinguishes itself by being able to fly two missions per day on the same vehicle, which can land where it was launched, drastically speeding up the collection of data.

“That has huge implications when it comes to advanced materials, when it comes to new pharmaceuticals and beyond that, regenerative medicine, the 3D printing of human organs, these types of things which we are (already) proving on the International Space Station,” said Jim Bridenstine, the former

Oklahoma congressman and NASA administrator who launched his own private consulting firm, Artemis Group, after leaving public office.

Oklahoma has experienced some success in the space industry. Manufacturers across the state have built components that were flown during the Apollo Space Program, on the space shuttle and on the International Space Station.

In 1999 when state lawmakers created the Oklahoma Space Industry Development Authority, or OSIDA, there was early optimism as small companies sought out the isolated spaceport about 100 miles west of Oklahoma City.

But projects at the spaceport barely got off the ground. OSIDA and its supporters faced major embarrassment a few years later when one of those early companies, Rocketplane, went bankrupt.

Meanwhile, the site languished, with little money to repair aging hangars and other structures. It didn’t help that Oklahoma earned more revenue from agricultural leases and airport landing fees than from rocket launches. It was a spaceport in name only.

About five years ago, however, with new officials and a reinvigorated board overseeing progress, the languishing air and spaceport began turning the corner. Boeing has used the 2.5-mile-long runway for flight testing of its prototype 777X aircraft. Premier Aviation is building an aerospace testing and maintenance base at the Clinton-Sherman Airport that can handle wide-body aircraft.

Recently, the state has pumped millions of dollars into maintenance, repairs and upgrades to the infrastructure at Clinton-Sherman Airport.

Not only is the state renovating the spaceport, but also the state’s space industry image.

Lawmakers merged OSIDA in 2025 with the Oklahoma Department of Aerospace and Aeronautics, bringing control of the spaceport and its industrial park directly under the umbrella of Oklahoma’s aerospace development team and department Executive Director Grayson Ardies.