

## Lower prices, no major power outages in Alberta in 2014: electricity operator

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CALGARY – The organization that oversees Alberta’s electricity says wind power and a new natural gas plant helped meet growing demand this year at a lower price to consumers.

The Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) says the increased supply of power also meant no major outages.

But with the province’s burgeoning population and economy, what about next year?

Miranda Keating Erickson, AESO’s vice-president of operations, said 2015 could be much the same.

“We have been breaking records every year in terms of electricity use. I would be shocked if we don’t break a record again this winter,” she said Thursday.

“Next year, as I look forward, looks an awful lot like this year in terms of lots of supply, continued demand growth.”

The Conference Board of Canada is forecasting Alberta’s economy to grow by 3.3 per cent in 2015.

Erickson said AESO added more than 1,400 megawatts of new power generation to the system in 2014 – more than 2012 and 2013 combined.

Demand this year was up by 3.5 per cent, mainly due to swelling cities and more energy sector development.

Two projects are credited with contributing to what she called the extraordinary increase in supply.

They include the Shepard Energy Centre natural gas power plant in Calgary and the Blackspring Ridge wind farm near Lethbridge.

Blackspring is the largest wind farm in Canada, AESO says. When it’s fully operational next year, Shepard will be Alberta’s largest natural-gas-fired power facility.

Other projects are to come on stream in 2015, Erickson said.

The prospect of meeting the long-term growing demand for more electricity in Alberta will be a big challenge.

Erickson said AESO forecasts the province will need to almost double its electricity transmission capacity over the next 20 years.

“The consumption of electricity in Alberta has been growing in leaps and bounds for five-plus years and we expect it to keep growing because the economy in the province is doing so well,” she said.

“Industry in this province is very dependent on electricity and so we have to make sure we are there to meet its needs.”