

### **Britain 'could have winter power cut'**

Britain could suffer a big blackout similar to America's as early as this winter, a Government energy adviser warned today.

Professor Ian Fell was speaking after cuts left 50 million Americans in the dark.

The same company that runs and owns Britain's National Grid also owns the part of the US grid which is suspected to have crashed.

"A blackout could happen here," said Professor Fell, also an adviser to the World Energy Council.

"I have come to the conclusion there is a 20% chance of power cuts next winter," he added.

Professor Fell said electricity prices had been driven down so much over the last few years that energy companies were making no profits to invest back into the system and build extra power supplies.

This means capacity in the system is falling - and if a surge comes due to a bad winter then blackouts will be inevitable.

### **Rationing**

Britain's National Grid would initially start rationing, particularly with large industrial companies, experts believe.

Current UK generating capacity is put at 65,000 megawatts and demand peaked last December at 54,000 megawatts. A single megawatt is enough to boil 400 kettles.

France can export 2,000 megawatts to the UK via a cable under the channel.

The average annual household electricity bill in the UK is £250.00 while in France it is £277.50.

### **Contingency plans**

Chris Mostyn, a spokesman for National Grid said: "We don't know what caused the blackout in the US so we can't speculate as to whether it could happen here.

"Our record speaks for itself. The last blackouts we had were in 1987 due to hurricane storms."

A spokesman for Ofgem said: "We will work with National Grid to see if there are any lessons to be learned from the experience in the states.

"There are contingency plans in case of any event and these are tested on a regular basis."

- Coventry-based National Grid Transco's US subsidiary Niagara Mohawk has described speculation that its system may have been at the root of the fault as "uninformed and premature".

