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Energy crisis possibility brings drills

By DENNIS PATTERSON
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RALEIGH - State emergency officials Tuesday began practicing how to handle an energy crisis with a simulated game plan that could have been written from the front pages of North Carolina newspapers over the last nine months.

The exercise included a hurricane with winds over 130 miles an hour that strikes the North Carolina coast, followed three weeks later by a cold snap that puts heating oil and gas in short supply. At the same time, Iraq attacks Syria in the Middle East, starting a shooting war that leads to an oil embargo against the United States.

Hurricane Hugo, which hit Charlotte last September, was followed in December by a bitter cold snap that shut down gas wells in the Gulf of Mexico. And Iraq's invasion of Kuwait three weeks ago has driven up oil prices as shipments of crude oil were interrupted.

At each stage of the energy emergency drill which lasts through today, state officials and industry representatives must decide what conservation steps to take, what kinds of restrictions to apply and how to get the energy where it is needed.

What we get out of these games is essentially, that we are going to test the state's energy preparedness plan" said Edward Badolato, President of Contingency Management Services. His company is running the simulation for the state.

"Without having to pay the price we actually get a chance to run through an emergency and see what actions need to be taken he said.

The list of responses state officials can make to an energy Crisis range from requests for voluntary conservations by consumers to mandatory reductions of governmental fuel use and mandatory fuel allocations to critical services industries.

Badolato, a former Marine officer and military attaché in the Middle East said the scenarios for the North Carolina drill were drawn up months ago, before Iraq invaded Kuwait. But he said anyone familiar with energy or the Middle East could see the potential for problems.

We've had 15 big oil crises since 1950," Badolato said. "All of those crises revolved around political problems and instability in the Persian Gulf."