

11:20 25Mar2009 RTRS-UPDATE 1-POLL-US natgas stocks seen down 9 bcf in weekly EIAs

NEW YORK, March 25 (Reuters) - U.S. natural gas storage levels are expected to fall 9 billion cubic feet when weekly data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration are released early Thursday, according to a Reuters poll.

In the weekly survey of 23 industry traders and analysts, estimates for the week ended March 20 ranged from a draw of 20 bcf to a build of 2 bcf.

Stocks fell an adjusted 43 bcf for the same week last year, while the five-year average decline for that week is 49 bcf.

The median withdrawal in the survey was 10 bcf.

The EIA storage report will be issued Thursday at 10:30 a.m. EDT (1430 GMT).

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said there were 108 heating degree days last week, 32 warmer than the previous week, 22 warmer than normal and 16 warmer than the same week last year.

Degree days, a measure of departure in the mean daily temperature from 65 degrees Fahrenheit, are used to reflect demand for energy to heat or cool homes and businesses.

In the last report, overall storage fell 30 bcf, above the Reuters survey estimate of 28 bcf but well below the adjusted year-ago decline of 85 bcf and the five-year average drop for that week of 61 bcf.

Despite a cold winter this year, storage withdrawals have often fallen short of expectations, slowed by a weak economy that has sharply cut industrial and power generation demand.

Adjusting for weather differences, analysts estimate there has been about 5 bcf per day, or 6 percent, more gas around this winter, the result of recession-related cuts in demand and still-rising first quarter production.

Eastern stocks dropped 26 bcf in the last report but climbed to about 4 percent above last year's levels.

Consuming Region West storage, which fell 12 bcf for the week, slipped to 51 percent above the same year-ago week, while inventories in the Producing Region rose 8 bcf and climbed to about 42 percent above the same week in 2008.

Last week's EIA report showed that total domestic gas inventories of 1.651 trillion cubic feet stood at 326 bcf, or 25 percent, above last year and 16 percent above the five-year average. [ID:nPRWPI54]

A draw Thursday at the Reuters estimate would widen the storage surplus to last year to a whopping 360 bcf.

In the previous four reports, total stocks fell 345 bcf, or 86 bcf per week, versus a 495 bcf adjusted slide for the same one-month period last year and a 418 bcf five-year average decline for that period.

NOAA said it expected 100 HDDs this week, 17 milder than normal and 24 milder than the same year-ago week.

Early estimates for next week's EIA report range from a 15 bcf draw to a 15 bcf build versus a 30 bcf adjusted decline for the same week in 2008.

In mid-November, storage peaked at 3.488 tcf, its second highest level ever and just shy of the all-time high of 3.545 tcf hit in early November 2007, according to EIA data.

If drawdowns for the next few weeks match the five-year average pace, inventories will end the heating season at 1.586 tcf, about 17 percent above average and a very comfortable level to start the April-through-October stock building season.

The following is a partial list of forecasters who participated in this week's survey. If forecasters provided a range, the midpoint was used.

Caprock	- 11
CH Guernsey	- 13
Citi Futures	- 10
enerjay	- 8
FC Stone	- 15
First Enercast	- 9
FirstEnergy	- 7
Global Insight	- 7
Hencorp	- 12
JPMorgan	- 14
MF Global	- 13
Newedge USA	- 9
Raymond James	0
Ritterbusch & Assoc	- 12
SMC Forecasting	+ 1
Societe Generale	- 11
Stephen Smith Energy	- 1
Strategic Energy	+ 2
Summit Energy	- 10

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