

NEW YORK, Sept 2 (Reuters) - U.S. natural gas storage levels are expected to rise by 66 billion cubic feet when weekly data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration is released early Thursday, according to a Reuters poll.

In the weekly survey of 25 industry traders and analysts, injection estimates for the week ended Aug. 28 ranged from 58 bcf to 75 bcf.

Stocks rose an adjusted 92 bcf for the same week last year, while the five-year average gain for that week is 64 bcf.

The median build in the survey was also 66 bcf.

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

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said there were 61 cooling degree days last week, 18 cooler than the previous week but four warmer than normal and one warmer than the same week in 2008.

Degree days, a measure of departure in the mean daily temperature from 65 degrees Fahrenheit (18 degrees Celsius), are used to reflect demand for energy to heat or cool homes and businesses.

In the last report, overall storage rose 54 bcf, slightly above the Reuters survey estimate of 52 bcf but well below the year-ago gain of 100 bcf and the five-year average increase for that week of 67 bcf.

Last week's EIA report showed that total domestic gas inventories climbed further into record high territory for this time of year, hitting 3.258 trillion cubic feet.

EIA raised its estimate of aggregate peak natural gas storage capacity by 100 bcf, or 2.6 percent, to 3.889 tcf due to the addition of new facilities, capacity expansions at some existing facilities, and greater use of existing facilities over the past year.

EIA said total working gas design capacity, a measure based on the theoretical peak of each storage field, also increased, climbing 177 bcf, or 4.3 percent, to 4.313 tcf.

Total stocks crossed the 3 tcf mark during the week of July 24, the earliest week ever to break that benchmark, and they seem on track to hit all-time highs above 3.8 tcf by winter.

Normally, storage does not top 3 tcf until mid-September.

Inventories now stand at 516 bcf, or 19 percent, above last year and 500 bcf, or 18 percent, above the five-year average. [ID:nPRWPI54]

Eastern stocks gained 43 bcf in the last report but slipped to 8 percent above last year's levels.

Inventories in the Producing Region climbed 5 bcf to a new all-time high of 1.079 tcf but fell to 40 percent above the same week in 2008.

EIA estimates peak working gas capacity in the Producing Region at 1.202 tcf, with design capacity at 1.351 tcf.

Consuming Region West storage rose 6 bcf for the week but eased to 23 percent above the same year-ago week.

Stocks in the West are just 23 bcf shy of breaking the regional high of 478 bcf from November 2007. Peak working gas capacity in the West is estimated at 509 bcf.

A total build Thursday at the Reuters estimate would sharply trim the storage surplus to last year to 490 bcf.

In the previous four reports, total stocks rose 235 bcf, or

59 bcf per week, versus a 290 bcf adjusted gain for the same one-month period last year and a 213 bcf five-year average build for that period.

NOAA said it expected 44 cooling degree days this week, 7 cooler than normal and 19 cooler than the same year-ago week.

Early injection estimates for next week's EIA report range from 75 bcf to 87 bcf versus a 63 bcf adjusted increase for the same week in 2008.

To get inventories back to a comfortable 3.5 tcf by next winter, weekly injections must average 24 bcf for the remaining 10 weeks of the stock building season, well below the five-year average of 62 bcf for that period.

If weekly storage builds through October match the five-year average pace, inventories will begin next heating season with 3.878 tcf in the ground, easily eclipsing the all-time high of 3.565 tcf set on Oct. 31, 2007.

The following is a partial list of forecasters who participated in this week's survey. If forecasters provided a range, the midpoint was used. Numbers in billion cubic feet (BCF)

Caprock	+ 63
CH Guernsey	+ 68
Citi Futures	+ 64
enerjay	+ 67
FC Stone	+ 66
FirstEnergy	+ 68
First Enercast	+ 63
Gelber & Assoc	+ 73
Hencorp	+ 58
IHS Global Insight	+ 75
JPMorgan	+ 61
MF Global	+ 69
PFGBest Research	+ 70
Prestige Economics	+ 70
Raymond James	+ 64
Ritterbusch & Assoc	+ 61
SMC Forecasting	+ 72
Stephen Smith Energy	+ 66
Strategic Energy	+ 63
Summit Energy	+ 68
Tradition Energy	+ 65

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