

**12:29 18Feb2009 RTRS-UPDATE 1-POLL-U.S. natgas stocks seen down 57 bcf in wkly EIAs**

(Adds weather data, background, table)

NEW YORK, Feb 18 (Reuters) - U.S. natural gas storage levels are expected to fall by 57 billion cubic feet when weekly data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration is released early Thursday, according to a Reuters poll.

In the survey of 22 industry traders and analysts, withdrawal estimates for the week ended Feb. 13 ranged from 40 bcf to 87 bcf. The median withdrawal was 54 bcf.

For the same week last year, stocks fell an adjusted 157 bcf, while the five-year average decline is 155 bcf.

The EIA storage report will be issued on Thursday at 10:30 a.m. EST (1530 GMT).

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said there were 143 heating degree days last week, 84 fewer than the previous week, 46 below normal and 57 less 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 159 bcf, below the Reuters survey estimate for a 166 bcf decline and the five-year average drop for that week of 166 bcf, but above the adjusted year-ago draw of 143 bcf.

Traders noted that withdrawals this heating season have typically fallen short of what would have been expected if the economy was in better shape.

Eastern stocks lost 115 bcf in the last report and slipped to about 11 percent below last year's levels.

Consuming Region West storage, which fell 7 bcf for the week, jumped to 39 percent above the same year-ago week, while

inventories in the Producing Region shed 37 bcf, but held at about 11 percent above the same week in 2008.

Last week's EIA report showed that total domestic gas inventories of 2.020 trillion cubic feet stood at 44 bcf, or 2 percent, above last year and 1 percent above the five-year average. [ID:nPRWPI54]

A draw Thursday at the Reuters estimate would sharply widen the storage surplus to last year to about 144 bcf.

In the previous four reports, total stocks fell 716 bcf, or 179 bcf per week, versus a 732 bcf adjusted slide for the same one-month period last year and a 659 bcf five-year average decline for that period.

NOAA said it expected 180 HDDs this week, 2 more than normal but 5 less than the same year-ago week.

Early withdrawal estimates for next week's EIA report ranged from 100 bcf to 142 bcf, versus a 157 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 rest of winter match the five-year average pace, inventories will end the heating season at 1.382 tcf, about 2 percent above average and a fairly comfortable level to start the April-through-October stock-building season.

Some industry analysts expect stocks to end winter even higher, possibly at a record above 1.7 tcf, as the slowdown in economic activity sharply cuts demand in the first quarter, particularly from the industrial sector.

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** - 67

CH Guernsey - 45

Citi Futures	- 60
enerjay	- 55
FC Stone	- 51
First Enercast	- 56
FirstEnergy	- 66
Global Insight	- 87
Hencorp	- 76
JPMorgan	- 43
MF Global	- 83
Raymond James	- 45
Ritterbusch & Assoc	- 59
SMC Forecasting	- 79
Stephen Smith Energy	- 44
Strategic Energy	- 57
Summit Energy	- 49