

## WHY DO ELECTRIC UTILITIES PRUNE AND REMOVE TREES NEAR HIGH VOLTAGE POWER LINES?

### Public Safety

To prevent injury to people climbing or working in trees adjacent to power lines.

### Fire Safety

Trees contacting high voltage power lines can act be a fire ignition source.

### Reliability

Trees represent one of the largest causes of power outages in California.

## WHICH STATE LAWS OR REGULATIONS APPLY TO VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND WORKING NEAR ENERGIZED POWER LINES?

### California Public Resource Code:

- 4171: Public Nuisances
- 4291: Reduction of Fire Hazards Around Buildings
- 4292: Power Line Hazard Reduction
- 4293: Power Line Clearances

### California Code of Regulations:

Title 14: Minimum Clearance Provisions  
Sections 1250 - 1258

### General Industry Safety Orders

Title 8: Group 3: Articles 12, 13, 36, 37,38

### California Penal Code Section 385

### California Public Utilities Commission

- General Order 95: Rule 35 & Appendix-E
- General Order 165

## IS THERE HOMEOWNER LIABILITY?

Failure to allow a utility company to comply with the law can result in homeowner liability for damages and/or injuries resulting from a vegetation caused fire. Many insurance companies do not cover these types of damages if the policy owner has refused to allow the hazard to be eliminated.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PREVENTION MEASURES HOMEOWNERS CAN TAKE?

- DO clear all flammable vegetation a minimum of 30 ft, around your home and other structures
- DO plant the right tree in the right place. If you must plant trees near power lines, make sure the maximum *mature* tree height is ten ft. from the nearest power line.
- DO inspect the trees on your property annually for hazards. For expert advice on tree health or hazards consult an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist.
- DO plant fire resistant plants.
- DO NOT allow children to climb trees growing near power lines.
- DO NOT attempt to prune trees growing near power lines. Call your local electric utility first to inspect the trees.

## WHAT ARE THE ELECTRIC UTILITIES DOING?

### Inspection

The clearances established in General Order 95, Table 1, Cases 13-14 are *minimum clearances*.

Appendix E of General Order 95 provides recommended clearances between vegetation and power lines to be achieved at the time of pruning, and specifically notes that reasonable vegetation practices may make it advantageous for a utility to obtain greater clearances than those listed to allow for variables such as wind, temperature, tree growth, and line sag.

General Order 165 sets forth inspection cycles for electric facilities. At a minimum, overhead power lines are inspected every year in urban areas and every other year in rural areas. Therefore, when conducting vegetation management work, utilities must achieve sufficient clearance to ensure the clearance requirements of General Order 95 Rule 35 are maintained until the next scheduled inspection.

### Maintenance

The CPUC requires utilities to prune or remove only vegetation that could damage or fall into the overhead conductors, and authorizes funding for this maintenance work. Utilities may not use this money to perform special services for individual property owners not related to mandated vegetation management work. Further, utilities are responsible for cutting only the parts of the tree that could fall into the overhead conductors. Additional work on trees or branches that do not threaten utility facilities is the customer's responsibility.

The CPUC also requires utilities to remove vegetation around poles, towers, conductors and other electric facilities and authorizes funding for this work as part of approved rates.

### Access

CPUC Utility Electric Tariff Rule 16 grants utilities the right to enter customers' property for any purpose connected with the furnishing of electric service, including routine maintenance. The performance of vegetation management is considered routine maintenance.

## Resources

*This brochure has been created with the cooperation of the CPUC to inform you about electrical safety, fire prevention and pertinent rules and regulations that affect all homeowners.*



California Public Utilities Commission Consumer Affairs (CPUC) (800) 649-7570

*The information here covers the general rules and regulations that affect all homeowners. You can make a difference by acting on this information. If you are interested in knowing more call us or your local utility. We're here to help!*



California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection,  
Headquarters (CDF) (916) 653-5123  
[www.fire.ca.gov](http://www.fire.ca.gov)

## California Homeowners & Utility Companies

*Understanding our shared vegetation responsibilities*



*A message from the  
CPUC & CDF*