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Cc:
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Subject: CPUC Acts to Reduce Fire Hazards Associated with Overhead Power Lines and Communications Facilities: CPUC Press Release

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RELEASE**

PRESS

Media Contact: Terrie Prosper, 415.703.1366, news@cpuc.ca.gov
Docket #: R.08-11-005

CPUC ACTS TO REDUCE FIRE HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH OVERHEAD POWER LINES AND COMMUNICATION FACILITIES

SAN FRANCISCO, January 12, 2012 - The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) today established new rules to reduce fire hazards associated with overhead power lines and aerial communication facilities located in close proximity to power lines.

The new rules bring several changes to the CPUC's General Orders 95 and 166 that increase utility safety practices associated with power lines while improving safety conditions for residents living near these facilities. The new rules include:

- Communication infrastructure providers must inspect their aerial facilities in high fire-threat areas on specific cycles.
- Utility pole-loading calculations must be done whenever there are significant new attachments to a pole.
- Electric utilities and communication infrastructure providers must remove vegetation-related strain on conductors energized at 750 volts or less.
- Electric utilities are authorized to increase the time-of-trim vegetation clearances around bare-line conductors based on specified circumstances such as line sag, vegetation growth rates, and fire risk.
- Communication infrastructure providers must attach a marker to newly constructed and reconstructed facilities on joint-use poles. The marker must identify the owner of the facilities and provide contact information.

- Investor-owned electric utilities in Southern California must prepare and submit plans to prevent power line fires during extreme fire-weather events. Electric utilities in Northern California must do the same if they determine there is a credible possibility of extreme fire-weather events in their service territories.

The new rules are in response to dozens of wildfires that swept through Southern California in 2007 and burned more than 780 square miles, taking the lives of 17 people, and destroying thousands of homes and buildings. Several of the worst fires were reportedly ignited by power lines, including the Grass Valley Fire, the Malibu Canyon Fire, the Rice Fire, the Sedgewick Fire, and the Witch Fire.

Commissioner Timothy Alan Simon, the assigned Commissioner for this proceeding, said, “We have sadly seen in recent years the devastation brought on by wildfires in high fire-threat areas of California. Today’s decision will reduce fire hazard risk associated with overhead power lines and utility pole top communication facilities located in close proximity to power lines. Proper vegetation management and regular inspection, as required by the decision, will play a major role in reducing the risk of such disasters. The rules adopted today will heighten awareness to the need for continued vigilance in wildfire safety, while advancing policies that will not inhibit investment in electric and communication infrastructure. This decision strikes the balance between fire safety and the critical infrastructure needed to advance California’s energy and communication economies, including their convergence through smart technologies. In the next phase of this proceeding, I hope to consider how we can integrate smart technologies into California’s energy and advanced communication sectors so that we can better protect public safety and our critical infrastructure.”

Added CPUC President Michael R. Peevey, “Californians are well aware of the yearly threat of wildfires and the devastation they can bring. The safety practices we have adopted will provide an additional measure of safety for power lines to lessen the possibility that they may become a trigger for wildfires in the future.”

The CPUC will continue evaluate additional safety measures, including the creation of a fire threat map, in the next phase of this proceeding.

The proposal voted on today is available at
http://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/word_pdf/AGENDA_DECISION/156918.pdf.

For more information on the CPUC, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov.

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