

Item 40a – General Order 95
Statement of Commissioner Rachelle Chong
February 15, 2007

Colleagues:

My alternate proposed decision adopts an unopposed settlement between the Commission's Consumer Protection and Safety Division, unions representing utility line workers and communications workers, PG&E, Southern California Edison, the state's largest wireless carriers, AT&T, Verizon, and cable companies.

The new Rule 94 adopted in my decision establishes vertical clearances between antennas and electric wires and communications equipment.

The new rule also requires that antenna owners provide signs that identify the antenna owner and provide a 24-hour contact number for the use of line workers. This signage is important to worker safety, so they can coordinate the de-energizing of antennas with antenna operators.

The signatories to the settlement have also agreed to specific protocols to ensure that workers and antenna operators communicate appropriately in emergency and routine situations. The new Rule 94 requires that all antennas be subject to similar agreements.

One of the principal purposes of General Order 95 is to protect the safety of electrical and communications workers. My decision does that, as evidenced by the support of both unions and the companies whose employees work on electric poles.

This decision also supports the expansion on telecommunications and broadband access, consistent with our goal of having state of the art communications throughout all of California.

Notably, many rural areas in California still lack good quality cellular coverage. Extending cellular coverage into these rural areas helps economic development, and has huge public safety benefits.

Existing utility infrastructure, such as electric utility poles covered by this order, is often the best or only place to locate advanced telecommunications equipment in rural and remote areas. The telecom companies desire access to the poles to provide much needed wireless phone service. Workers need to know that the equipment is installed safely and can be turned off when maintenance work is required at the pole.

The settlement approved in this decision reflects a spirit of cooperation that is to be greatly congratulated. The state's utilities, workers and communications companies worked together well to extend communications infrastructure throughout the state, for the good of all citizens. I hope this cooperation continues in the future. Finally, I thank

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Commissioner Bohn for his good offices working out some final issues to get us to a point where we can vote on this item.

I move Item 40a for consideration and urge a yes vote.