



November 5, 2019

The Honorable Benjamin Hueso
Chair, Senate Energy, Utilities & Communications
Committee
State Capitol, Room 4035
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Suggested Changes to Minimize Impacts from Utility Public Safety Power Shutoff Events

Dear Senator Hueso:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on how to improve Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events to avoid unnecessary impacts to the state. RCRC is an association of thirty-seven rural California counties, and its Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from those member counties. These comments are based upon our member counties' PSPS experiences over the last year.

RCRC is keenly interested in the effective implementation of Senate Bill 901 and Assembly Bill 1054 and has been actively involved in related proceedings at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). RCRC's member counties comprise more than 58 percent of the land mass in California and have a population greater than twenty-four U.S. states. Home to the vast majority of the state's forested lands and high fire hazard severity zones, our members have suffered the lion's share of destruction caused by catastrophic wildfires over the past decade and experienced most of the state's PSPS events.

We do not underestimate the risk of wildfire danger and appreciate the role that expertly-informed, tailored PSPS events play in avoiding catastrophic wildfires like the one that devastated the town of Paradise; however, PSPS events alone are not a panacea for preventing wildfire events during high risk conditions. We remain deeply concerned that the current notification and execution of PSPS events and subsequent restoration of power unnecessarily endangers lives and property and the operation of critical infrastructure.

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Rural areas are hardest hit by PSPS events and often lack the resources to fully mitigate impacts on critical infrastructure and sensitive populations. Our communities are home to a higher percentage of elderly and low-income individuals who are least able to bear the impacts of PSPS events. Furthermore, our residents are more likely to rely on private groundwater wells and may not have the resources to acquire the backup generation necessary to maintain access to something as basic as water for drinking, bathing, and sanitation. Our counties often find themselves having to invest in new backup generation resources and deploy additional public safety, social services, and health workers to address the myriad communication, emergency response, transportation, and life-sustaining needs brought about by PSPS events.

While the CPUC has given utilities the ultimate responsibility for notifying customers of PSPS events, it has become clear that those notifications are not always getting through to residents either because they reside in a facility served by a master meter or because of a loss of power to both telecommunications infrastructure. Furthermore, while utilities may be making additional efforts to reach medical baseline customers, it is not clear that similar communications are being made to a number of other sensitive populations that are either not enrolled in, or not eligible for, the utility's medical baseline program.

To mitigate the impacts of deenergization on residents, utilities have made efforts to set up Community Resources Centers (CRCs) in the deenergized areas. Unfortunately, those CRCs have been too few in number, too far from residents, open too few hours, and sometimes delayed in opening. To mitigate the impacts to of the October 9th event that shut off power to over 700,000 customers (over 1.5 million people), PG&E set up 33 CRCs across 33 counties. PG&E doubled the number of CRCs set up to mitigate the impact of the much larger October 26th and 29th events that impacted over 900,000 customers (over 2 million people); however, that is still a ratio of one CRC per over 25,000 residents. Failure to plan ahead and properly coordinate with local governments led to significant delays in opening many CRCs. Furthermore, most of those CRCs were only open from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and so could not serve customers dependent upon electricity to recharge medical devices with a battery life of less than 12 hours. Sonoma County's experience is even bleaker, as 185,000 residents were evacuated in response to the Kincade Fire, which may have been caused by a PG&E transmission line that was not deenergized. For many residents living in Western Sonoma County whose electricity and gas were both shut off, the nearest CRC was nearly an hour away.

Some of the most recent PSPS events also wreaked havoc on local communications infrastructure, which inhibited the notification process and precluded individuals from being able to reach out for help in the event of an emergency. In total, over 450,000 Californians lost communication services, with 22 percent of cell sites out of service in Sonoma County and 15 percent in Napa County. Portions of Mendocino County that already lacked cell phone coverage lost landline phone service, thereby

leaving those residents without any communications capabilities. Even more troublingly, some local fire departments also lost communications capabilities.

Clearly, significant long-term changes are needed to improve the electrical transmission and distribution systems and communications infrastructure. Ideally, electrical system improvements will reduce fire risk, create linkages that decrease the scope of future PSPS events, and promote local resiliency. We believe that distributed energy generation, energy storage, and microgrids also play a complimentary role in ensuring the future resiliency of rural communities. Finally, the telecommunications industry must invest in backup power to avoid future widespread systems outages like those experienced in late October's PSPS events.

In addition to longer-term system-wide improvements, RCRC believes many changes can be implemented now to immediately and significantly reduce the impacts associated with PSPS events. We offer the following suggestions to improve event planning, notification, and execution, and post-event service restoration:

Improve notification and sharing information with local governments

- Eliminate cumbersome restrictions that inhibit the provision of emergency services by allowing information about medical baseline customers, Access and Functional Needs (AFN) populations, and critical facilities to be shared between utilities and local agencies while maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive information.
 - Prohibit the use of nondisclosure agreements prior to sharing with local agencies information on medical baseline customers, AFN customers, and critical facilities.
 - Generally require local agencies to maintain the confidentiality of that information, but allow it to be used or disclosed as necessary to plan for, prepare for, or respond to public safety power shutoff events.
- Require advance notification to public safety partners before public notification so locals can prepare for and respond to inquiries from the public.
- Require utilities to share the same maps and information regarding the areas impacted by a PSPS event with public safety partners that they use in internal operations.
- Require utilities to coordinate with local telecommunications providers and emergency response partners to ensure the resiliency of communications systems during a PSPS event.
- Require utilities to work with customers with master meters to obtain contact information about residents served by those meters in order to provide notifications.
- Require utilities to communicate customer notifications through multiple mediums, especially for and tailored to known AFN populations.
- Fully embed local representatives in utility emergency operations centers.

- Ensure utilities have adequate capacity to handle the volume of traffic on websites and call volumes anticipated for a given PSPS event.

Expand access to and services provided by community resource centers

- Require utilities to coordinate in advance with local governments to identify sites for community resource centers and the level of services that will be available at those centers.
 - Require standing contracts to be executed in advance to ensure that CRCs can be opened quickly when needed.
 - Require the utility to ensure that the CRCs can provide the services and supplies required by medical baseline and AFN populations as suggested by the respective local government.
 - Require the utility to work with the impacted local government to identify the CRC to be opened from the prepared list of facilities
 - Ensure that the CRC is open 24 hours a day from the beginning of the PSPS event until the final service restoration.
- Allow local governments to site and operate community resource centers and require the utility to reimburse the local government for costs incurred in setting up and operating the CRC.
- Require the utility to establish one CRC for each 5,000 residents impacted, either itself or through reimbursement of local governments. Require CRC siting to reflect the geographic distribution of residents impacted by the PSPS.

Improve notification and mitigation for baseline and Access and Functional Needs (AFN) populations

- Modify SB 167 (Dodd) of 2019's requirement for utilities to mitigate the impacts of deenergization on medical baseline "customers" to additionally include mitigation of impacts on all persons who rely upon "life-support equipment, as defined in PUC Section 739(c)(2)," including those who live within a facility served by a master meter.
- Require the CPUC to direct utilities to expand the list of medical baseline and AFN populations that require advanced warning of PSPS events by:
 - Working with willing community-based organizations that serve AFN individuals to identify those who need advanced warning.
 - Surveying customers (and residents who live in units served by a master meter) to determine whether the individual uses "life-support equipment, as defined in PUC Section 739(c)(2)" or has another reasonable need for receiving advanced warning.
 - Accepting and incorporating lists voluntarily submitted by local agencies of those residents who meet the requirements above.

- Allow self-identification as an AFN customer for purposes of receiving advanced notification of PSPS events.
- Require the CPUC to direct utilities to provide backup equipment, battery storage for devices, or transportation and lodging resources for people within the footprint of a PSPS that are disabled or who rely upon “life-support equipment.”
 - Require utilities to enter into MOUs with paratransit and other transportation providers to provide non-emergency transportation, at the utility’s expense, for customers who need it, including isolated elderly who are dependent on durable medical equipment or life support equipment and cannot get to CRCs or other locations without assistance.
 - Provide lodging resources for those who need to temporarily relocate to a hotel with power to operate their medical devices.
- Require utilities to identify independent living facilities, assess the ability of each facility to maintain operations during de-energization events of varying length, and to help assess the need for backup generation at those facilities.

Expand the definition of “critical facilities”

- Expand the definition of “critical facilities” for which the utility must currently provide advanced notification, assess the ability of each facility to maintain operations during de-energization events of varying length, and assess the need for backup generation to include the following:
 - Schools and school districts
 - Facilities designated by a local government as a staging or shelter site
 - Independent living facilities
 - Private industrial facilities necessary for operation of emergency response operations (pipelines, etc.)
- Require utilities to provide backup generation to local elections departments and polling places in the event a PSPS occurs on an election day, to multi-story independent living facilities with a substantial number of low-income residents, and to locally designated staging or shelter sites that are operated as Community Resource Centers.

Evaluate and mitigate PSPS costs and impacts

- Require the CPUC or the utilities to perform a survey to better understand the local cost impacts resulting from PSPS events and efforts to improve the resiliency of critical infrastructure.
- Require utilities to work with the California Department of Public Health to perform health impact assessments of PSPS events due to downstream consequences of shutting off power.
- Require utilities to reimburse local governments for equipment necessary for maintaining operation of critical facilities during a PSPS event.

- Require utilities to reimburse local governments for emergency, health, and social services personnel costs associated with responding to PSPS events and notifying and mitigating impacts on sensitive populations.
- Allow critical facilities to utilize generators to maintain operations without counting against local time limits on the operation of those generators.
- Allow manufacturers, solid waste processing facilities, and other businesses to reduce PSPS-related losses by requiring utilities to waive time of use charges for a number of hours commensurate with the duration of the PSPS event.

Establish clear system restoration goals

- Accelerate service restoration to achieve an average system restoration of 12 hours after the “all clear” is given.
 - Allow utilities to draw on mutual assistance processes to expedite service restoration where possible.
 - Prioritize restoration of circuits serving critical facilities and those with high proportions or medical baseline and AFN populations
- Require utilities to promptly notify local governments as service is incrementally restored.

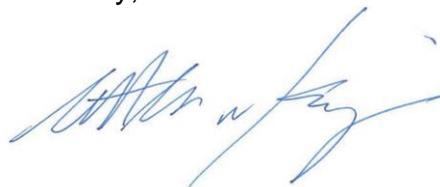
Improve the scrutiny and utility of post-event reports

- Require the submission of utility PSPS post-event reports as part of on-going proceedings, with service provided to all parties involved in that proceeding and to all local agencies impacted by the event.
 - Allow all local agencies impacted by the PSPS event to receive party status and intervenor compensation, provide their own comments on their PSPS experiences, comment on the utility post-event report, and make recommendations for the utility to improve its processes.
 - Require the utility to respond to comments and recommendations, including whether the recommendations will be incorporated for future events and an explanation for why any recommendation will not be incorporated.
- Require utilities to specify in the report the number of hours in advance the warning was given to each public safety, local government, and critical infrastructure contact and to disclose the number of customers and critical facilities provided with less than two-hours advanced notice of a PSPS event.
- Require the CPUC to evaluate utility post-event reports and comments by interested parties and consider whether additional changes to the rules governing PSPS events are warranted.

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In conclusion, we reiterate that PSPS events should always remain a last resort utilized solely to protect the public from catastrophic wildfire and offer these suggestions to minimize the impacts related to those events. We happily offer our assistance in drafting legislation to implement these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt Kingsley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

MATT KINGSLEY
Member, Inyo County Board of Supervisors
RCRC Chair

cc: The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor of the State of California
Commissioner Marybel Batjer, President, California Public Utilities Commission
Commissioner Liane M. Randolph, California Public Utilities Commission
Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves, California Public Utilities Commission
Commissioner Clifford Rechtschaffen, California Public Utilities Commission
Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma, California Public Utilities Commission
Members of the California State Legislature
Members of the RCRC Board of Directors