

Date of Hearing: July 14, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

SB 256 (Pérez) – As Amended July 10, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 30-8

SUBJECT: Electricity: electrical infrastructure: wildfire mitigation

SUMMARY: Requires a number of additional provisions be included in the wildfire mitigation plans provided by the Investor-Owned Utilities (IOUs), local publicly owned utilities, and electrical cooperatives. Enhances wildfire mitigation measures for abandoned electrical facilities and communications related to de-energization events and disasters between utilities, community members and local emergency management officials. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Finds and declares it is the intent of the Legislature to find sustainable ways to finance mitigation strategies for ratepayers and Californians to ensure the safety and affordability in the face of catastrophic wildfires in the State of California.
- 2) Finds and declares it is the intent of Legislature that fire risk mitigation capital expenditures, including the decommissioning of permanently abandoned facilities and the undergrounding of electrical distribution infrastructure after a wildfire event, be financed in ways that reduce the impact to ratepayers.
- 3) Requires California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), on or before January 1, 2027, to update General Order No. 95 to require each electrical corporation to remove all permanently abandoned facilities in order to prevent public nuisances or hazards to life or property and specifies this update shall not impact an electrical corporation's right to an easement.
- 4) Requires the CPUC to ensure all applicable safety requirements, including wildfire mitigation measures, apply to "permanently abandoned facilities" until they are removed. A permanently abandoned facility is a facility that is out of service and will remain out of service for a time determined by the CPUC, as specified.
- 5) Adds risks related to the wildland-urban interface to the description of the preventive strategies and programs to be adopted by the electrical corporation, publicly owned electric utility, and electrical cooperative to minimize the risks of its electrical lines and equipment causing catastrophic wildfires as required in the annual preparation and submission of a wildfire mitigation plan to the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety.
- 6) Requires procedures for notifying customers who may be impacted by a de-energizing event to include consideration of enabling residents within a household who are not the customer of record to subscribe to receive notifications related to such an event.
- 7) Requires procedures for notifying customers who may be impacted by a de-energizing event to include consideration of communication with public safety partners who have the ability to coordinate with the electrical corporation to provide broader messaging to affected communities.

- 8) Requires an electrical corporation's, a publicly owned electric utility's, and an electrical cooperative's wildfire mitigation plan to include a description of the processes and procedures that the electrical corporation uses to coordinate its communications with local governments within the service area, as specified.
- 9) Requires an electrical corporation's wildfire mitigation plan to include an accounting of all transmission facilities, including a list of facilities that are in service, facilities that are out of service, and permanently abandoned facilities. For permanently abandoned facilities, the accounting shall include a plan for when each facility will be removed, as specified.
- 10) Requires, for areas affected by wildfires, electrical distribution infrastructure to be rebuilt by an electrical corporation, the electrical corporation shall consider the undergrounding of electrical distribution infrastructure if it is determined to be cost effective compared to other wildfire mitigation strategies.
- 11) Requires all electrical corporations and local publicly owned electric utilities that have service areas that overlap with the boundaries of a state regional emergency operations center, in cooperation with Office of Emergency Services (OES), and other emergency service agencies, to establish procedures for the coordination of efforts between electrical corporations and local electric POU's and their representatives and those of emergency response agencies.
- 12) Requires these electrical corporations and local publicly owned electric utilities to assign a representative to work within each state regional operations center that has boundaries that overlap with the electrical corporation's or local electric POU's service area.
- 13) Requires the representative to complete the appropriate Standardized Emergency Management System training.
- 14) Provides that no reimbursement would be required for specified reasons.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) with regulatory authority over public utilities, including electrical corporations. (Article XII of the California Constitution)
- 2) Establishes the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety (OEIS) is the successor to, and, effective July 1, 2021, is vested with, all of the duties, powers, and responsibilities of the Wildfire Safety Division within the CPUC established pursuant to Section 326 of the Public Utilities Code, including, but not limited to, the power to compel information and conduct investigations. (Government Code Section 15475)
- 3) Requires every public utility to furnish and maintain adequate, efficient, just, and reasonable service, instrumentalities, equipment, and facilities, as are necessary to promote the safety, health, comfort, and convenience of its patrons, employees, and the public. (Public Utilities Code Section 451)

- 4) Establishes the policy of the state that each electrical corporation is required to continue operate its electric distribution grid in its service territory and to do so in a safe, reliable, efficient, and cost-effective manner. (Public Utilities Code Section 399.2(a))
- 5) Authorizes the CPUC to supervise and regulate every public utility in the state and to do all things necessary and convenient in the exercise of such power and jurisdiction. (Public Utilities Code Section 701)
- 6) Requires an electrical corporation to construct, maintain, and operate its electrical lines and equipment in a manner that will minimize the risk of catastrophic wildfire posed by those electrical lines and equipment. (Public Utilities Code Section 8386 (a))
- 7) Requires each electrical corporation to annually prepare a wildfire mitigation plan (WMP) and to submit the plan to the Wildfire Safety Division, and, as of July 1, 2021, to the OEIS, for review and approval. (Public Utilities Code Section 8386 (b))
- 8) Requires a WMP of an electrical corporation to include, among other things, protocols for deenergizing portions of the electrical distribution system that consider the associated impacts on public safety, and protocols related to mitigating the public safety impacts of those protocols, including impacts on critical first responders and on health and communications infrastructure. (Public Utilities Code Section 8386 (c)(6))
- 9) Requires a WMP plan of an electrical corporation to also include appropriate and feasible procedures for notifying a customer who may be impacted by the deenergizing of electrical lines and requires these procedures to consider the need to notify, as a priority, critical first responders, health care facilities, and operators of telecommunications infrastructure with premises within the footprint of a potential deenergization event. (Public Utilities Code Section 8386 (c)(7))
- 10) Requires the WMP of electrical corporations to identify circuits that have frequently been deenergized pursuant to a deenergization event to mitigate the risk of wildfire and the measures taken, or planned to be taken, by the electrical corporation to reduce the need for, and impact of, future deenergization of those circuits. (Public Utilities Code Section 8386 (c)(8))
- 11) Requires the CPUC to establish an expedited utility distribution undergrounding program. Requires, to participate in the program, large electrical corporations to submit to the OEIS a distribution infrastructure undergrounding plan meeting certain requirements. Requires the OEIS upon the submission of the plan, to publish the plan for public comment. (Public Utilities Code Section 8388.5)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations, “The Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety (OEIS) estimates ongoing costs of \$562,980 annually (ratepayer funds) and 3 positions to modify WMP guidelines and review WMPs consistent with the requirements of this bill. The CPUC estimates ongoing costs of about \$474,000 annually (ratepayer funds) and 2 positions to cover additional workload related to safety certification, WMP review, and analysis of undergrounding project financing structures. To the extent that this bill impacts electricity rates, it could result in costs or savings to the state as an electric utility ratepayer. The State of California is an electricity customer, purchasing roughly one percent of the state’s electricity. As such, the state incurs costs when rates increase, and realizes cost savings if rates go down (various funds).”

COMMENTS:

Purpose of the bill: According to the author, “Over the past decade, California’s wildfires have destroyed a total of 53,970 structures and claimed 207 lives, with numerous incidents traced back to electrical infrastructure failures. The Eaton and Palisades fires in Los Angeles County alone destroyed 16,246 structures and caused 30 deaths, ranking it amongst the most destructive. UCLA estimates the broader economic impact for Los Angeles County could reach \$131 billion, with up to \$45 billion in insured losses and \$297 million in lost wages. While investigations are ongoing, Southern California Edison has acknowledged that a decommissioned line may have played a role in lighting the Eaton fire¹.

To address this crisis, the Legislature has strengthened oversight of electrical utilities through Wild Fire Mitigation Plans, creating a plan to remove decommissioned lines, system hardening, and Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS). It also authorized a long-term power line undergrounding program. Governor Newsom recently ordered an acceleration of underground utility systems in fire-damaged areas like Altadena and Palisades.

However, the recent wildfires revealed gaps in our state’s mitigation efforts. While the Altadena area was not officially classified as high risk, the destruction of the Eaton Fire underscores the need to expand how wildfire risk is assessed. Slow response time to firefighters during the wildfires, as reported by the media, highlight the need for better coordination with emergency services. This includes assessing PSPS to ensure decisions on power shutoffs are transparent and clearly communicated. Although undergrounding of high-risk power lines is a well-established wildfire prevention strategy, participation in the state’s program is voluntary.

SB 256 strengthens California’s wildfire and emergency response policies by expanding mitigation planning to include low-risk areas and addressing past communication failures to improve future coordination. It also requires annual preparedness workshops, mandates utilities to collaborate with regional emergency centers, and enhances PSPS notifications. Finally, it also requires prioritization for undergrounding in fire affected areas when it is the best option and restricts certain costs from being passed to ratepayers and for the IOU’s to create a plan for removing decommissioned lines.”

¹ “SoCal Edison probing whether idled electrical line sparked Eaton Fire”, NBC Bay Area, [Edison probing whether idled electrical line sparked Eaton fire – NBC Bay Area](#). 8 February 2025.

Equity impact: According to the author's staff, "SB 256 will positively impact vulnerable communities by promoting safe and transparent communication during times of emergencies with utilities and local jurisdictions. The undergrounding provision being tied to fire affected areas and including a cap on rates will ensure disadvantaged communities that are affected by fires will be able to improve their electrical infrastructure without drastically increasing their rates."

January 2025 Firestorms in Los Angeles: On January 7, 2025, following consistent forecasts for dangerous fire weather conditions, the Los Angeles Fire Department pre-deploys and pre-positions resources, including fire engines, command teams, brush patrols, water tenders and air operations personnel at 8:00am. Thirty minutes later, a hiker near the source of the Palisades Fire reports smelling smoke. At 10:20am, an AlertCalifornia wildfire detection camera detects smoke rising. CAL FIRE reports the Palisades Fire has started southeast of Palisades Drive in the Pacific Palisades at 10:30am. The Palisades Fire erupts, growing from 10 to 200 acres within a half hour and prompting evacuation warnings and orders.

Near noon, Governor Gavin Newsom proclaims a State of Emergency in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties due to fire and windstorm conditions. The Palisades Fire has grown to 1,200 acres at the time of his declaration.² By 2:30pm, the Palisades Fire has spread to 700 acres and is making a run towards the Pacific Coast Highway. According to the Los Angeles Fire Department, 10,000 houses are threatened and there are 250 city firefighters on scene in addition to 100 Los Angeles County Fire Department Firefighters deployed to assist. Extreme fire behavior, including short and long-range spotting, continues to challenge firefighting efforts for the Palisades Fire. CAL FIRE Incident Management Team II is activated to assist Los Angeles County Fire and Los Angeles City Fire Departments as winds gust up to 60 mph and the fire grows to 1,262 acres by 4:00pm.³

At 6:18pm, CAL FIRE reports the Eaton Fire has begun in Altadena, describing the incident as a "fast-moving fire burning brush fueled by high winds," prompting evacuation orders.⁴ Given the dire conditions of simultaneous conflagrations, the Los Angeles Fire Department calls on all of its firefighters to report for duty and the LA County Fire Department's incident commander orders 10 strike teams (50 engines) to help contain the Eaton Fire.

Palisades and Eaton Fires: At its height, the fires placed an estimated 331,335 people on an evacuation advisory, with nearly 192,000 residents facing mandatory evacuation and roughly 140,000 subject to warnings. The blazes burned a combined 37,469 acres and leveled entire communities in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods of LA County.

The Eaton Fire became the second most destructive fire in California history after destroying 9,418 buildings. The Palisades Fire is the third most destructive fire in state history, with 6,837 structures destroyed. As firefighters were battling the largest conflagrations, additional fires broke out in the Los Angeles area. Crews were able to stop the forward spread and contain the blazes. These fires included the Lidia, Archer, Woodley, Sunset, Kenneth, Hurst and Auto fires, which burned close to 2,400 acres between them.

² <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/01/07/governor-newsom-proclaims-state-of-emergency-meets-with-first-responders-in-pacific-palisades-amid-dangerous-fire-weather/>

³ <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2025/1/7/palisades-fire/updates/b5ee529b-be05-4c4a-8892-5463128f2c1d>

⁴ <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2025/1/7/eaton-fire/updates/35f4cb4c-4023-4484-a7b2-d0c2a40a5880>

Two weeks after the initial fires, the Hughes Fire began near Castaic Lake in northern Los Angeles County on January 22 and quickly grew to over 10,000 acres. It was fully contained on January 30 after covering 10,425 acres.

The Eaton and Palisades Fires devastated the lives of thousands in Altadena, Pacific Palisades, Malibu, Sierra Madre, Pasadena, and Los Angeles. More than 6,000 homes across 22 square miles were destroyed, some more than two miles deep into Altadena. At least 18 Angelenos lost their lives in the Eaton Fire, many during the night in west Altadena, and at least 12 Angelenos lost their lives in the Palisades Fire.

Wildfires and Utility Lines: California continues to experience increased, intense, and record-breaking wildfires in Northern and Southern California. These fires have resulted in devastating loss of life and billions of dollars in damage to property and infrastructure. Electric utility infrastructure has historically been responsible for less than ten percent of reported wildfires; however, fires attributed to power lines comprise roughly half of the most destructive fires in California history.

With the continuing threat of wildfire, utilities may proactively cut power to electrical lines that may fail in certain weather conditions to reduce the likelihood that their infrastructure could cause or contribute to a wildfire. This effort to reduce the risk of fires caused by electric infrastructure by temporarily turning off power to specific areas is called a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS). However, a PSPS can leave communities and essential facilities without power, which brings its own risks and hardships, particularly for vulnerable communities and individuals.

PSPS during January 2025 Firestorms in Los Angeles: The Assembly Committee on Utilities and Energy's analysis of this bill notes, "On January 2, 2025, SCE initiated a PSPS event and de-energized 363,196 customer accounts.⁵ These accounts include 11,740 Medical Baseline customer accounts, 90,632 Access and Functional Needs customer accounts, and 6,800 critical facilities accounts.⁶ Fifteen days later, in the afternoon of January 17, 2025, SCE restored power to all customers.⁷ According to the Public Advocates Office, during the Southern California fires in 2025, SCE failed to send 307,211 required notifications to Public Safety Partners, Critical Facilities and Infrastructure, and customers.⁸ Cal Advocates found that the events in 2025 continued a pattern of failure of SCE to provide its customers with advance notification prior to de-energization."

Notification Protocols Implemented by the CPUC: In 2012, the CPUC released protocols for utilities to follow during de-energization events. In 2019, the CPUC implemented Phase 1 PSPS notification guidelines. The Commission stated that electric IOUs should, whenever possible, adhere to the following minimum notification timeline:

- 1) 48-72 hours in advance of anticipated de-energization: notification of public safety partners priority notification entities.

⁵ Southern California Edison, January 2, 2025 to January 17, 2025, March 3, 2025 (SCE 25-1 Post-Event Data Workbook), Table 5.

⁶CPUC, Decision 19-05-042, May 30, 2019

⁷ SCE 25-1 Post-Event Data Workbook, Table 5.

⁸ Comments of the Public Advocates Office on Southern California Edison Company's Public Safety Power Shutoff Post-Event Report - January 2 TO 17, 2025, Rulemaking 18-12-005, March 18, 2025

- 2) 24-48 hours in advance of anticipated de-energization: notification of all other affected customers.
- 3) 1-4 hours in advance of anticipated de-energization, if possible: notification of all affected customers.
- 4) When de-energization is initiated: notification of all affected customers.
- 5) Immediately before re-energization begins: notification of all affected customers.
- 6) When re-energization is complete: notification of all affected customers.

In 2020, Phase 2 guidelines directed electric IOUs to provide enhanced customer-friendly communication during all phases of a PSPS event, minimize the impact on customers, and increase accountability with regional Working Groups and in reports. In 2021, Phase 3 guidelines were implemented and are ongoing. They require IOUs to take a results-based approach to improve notification and mitigate the impacts of PSPS events.

Wildfire Mitigation Plans (WMPs): Under SB 1028 (Hill, Chapter 598, Statutes of 2016), SB 901 (Dodd, Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018) and AB 1054 (Holden, Chapter 79, Statutes of 2019), electric investor-owned utilities (IOUs) are required to file WMPs with guidance by OEIS (as of 2021). OEIS reviews and determines whether to approve these plans and ensures compliance with guidance and statute. The electric IOUs' WMPs detail, describe and summarize electric IOU responsibilities, actions, and resources to mitigate wildfires. These actions include plans to harden their system to prevent wildfire ignitions caused by utility infrastructure, such as widespread electric line replacement with covered conductors designed to lower wildfire ignition, pole replacement, and other actions. The plans also include information regarding the electric IOUs' efforts to conduct extensive vegetation management to reduce the risk of tree branches, grasses, and other vegetation from coming into contact with utility infrastructure. The WMPs are publicly available and require electric utilities to incorporate their protocols and procedures for proactive power shutoffs as required by CPUC rules.

Committee amendment:

- 1) To strengthen the collaboration, preparedness and response of emergency management and utility professionals, the author may wish to modify the regional emergency operations section of the bill as follows:

CHAPTER 8. Emergency Operations

8395. (a) All electrical corporations and local publicly owned electric utilities that have a service area that overlaps with the boundaries of a county state regional emergency operations center, in cooperation with the Office of Emergency Services and other emergency service agencies, shall establish procedures for the coordination of efforts between electrical corporations and local publicly owned electric utilities and their representatives and those of emergency response agencies.

(b) All electrical corporations and local publicly owned electric utilities subject to subdivision (a) shall assign a liaison representative to work within each county state regional operations center that has boundaries that overlap with the electrical corporation's or local publicly owned electric utility's service area. The representative shall complete the appropriate Standardized Emergency Management System and National Incident Management trainings, sufficient to enable them to assist activated Emergency Operations Centers, to the fullest extent possible.

Arguments in support: The Altadena Chamber of Commerce and Civic Association writes, “On behalf of Altadena Chamber of Commerce & Civic Association, I am pleased to support SB 256, which will strengthen California’s wildfire mitigation by improving planning, enhancing emergency response, and increasing public safety through better communication and undergrounding of power lines. Wildfire Mitigation Plan (WMP) Guidelines prioritize high-risk areas; however, gaps in planning highlight the need to reassess vulnerabilities, including in low-risk zones that still face threats. While the Altadena area was not officially classified as high risk, an analysis by the Los Angeles Times found that 94% of properties within the fire’s perimeter had “severe” or “extreme” fire risk. The Eaton fire also exposed deficiencies that need to be addressed, such as reassessing infrastructure safety and emergency response coordination between utilities and responders, as well as the need for greater transparency when PSPS is used to reduce uncertainty during wildfire emergencies.”

County of Los Angeles Supervisor Lindsey Horvath writes, “As the Supervisor for the Third District of Los Angeles County, I am pleased to support SB 256 (Pérez), which will strengthen California’s wildfire mitigation by improving planning, enhancing emergency response, and increasing public safety through better communication and undergrounding of power lines. SB 256 strengthens wildfire and emergency managements by addressing past coordination gaps, improving preparedness and requiring collaboration between utilities and government emergency centers. It mandates annual workshops, enhances PSPS notifications, and expands underground efforts for safer electrical infrastructure.”

Arguments in opposition: The California Chamber of Commerce writes, “SB 256 mandates public disclosure of detailed information about transmission infrastructure and idle or abandoned facilities in a way that may conflict with established CPUC protocols for safeguarding critical energy infrastructure information. The CPUC explicitly restricts public access to such data to prevent exploitation by malicious actors. By requiring utilities to publish inventories of transmission assets and decommissioning plans, SB 256 disregards these protections and creates new vulnerabilities for California’s electric grid.”

Double referral: This bill is double referred. This bill was passed by the Assembly Committee on Utilities and Energy on July 9, 2025.

Related legislation: SB 254 (Becker) of this Session. Includes various proposals to address electric utility bill affordability, including requirements to consider the time required to implement an action and the amount of risk reduced when electric utilities implement wildfire mitigation strategies. (Pending in the Assembly Committee on Utilities and Energy)

SB 332 (Wahab) of this Session. Includes various proposals, including consideration of underground of electrical infrastructure within an electrical corporation’s wildfire mitigation plan. (Pending in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations)

SB 559 (Stern) of this Session. Would require electrical corporations to provide specified notifications of deenergization events related to mitigating wildfire ignition risks, and requires specified reporting to, and oversight by, the CPUC. (Held in Senate Committee on Appropriations)

Prior legislation: SB 1003 (Dodd) of 2024, would have modified timelines relevant to the wildfire mitigation plans by electrical corporations and requires the electrical corporations to take into account both the time required to implement an action and the amount of risk reduced for the costs and risk remaining. (Held on the Assembly Floor)

SB 884 (McGuire, Chapter 819, Statutes of 2022) required the CPUC to establish an expedited electric utility distribution infrastructure undergrounding program for large electrical corporations.

SB 533 (Stern, Chapter 244, Statutes of 2021) required electrical corporations to identify circuits that have frequently been deenergized to mitigate the risk of wildfire and the measures taken to reduce the need for future deenergization of those circuits, as specified.

AB 1054 (Holden, Chapter 79, Statutes of 2019) included numerous provisions related to addressing wildfires caused by electric utility infrastructure, including: bolstering safety oversight and processes, recasting recovery of costs from damages to third-parties, including the authorization for an electrical corporation and ratepayer jointly funded Wildfire Fund to address future damages.

SB 167 (Dodd, Chapter 403, Statutes of 2019) required electrical corporations to include impacts on customers enrolled in specified programs as part of the protocols for deenergizing portions of their distribution system within their WMP.

SB 901 (Dodd, Chapter 626, Statutes of 2018) addressed numerous issues concerning wildfire prevention, response and recovery, including funding for mutual aid, fuel reduction and forestry policies, WMP by electric utilities, and cost recovery by electric corporations of wildfire-related damages.

SB 1028 (Hill, Chapter 598, Statutes of 2016) required electric CPUC-regulated utilities to file annual WMPs and requires the CPUC to review and comment on those plans.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Altadena Chamber of Commerce & Civic Association
Altadena Library District
City of Santa Barbara
County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors
Jewish Federation of the Greater San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Office of Los Angeles County Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath
The Climate Reality Project, Los Angeles Chapter
The Climate Reality Project, San Fernando Valley CA Chapter

Opposition

California Chamber of Commerce
North American Wood Pole Council

Pacific Gas and Electric Company
San Diego Gas and Electric Company
Southern California Edison
Treated Wood Council
Western Wood Preservers Institute

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