



## Key Themes from the Utility Pole En Banc

April 29, 2016

**Overall Takeaway** - There appears to be a consensus that a shared, accessible, well-populated database of utility pole data would be beneficial for both safety and prompt, orderly access to poles. However, there is a lack of sustained, consistent effort towards the creation of such a database, and additional conversations need to take place between all stakeholders to determine how to move forward with creating the database.

Municipal utilities are employing cutting edge infrastructure practices. The Anaheim Department of Utilities, for example, is integrating wireless attachments with streetlights, and using sole contractor/dig once to coordinate undergrounding work with attachers.

Public safety agencies such as CALFIRE are not regulated by the Commission, but they are critical partners in the Commission's utility safety work, because utility pole failures can spark devastating fires.

As a complement to regular in-person inspections, pole owners are piloting the use of LIDAR to create 3D point clouds of utility pole infrastructure, monitor changes in that infrastructure over time, and verify whether the changes are consistent with recorded data. This is potentially a very valuable tool to quickly identify rogue attachments.

A panelist provided photographs of pole safety issues from around the state, raising the question of whether there is a worrisome variability in GO 95 compliance between the electric and communications industries and between different attachers.

### **Major Ideas**

- Utility poles are important to California consumers, utilities, and the Commission.
- Utility poles are key to providing access to the communications and energy infrastructure
- Utility poles have environmental impacts
- Utility pole failures can have major safety impacts
- Utility poles are a key part of costly distribution plant for both communications, cable and electric companies
- Some databases concerning utility poles are now being developed and are at various stages
- Sole ownership of a pole appears to have a beneficial impact on pole management and safety
- Intrusive inspection provides good information on pole status
- Pole loading programs now underway are developing information about the weight of pole attachments
- Fire maps now provide important information on risks arising from vegetation loading.
- Aging poles and tilting poles can be a problem
- There appears to be a difference in the practices of electric and communications companies concerning practices relating to wires on poles. Electric companies appear neater, with communications carriers leaving unused plant on the pole.

- There appears to be a difference between utility models and records of outside plant and the plant one encounters in the field. At times, one finds substandard practices or abandoned plant.

#### GO 95

- A GO 95 committee has done major work concerning pole safety in California over a period of decades
- GO 95 is largely compatible with NESC standards, but there may be some areas where NESC standards could improve California practice
- The “non-conforming rule” is a prelude to citation in electric regulation, but there is no citation authority for communications wires out of compliance.

California Public Utilities Commission