



# California Public Utilities Commission

## Utility Pole Safety En Banc

### April 28, 2016

#### Ronald Reagan State Building, Los Angeles

In recent years, California has experienced blackouts and wildfires associated with utility poles, including the 2007 Fire Siege, sparked by downed electrical lines, and the extended blackout associated with the 2011 windstorm.

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has recently considered utility pole safety issues in various proceedings, but these opportunities have necessarily been limited in scope. For example, the CPUC has considered utility pole safety in the context of a specific incident, or an investor-owned utility's General Rate Case, or in the context of extending rights of way to a particular industry.

This day-long en banc is designed to begin a broader conversation on utility pole safety by bringing together representatives from different industries and stakeholder groups (e.g., investor-owned utilities, communications providers, public safety agencies, consumer groups, utility worker groups) for a high-level discussion of utility pole safety not limited to a specific incident, industry, or service territory.

**NOTE:** *This en banc is independent of any Commission proceeding, and panelists are forbidden from making ex parte comments related to open proceedings during their presentations or discussions. No Commission Decision will issue as a result of information shared in this en banc.*

#### **9:30 a.m.-9:55 a.m. Welcome**

[Commissioners]

#### **9:55 a.m.-10 a.m. Opening**

[Executive Director Timothy Sullivan, CPUC]

#### **10 a.m.-12 p.m. Panel One: The State of Utility Poles in California**

**Moderator: Marzia Zafar, Director of Policy and Planning Division, CPUC**

- 1. SCE on behalf of Consolidated IOUs--Christine Fanous, Director, Pole Program Management, SCE;**
- 2. CALFIRE--Chief David Shew;**
- 3. CWA-- Shawn Heape, Lineman;**
- 4. Davey Resource Group, Natural Resource and Utility Consulting--Scott Carlin**



Joint pole owners will discuss the state of utility poles in California, including pole safety issues, and the adequacy of existing pole infrastructure for current needs, and projected demand over the next five years.

What is the magnitude of pole overloading in the joint pole owners' respective service areas? What are the consequences of pole overloading? To what do pole owners attribute pole overloading?

How do joint pole owners learn that a pole is overloaded? How do pole owners prevent and remedy pole overloading?

What are pole owners' risk assessment and mitigation strategies? How do pole owners identify threats and rank poles for replacement?

How significant a problem are rogue attachments, i.e. attachments placed without the knowledge or permission of the pole owner(s)?

Have vegetation management techniques changed due to California's drought, suburban sprawl, or other factors?

What is the magnitude and consequence of engineering and design failures short of overloading? Can a pole be in compliance with, e.g., strength requirements, but still pose a safety hazard? Are there particular conditions that pose a risk to employees working on poles and attachments?

Will increasing demand for energy and communications services exhaust the available capacity on existing poles? What is the process for installing additional poles?



**12 p.m.-1 p.m. Lunch**

**1 p.m.-2:30 p.m. Panel Two: Information and Communication**

***Moderator: April Mulqueen, CPUC***

- 1. PG&E on behalf of Consolidated IOUs--Eric Back, Director, Electric Compliance and Risk Management, PG&E;***
- 2. AT&T--Josh Mathisen, Area Manager, AT&T Construction Engineering;***
- 3. CCTA--Jerome Candelaria, Vice President and Counsel, Regulatory Affairs;***
- 4. City of Anaheim Public Utilities Department--Fred Barvarz, Transmission and Distribution Manager***

There are approximately 4 million utility poles in California, and any given pole may have multiple parties sharing ownership interests and renting space on that pole. Panelists including



joint pole owners and attachers will discuss how they obtain and share information about existing poles and attachments and coordinate new pole attachments.

Are there reliable, shared databases containing information on utility poles and their existing attachments?

Short of visiting a given pole and measuring/weighing the existing infrastructure, is it possible to know with certainty whether a pole is overloaded?

What is the process for obtaining the information necessary to place a new attachment on a pole?

Is it always clear to stakeholders which rules apply when coordinating new attachments, e.g., General Order 95 or Southern California Joint Pole Committee/Northern California Joint Pole Association rules?

**2:30 p.m.-2:45 p.m. Break**

**2:45 p.m.-4:15 p.m. Panel Three: Commission Rules and Processes**

**Moderator: April Mulqueen, CPUC**

- 1. SDG&E on behalf of Consolidated IOUs--John Sowers, VP of Electric Distribution Operations;**
- 2. CALFIRE--Chief David Shew;**
- 3. CCTA--Jerome Candelaria, Vice President and Counsel, Regulatory Affairs,**
- 4. NESC--Nelson Bingel, Member, NESC Executive Subcommittee and Chair of NESC Subcommittee 5**

Stakeholders will discuss whether there are opportunities to update existing CPUC rules concerning utility poles, e.g., General Order 95, and whether changes to CPUC processes might contribute to greater utility pole safety.

General Order 95 Rule 12 permits grandfathering, and some safety rules only become applicable to facilities when those facilities are replaced or reconstructed. How does the variability of standards from pole to pole affect safety?

Does the National Electric Safety Code contain rules that might inform the CPUC's regulation of utility pole safety? Are there other industry best practices that might similarly inform CPUC rules?

Investor-owned utility General Rate Cases tend to have more limited service lists than safety related investigations. Should the CPUC explore inviting safety intervenors to participate in General Rate Cases in which utility pole safety issues are addressed?



**4:15 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Wrap-up**

[CPUC President Michael Picker]

**4:30 p.m.-5 p.m. Public Comment**