



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: CEO
Department No.: 012
For Agenda Of: August 27, 2019
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Time: 1 hour 30 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department: Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer
Director(s)
Contact Info: Matt Pontes, Assistant County Executive Officer

SUBJECT: **Presentation on the Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) Protocol, Critical Issues, and Actions Taken by County Government Officials to Prepare for Preventative De-Energization of Electrical Services**

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file a presentation from Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), Southern California Edison (SCE) and County Staff on the Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) Protocol, critical issues, and actions taken by County staff to prepare for preventative de-energization of electrical services; and
- b) Determine that the proposed actions are administrative activities that do not involve commitment to any specific project, and are therefore not a project as defined by State California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines Sections 15378 (b)(5).

Summary Text:

This item is on the agenda to receive and file a presentation from Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), Southern California Edison (SCE) and County Staff on the Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) protocol, critical issues, and actions taken by County government officials to prepare for preventative de-energization of electrical services in the Santa Barbara County Operational Area.

Cumulatively, this presentation will be administered by three agencies. They are:

1. Southern California Edison by Rondi Guthrie for south Santa Barbara County
2. Pacific Gas and Electric by Eric Daniels for north Santa Barbara County
3. Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management by Matt Pontes, Assistant CEO

Background:

Reasons for Public Safety Power Shutdowns

Preparing for, reducing risk, responding to and recovering from large wildland fires throughout the State of California continues to challenge communities and public serving agencies. Wildfires in the last few decades have exceeded historical State incidents in size and overall destruction. In 2018 alone, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) reported that it responded to wildland fires that burned a total of 1,671,203 acres of land in the state. Several existing conditions combine to create situations in which the threat of wildland fire is exacerbated. These conditions include prolonged periods of drought, excessive forest fuels accumulation, coupled with extreme fire weather conditions. While some wildfires ignite from natural causes, such as lightning strikes, several recent man-caused ignitions are from damaged electrical utility equipment.

Consequently, electrical utility companies in California have adopted many strategies to minimize wildfire threats from their infrastructure. One of these is the Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) protocol, also referred to as “de-energization,” which is the process of intentionally shutting off electrical services under specific conditions to prevent wildland fires. These companies include the two power utility providers that service Santa Barbara County; Southern California Edison (SCE) along the south coast and Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) in the northern portions (Santa Maria Valley, Santa Ynez Valley and Lompoc areas) of Santa Barbara County.

Although rulemaking by the California Public Utilities Commission is ongoing, as of Summer 2019 de-energization decisions by these utility companies presently are subject to a “reasonableness review” by the CPUC with includes these factors: public outreach, notification and mitigation. (CPUC Resolution ESRB-8, adopted July 12, 2018.)

Potential Conditions for a PSPS

Elevated wildland fire hazard conditions meriting the use of the PSPS protocol as a wildland fire prevention technique are extremely similar across all electrical power companies. Broadly speaking, these conditions include:

- A Red Flag Warning issued by the National Weather Service.
- Humidity levels less than or equal to 20%.
- Forecast sustained winds above 25 miles per hour (mph).
- Forecast gusts above 45 mph.
- Data from company-specific computer modeling.
- Moisture content estimates and condition of fuel beds in the area.
- Real-time observations in the field.

It is important to note that **not** all of these conditions are required for an electrical company to decide to de-energize circuits or transmission lines through fire-threat areas. Any combination of these or other related conditions can result in an electrical company's decision to de-energize. Furthermore, these conditions are typically required to be present in locations determined by CalFIRE and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to be either "Tier 2 Elevated" or "Tier 3 Extreme" fire risk areas, both of which we have in Santa Barbara County.

What makes the PSPS protocol especially challenging is the duration for which it may last. Electrical companies uniformly report that de-energization will last for:

1. The duration of fire weather conditions that merited de-energization, **plus**
2. The amount of time it takes for each circuit mile of de-energized lines to be physically inspected for damage, **plus**
3. The amount of time it takes for all repairs to be completed by the owning electrical company.

Cumulatively, with our local vegetation, weather conditions and the power utility companies' infrastructure, we should expect for a PSPS to last anywhere from 5-7 days, though this could last longer. It is also possible to have back-to-back weather events in our County that may cause power utility companies to de-energize repeatedly.

Staff have been monitoring other jurisdiction's experiences with PSPS that includes one event in Northern California where a PG&E de-energization affected over 22,000 customers and over 1500 Medical Baseline customers over a 1-day period. A de-energization event from SCE occurred in January of this year in City of Orange where over 74,000 customers in four counties were notified, but eventually only 34 customers (mostly commercial) were impacted over the 14-hour event. In another instance SCE alerted over 22,000 customers in Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties and activated their Operations Emergency Center for a possible PSPS event, but did the event did not result in a power shut down.

Santa Barbara County Preparedness

Impacts on communities will depend primarily on the duration of a PSPS and extent of circuit de-energization. For County government, most essential facilities are on back-up generator power, and all departments have completed a PSPS continuity of operations plan. However, normal operations will be disrupted for many, and the severity will depend on the length of time without power, and ease of access to areas that have power.

To prepare for a PSPS, Santa Barbara County staff have taken steps to preserve life, maintaining public safety, and support continuity of government. These actions include the following:

Coordination among community agencies and utilities:

- Communication (phone calls, emails, and meetings) with SCE, PG&E, other County government agencies, and government agencies/special districts/private partners within the County to further preparedness and coordination.
- Facilitating PSPS exercises for other jurisdictions in the Operational Area.

Assisting vulnerable populations:

- Continued evaluation of medical sheltering capabilities for those medically dependent on electricity.
- Creation of a PSPS preparedness checklist for those who are medically dependent on electricity for survival.

Enhanced County Communication on PSPS:

- Updating the ReadySBC.org website to have specific PSPS information for preparedness on de-energization
- Bilingual updates to ReadySBC.org to include PSPS information for the public.
- Development of bilingual templates of PSPS mass notification alerts.
- Providing additional resources that guide our communities to information on the power utilities websites and contact phone numbers

Ensuring County government operations readiness:

- Drafting the County's PSPS Contingency Plan
- Creation of key County departmental continuity plans specific to PSPS.
- Execution of a tabletop exercise for departments.
- Started the process for the County to review and update its Continuity of Operational Plans (COOP)

Other PSPS-specific activities that are in progress by County Departments include:

- PSPS coordination with similar agencies in the Operational Area
- Monitoring of actual PSPS events throughout the State to understand lessons learned
- Development of geographic information systems (GIS) products related to potential PSPS.
- Meeting with critical service providers in the community such as fuel stations, wireless providers, hospitality and grocery stores.
- Pursuit of circuit-specific maps and relevant transmission lines from PG&E.

Community Communication

As stated above, the County's ReadySBC.org website has been updated to include information (in English and Spanish) on what community members can do in the event of a PSPS event. The electric utilities have committed to giving local communities as much forewarning as possible, but this may be only a few hour depending on conditions.

Given the electric utilities have the most accurate information about what areas will be de-energized, the County's communications emphasize that residents first contact the electric utility for information and assistance during a PSPS.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: No

Public outreach, notification and mitigation are required of the electric utilities in a PSPS event. However, any County costs in preparation of, or in response to, a PSPS event are currently not reimbursed.

Fiscal Analysis:

Narrative:

There are no fiscal impacts associated with these presentations.

Special Instructions:

Attachments:

Attachment A - PSPS PowerPoint

Authored by:

John D. Saucedo, Emergency Manager, Santa Barbara County OEM