



## FACT SHEET

### Senate Bill 584 – Wildfire Mitigation through Undergrounding of Power Lines

#### SUMMARY

Senate Bill 584 would expedite opportunities for local jurisdictions located in Tier 3 High Fire Threat Districts to underground existing overhead electrical infrastructure for the purpose of wildfire mitigation.

#### BACKGROUND

Overhead utility lines and equipment have caused many devastating blazes over the years. Between 2014 and 2017, California's three largest utilities were responsible for igniting over 2,000 fires.<sup>1</sup>

The current utility company solutions of turning off the power and managing vegetation have been virtually ineffective. Utility companies propose "hardening" the overhead systems as a means of fire mitigation, but Southern California Edison noted in their Grid Safety and Resilience Program that hardening the overhead system is only 60% as effective as putting overhead systems underground.<sup>2</sup>

Wildfires have adverse impacts on health, safety, the economy and the environment, including unhealthy air quality, increased costs of short term and long term medical care, loss of jobs and taxes, increased greenhouse gas emissions and reduced water quality. Not only are wildfires caused by overhead utilities a statewide concern, but the cost of damages caused by wildfires is spread across all Californians.

Currently, there are methods to aide municipalities in undergrounding their electrical

lines. In 1967, Governor Reagan signed the nation's first state overhead conversion program legislation, which became Rule 20. This program facilitated undergrounding of overhead electric utilities in locations where doing so would be in the public interest. The program defined "public interest" as one or more of the following:

- Eliminate an unusual heavy concentration of overhead lines;
- Involve a street or road with a high volume of public traffic;
- Benefit a civic or public recreation area of unusual scenic interest;
- Be listed as an arterial street or major collector

The criteria has remained mostly the same over the years and has not adapted to the changing utility dynamics that may necessitate undergrounding for a wider range of reasons including wildfire mitigation and environmental protection.

#### THIS BILL

As introduced, SB 584 would direct the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to require electrical corporations to develop and administer programs to provide matching funds to local jurisdictions for conversion projects to replace overhead electrical infrastructure in Tier 3 High Fire Threat Districts. Tier 3 High Fire Threat Districts are designated to be at extreme risk by the CPUC Fire-Threat Map that outlines areas

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-california-utilities-wildfires-regulators-20190128-story.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.edison.com/content/dam/eix/documents/investors/wildfires-document-library/201809-gsrp-filing.pdf>

where there is an increased risk for utility associated wildfires.<sup>3</sup>

SB 584 would also urge electrical corporations to replace overhead electrical infrastructure that is destroyed as a result of a fire caused by overhead electrical infrastructure with underground infrastructure in Tier 3 High Fire Threat Districts.

SB 584 would require the CPUC to direct electrical corporations to reallocate unused credits provided to a jurisdiction under the Rule 20A program to be used for conversion projects in these high fire threat areas.

SB 584 would also appropriate funds annually from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to provide grants to local jurisdictions undertaking undergrounding conversion projects. Funding provided through this grant program shall not exceed 15 percent of the project's total cost.

## **SUPPORT**

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City of Laguna Beach (Sponsor)

City of Mission Viejo

Laguna Canyon Foundation

Town of Tiburon

## **CONTACT**

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<sup>3</sup> [ftp://ftp.cpuc.ca.gov/safety/fire-threat\\_map/2018/PrintablePDFs/8.5X11inch\\_PDF/CPUC\\_Fire-Threat\\_Map\\_final.pdf](ftp://ftp.cpuc.ca.gov/safety/fire-threat_map/2018/PrintablePDFs/8.5X11inch_PDF/CPUC_Fire-Threat_Map_final.pdf)