



SENATOR

JOHN M. W. MOORLACH

THIRTY-SEVENTH SENATE DISTRICT

FACT SHEET

Senate Bill 1463 – Electrical Line Mitigation

BILL SUMMARY

One of the paramount responsibilities of government is to provide for public safety. Consequences of wildfire include loss of life, property damage, impacts on ecosystems, etc. and lay at the heart of several communities' concern with wildfire and the PUC needs to be sure to take these into consideration when developing future standards.

Senate Bill 1463 instructs the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) on best use of fire hazard information in developing future heightened utility fire mitigation standards for at-risk communities throughout the state.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The City of Laguna Beach has been plagued by well-documented, utility-caused fires for years and has consequently undertaken efforts to protect its residents and businesses through maximizing the use of underground utility-related infrastructure to avoid future fire-related disasters.

Laguna Beach has previously been included within high risk areas under the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) Fire and Resources Assessment program. Recently, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) instituted Order Instituting Rulemaking to Develop and Adopt Fire-Threat Maps and Fire-Safety Regulations (Proceeding). The purpose of the Proceeding is to develop a map (Fire Map 1) that determines the areas within the state that are at high risk for power line fires. Based on Fire Map 1, the Commission will develop a second map (Fire Map 2) that

designates where utilities have increased fire mitigation responsibilities.

Conventionally, risk is defined as the product of hazard and consequence. Fire Map 1 is the PUC's hazard map. This map was developed based on the modeling of environmental factors, most notably wind speed. Consequently, only those areas with high wind gusts are designated as high risk for wildfire hazard. Fire Map 1's use of wind speed as its primary factor is insufficient for the development of fire safety standards because populated areas, like the City, that have experienced repeated utility-caused fire are designated as low risk for wildfire hazard because these areas have lower winds. In line with its efforts to protect the City from fire hazards, the City became an active participant in the PUC matter and submitted material documenting its high risk of utility-related fires.

SB 1463 would resolve this issue by requiring the PUC to take into consideration areas in which communities are at risk from the consequences of wildfire not just those areas where certain environmental hazards are present.

On February 2, 2016, the PUC served the final version of Fire Map 1. The City was not placed within the low-risk margins of the Utility Fire Threat Index. At present, the PUC has not stated how it will use Fire Map 1 to create Fire Map 2. The City is concerned that the map may be used by utilities to justify providing a less-safe level of service than would otherwise be required if the City remained in a high risk zone.

SUPPORT

- City of Laguna Beach (sponsor)

- Rural County Representatives of California

CO-AUTHORS

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