



Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WEST COAST UTILITY COMMISSIONS DISCUSS CHANGING WILDFIRE RISK AND MITIGATION EFFORTS

PORTLAND, Ore. – Today public utility commissioners from British Columbia, California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington convened at the Oregon Convention Center for a public dialogue focused on wildfire risk and mitigation. The all-day event featured experts who shared their perspectives and evolving approaches to address rapidly changing wildfire risk, driven by climate change and other factors.

Public utility commissions are responsible for ensuring safe and reliable access to utility services. By convening this joint conversation, the Commissions are exploring ways to address the expanding risk of wildfire.

“Working together will better equip us to handle the increased frequency and severity of wildfires in our region and the impacts on electric utilities, their customers, and the communities they serve,” said Letha Tawney, Commissioner for the Oregon Public Utility Commission. “This was a collaborative event amongst four western states and British Columbia to draw from the expertise and lessons learned in our regions.”

“I am pleased to be a part of this important dialogue focussing on addressing the increasing risk of wildfire which has the potential to impact many, including utility companies and ratepayers throughout British Columbia, and the entire west coast,” said Chair Dave M. Morton, British Columbia Utilities Commission. “Today’s dialogue was an opportunity to learn more about what regulators, utilities, and experts are doing, or could be doing, to best address the threat of wildfires.”

Expert panelists engaged in dialogue with the Commissioner roundtable on the realities of wildfires and wide-ranging solutions to mitigate risk. Specifically, the panel discussions focused on the following:

- Tracking the Changing Risk: *How climate change is impacting potential wildfire areas and the current risk mapping practices.*
- Making Risk-Based Changes to the System: *How utilities prioritize risk mitigation efforts, and the issues that arise or barriers that develop for utilities in that 'prioritization.'*
- Managing the Financial Risks: *The financial tools available to utilities to mitigate ratepayer risk and keep the cost of capital affordable, and whether these tools are robust enough for the scale of possible losses.*

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- Expanding Public Safety Coordination: *The factors that should be considered to ensure Public Safety Power Shutoffs or other fire driven outages do not increase public safety risk now that transportation, communications, and other essential services are more reliant on electricity.*

“Today’s event continues important collaboration among western states on pressing issues facing the utility sector, including adaptation to the impacts of climate change and dealing with wildfire risks. California will share lessons learned as we implement new tools to mitigate public safety risks and cost impacts to ratepayers,” said Commissioner Rechtschaffen of the California Public Utilities Commission.

One of the wildfire mitigation measures that can impact communities is proactive de-energization, or Public Safety Power Shut-offs, in the event of extreme wildfire risk. As utilities develop plans to mitigate wildfire, Commissions will need to understand and analyze these proposals from the utilities they regulate.

Commissioner Hayley Williamson of Nevada expressed how grateful she is for the opportunity to meet and speak with experts across the West regarding wildfires. “I especially appreciate the discussion on de-energization and what factors should be considered to ensure de-energizing lines does not increase public safety risks during a wildfire threat or event,” added Commissioner Williamson.

Panelists emphasized that climate change is impacting the intensity of wildfire seasons in their respective regions. The research and tools available to understand and plan for that changing risk to help ensure customer safety were highlighted in today’s discussion. The sharing of these best management practices and lessons are helpful in preparing the states and British Columbia as the wildfire risk continues to evolve.

“Climate change is resulting in increased risk of wildfires in the west,” said Washington UTC Chairman David Danner. “Utility regulators in the region need to understand fully the potential impacts of wildfires on utility service, costs, and community safety. Today’s conversation was an important opportunity to discuss how our utilities can best predict, prepare for, and respond to wildfires in our states, and we look forward to future discussions.”

The commissioners expressed a desire to continue this dialogue to help ensure safe, reliable and affordable electricity service at a time when wildfire risks continue to evolve, requiring constant evolution of best practices.

If unable to watch the event live, you can view the recorded panel discussions online by Monday, August 19, 2019. You can learn more about [Tracking the Changing Risk](#), [Making Risk-Based Changes to the Systems](#), [Managing the Financial Risks](#), and [Expanding Public Safety Coordination](#).

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