

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON UTILITIES AND ENERGY

Chris Holden, Chair

SB 533 (Stern) – As Proposed to be Amended May 20, 2021

**SENATE VOTE:** 36-0

**SUBJECT:** Electrical corporations: wildfire mitigation plans: deenergization events: microgrids

**SUMMARY:** This bill, as proposed to be amended, requires investor-owned electric utilities (IOUs) to identify circuits which have been deenergized and measures that have been or will be taken to reduce the need for and impact of future deenergization events.

**EXISTING LAW:**

Requires each IOU to develop a wildfire mitigation plan which must include, among the specified elements, if deenergizing is used, protocols related to mitigating the public safety impacts of deenergizing portions of the electrical distribution system, that consider the impacts on critical first responders, health and communication infrastructure, and medical baseline customers, and include procedures for notifying impacted customers who may be impacted by deenergizing. (Public Utilities Code § 8386 [c][6])

**FISCAL EFFECT:** None available based on bill as proposed to be amended. This bill will be referred the Assembly Appropriations Committee for its consideration.

**BACKGROUND:**

*Public Safety Power Shutoffs* – Over the last decade, California has experienced increased, intense, and record-breaking wildfires throughout the state. These fires have resulted in devastating loss of life and billions of dollars in damage to property and infrastructure. Electric utility infrastructure has historically been responsible for less than ten percent of reported wildfires; however, fires attributed to power lines comprise roughly half of the most destructive fires in California history. With the continuing threat of wildfire, utilities may proactively cut power to electrical lines that may fail in certain weather conditions to reduce the likelihood that the infrastructure could cause or contribute to a wildfire. This effort to reduce the risk of fires caused by electric infrastructure by temporarily turning off power to specific areas is called a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS). However, a PSPS can leave communities and essential facilities without power, which brings its own risks and hardships, particularly for vulnerable communities and individuals. From 2013 to the end of 2019, California experienced over 57,000 wildfires (averaging 8,000 per year) and the three large energy companies conducted 33 PSPS deenergizations.

Although PG&E effectuated a year-over-year one-third reduction in the footprint and use of PSPS from 2019 to 2020, the frequency and footprint of events in Edison territory increased dramatically in 2020 and early 2021. From May through December 2020, Edison initiated 16 PSPS events, with the majority of the events occurring in November and December, including two PSPS events during major holidays.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) *Proposed to be Amended.* This bill has been analyzed as proposed to be amended in this committee in order to more squarely focus on the issue of concern to the author. The amendments will strike sections 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 of the bill leaving section 5. The remaining section, at page 10, lines 1 through 7, will be amended as follows:

*(8) Identification of circuits that have frequently been deenergized pursuant to a deenergization event to mitigate the risk of wildfire and the measures taken, or planned to be taken, by the electrical corporation to reduce the need for and impact of future deenergization of those circuits, including, but not limited to, replacing, hardening, or undergrounding any portion of the circuit or upstream transmission or distribution lines, or the installation of microgrids.*

- 2) *Reducing Use of PSPS.* The author reports that since 2020, there have been 33 PSPS events statewide with 23 of these resulting in PSPS outages. These outages have resulted in almost one million customers losing their power (anywhere from a half day to up to seven days), in many instances losing power multiple times in the span of days. Very frequently, PSPS outages occur on the same portions of electrical infrastructure over and over again resulting in a mix of anxiety, frustration, uncertainty and anger for the thousands of customers who must endure multi-day power outages on multiple occasions.

The author further notes that frequent and reoccurring PSPS outages result in disruptions to businesses, employees, students, and communication and government services. PSPS outages also result in the complete loss of all perishable refrigerated items, including medicine. Efforts by the CPUC to curb the frequency, scope, duration, and consequences of PSPS outages remain on-going with improvement from Pacific Gas & Electric, but an increase in the number of PSPS events from Southern California Edison and administrative failures.

- 3) *Double Referral.* Should this bill pass this committee, it will be referred to the Assembly Judiciary Committee for its consideration.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:****Support**

350 Bay Area Action  
 Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA)  
 California Association of Public Authorities for IHSS  
 City of Santa Clarita  
 Rural County Representatives of California  
 Simi Valley; City of  
 The Climate Center  
 Thousand Oaks; City of  
 UDW/AFSCME Local 3930

**Support If Amended**

Microgrid Resources Coalition

**Opposition**

None on file.

**Analysis Prepared by:** Kellie Smith / U. & E. / (916) 319-2083