

Media Release

Energy Safe Victoria

31st May 2019

ESV releases south west power poles draft report

Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) is calling for submissions on its draft report into the state of wooden power poles in the south west region of Victoria and its assessment of Powercor's approach to their inspection and maintenance of these poles.

The draft report was released today. A separate legal investigation into the Garvoc and Terang fires is ongoing.

In response to significant concerns from communities whose lives were threatened and property burnt by the St Patrick's Day fires of 2018, ESV has conducted a detailed investigation. Technical reports were previously released on all these fires.

"The report is now available and ESV is seeking feedback and comments from the community and other stakeholders," Director of Energy Safety Paul Fearon said.

"The report was warranted given the damage caused to the community across the south west by the St Patrick's Day fires. The community deserves assurance that action has been taken to mitigate the risk of pole failure that caused one of the major fires.

"Community concerns around other poles in the region also had to be addressed.

"Powercor has made the required changes to their inspection and maintenance processes to adequately deal with those poles that are degrading at a faster rate. But if there are safety issues that have not been considered in this draft, we want to hear about them."

The report found that the changes – that came about after significant community criticism – were essential to address the higher rates of degradation associated with some older poles.

Those changes include:

- Increasing the frequency of inspection and testing processes for limited life poles from 30 months to 12 months
- Increasing the 'safety factor' from 25% to 40%. For poles identified for replacement, the safety factor determines at what point they must be replaced

ESV will require these changes to be included in their bushfire mitigation plan, which will then be subject to ongoing audits.

ESV concludes that with these changes in place, Powercor's regime is fit for purpose to address the immediate risk of pole failure in the south west.

The investigation included testing of poles using sonic tomography and requisitioning Powercor's asset inspection and maintenance records. Powercor's own investigations and conclusions were also tested and corroborated by ESV's own work.

The report is available at www.esv.vic.gov.au. Submissions are open until 24th June and a community consultation program is in place.

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