

# Media Release

## Energy Safe Victoria

24<sup>th</sup> October 2019

### ESV prosecutes Powercor over St Patrick's Day fires

Energy Safe Victoria has laid charges against Powercor following the Terang and Garvoc electricity asset failures and subsequent fires on St Patrick's Day 2018.

"The decision to lay charges brings to a head a long and complex legal investigation and demonstrates we are prepared to hold businesses to account," Director of Energy Safety, Paul Fearon said.

"Although many have demanded that ESV take this action taken earlier, these matters are not trivial and the burden of proof is high."

Powercor will face court over two incidents:

- the Terang fire that was due to clashing conductors at High St, Terang
- the Sisters fire at Garvoc which resulted from a broken power pole.

The charges are for breaches of the general duties under Section 98 of the Electricity Safety Act. They relate to Powercor's failure to operate and maintain its network to minimise as far as practicable:

- the hazards and risks to people's safety
- the hazards and risks of damage to people's property
- the bushfire danger from the supply network.

Powercor faces two counts of each charge, one for each fire.

The charges have been filed at the Warrnambool Magistrates' Court.

The St Patrick's Day fires swept through Victoria's south west on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2018. A significant amount of property and livestock was lost.

ESV completed a technical report which found that of the six fires that ignited from electrical assets, two should be pursued for legal investigation. These two fires are now the subject of the charges brought against Powercor.

A further report into the safety of wooden power poles in the south west was released 29<sup>th</sup> July. The report found there was no immediate systematic issue with Powercor's inspection and maintenance regime. A further report will be released in December following a review of the longer term sustainability of Powercor's regime.

"This action will provide an important test for the existing statutory safety scheme and future actions of this kind" Mr Fearon said.

More information on ESV reports can be found at [www.esv.vic.gov.au](http://www.esv.vic.gov.au).

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