



July 16, 2024

Board of Yakima County
Commissioners 128 North Second
Street
Room #232
Yakima, WA 98901

Dear Board of Commissioners,

Thank you for your letter dated July 8, 2024, outlining concerns and recommendations regarding recent power outages in Yakima County. I appreciate the level of community engagement in the recent wildfire forum held June 18, 2024, at Yakima Valley Community College. Many of the concerns you raise in your letter reflect the feedback from the community forum and our own experiences to help guide improvements in maintaining a critical service to the community in a time of unprecedented wildfire risk. We will continue to partner with you and the broader community as we evolve our emergency operational practices.

Wildfires and extreme weather threaten the health, safety and livelihoods of everyone. In our region, the result is an increased risk to the homes and businesses in the communities we serve. Wildfires also puts at risk our ability to provide electric service – a key contributor to healthy and growing local economies – in a safe and reliable manner. It is critical that wildfire-related issues be solved holistically, with businesses, governments and key stakeholders working together to design and implement constructive, enduring solutions. Without near-term policy shifts, economic growth is threatened, especially in the face of increasing demand and clean energy goals.

We understand the recent power outages (including emergency de-energizations) have affected your community and we do not take these circumstances lightly. The company's top priority is ensuring the safety of our employees, customers and communities, and our emergency operational practices are designed to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires. When confronted with the challenge of deciding between safety and reliability, we will always err on the side of safety.

Our team continuously reviews emergency operational practices, including with respect to any de-energization outlined in your letter. Continuous improvement is core to our ability to provide the safe, reliable and valued service that power communities and businesses. In that context, I have provided an update on our evolving emergency de-energization practices, our continued investments to mitigate the risk of wildfires in your region and feedback on the three specific recommendations outlined in your letter.

Emergency De-Energization Practices

Pacific Power has identified certain emergency de-energization practices that can address feedback from the community and our own experiences to date.

- *Validation:* Time allotted to gain credible validation of any ignition in areas designated as having lower wildfire risk before an emergency de-energization has been extended. This process includes verifying wildfire conditions through local emergency management and public safety partners, dispatching field resources, determining impacted areas and initiating customer and stakeholder notification processes.
- *Communication:* When areas are designated as having lower wildfire risk conditions and as time allows, we will communicate a potential emergency de-energization to potentially impacted customers and public safety partners. Customers who have signed up for outage alerts can receive updates via text, phone and email. Our local regional business manager will focus on efforts to communicate to large managed accounts. Also, when time allows, our emergency management team will reach out to Yakima Valley emergency management, 911 dispatch and Yakima County Public Health.

The safety of our employees, customers and communities remains our top priority and under certain conditions, such as extreme heat, high winds and dry fuels, an active wildfire may require the company to begin an emergency de-energization without prior notification to customers and public safety partners.

Pacific Power's Investment Commitments

For broader context, our wildfire mitigation practices continue to aim to protect our customers and communities with an enhanced focus on areas with the highest wildfire risk. We concentrate on three main areas to mitigate wildfire risk:

1. *System Hardening:* To date, we have invested \$19 million on system hardening in the Nile Valley, including rebuilding 22 miles of line with covered conductor, installing eight new system automation devices, and adding 14 new weather stations in Yakima County. The end goal is to deliver a more resilient and reliable electrical network and reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfires.
2. *Situational Awareness:* We perform 24/7 monitoring and forecasting with 484 weather stations and 30 years of data to show long-term forecasts and to provide a day-to-day look at wildfire risk across the states we serve. Detailed weather information is available to the public at PacificPowerWeather.com.

3. *Operational Practices:* We can significantly reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfire impacting our communities by employing safety settings on power lines when elevated fire risk conditions exist, conducting enhanced vegetation management, having the ability to conduct a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) anywhere in our service area and having the ability to enact an emergency de-energization when a wildfire comes too close to our powerlines and equipment. The recent changes identified above show the evolving nature of our work to mitigate wildfire risk in the region through operational practices.

The reality is that these operational practices result in more frequent and longer-duration outages for customers. For example, when a tree or other debris contacts a power line that has enhanced safety settings deployed, that line will automatically de-energize within fractions of a second. The line must be visually inspected by our crews to ensure that we can safely restore power. When an emergency de-energization takes place, a visual inspection of the impacted lines might also be required before we restore power. All of these practices are intended to ensure the safety of our customers and communities in the face of more frequent, longer duration and intense wildfires.

Response to Recommendations

We appreciate the thoughtful recommendations outlined in your letter. Our initial response to each of the three recommendations follows:

1. ***Enhanced Communication:*** *Implement a robust notification system that ensures timely and clear communication with all stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and local authorities.*

Pacific Power encourages customers to prepare for outages by updating their contact information with us and signing up for alerts. We will provide advanced notification of emergency de-energizations when conditions and timing allow.

- Sign up for alerts: [PacificPower.net/Alerts](https://www.pacificpower.net/alerts)
- Update your contact information: [PacificPower.net/Account](https://www.pacificpower.net/account)

2. ***Critical Infrastructure Support:*** *Develop contingency plans to support critical infrastructure and vulnerable populations during power outages, including the provision of backup power supplies for healthcare facilities and emergency services.*

We encourage customers with medical needs requiring electricity to contact Pacific Power Customer Service at 1-888-221-7070 to add that information to their account or visit [PacificPower.net/Medical](https://www.pacificpower.net/medical) for more information. We have the capability to make direct phone calls to these customers during an extended outage. We also encourage customers to have a plan with their medical provider that includes backup power for their devices. Finally, while Pacific Power is not responsible for providing backup power supplies for healthcare facilities and emergency services, we encourage healthcare facilities and emergency service organizations to sign up for alert notifications for communication on outages.

- 3. Community Engagement:** *Establish a task force involving Pacific Power representatives and Yakima County officials to regularly discuss and address concerns related to the de-energizing policy and explore potential improvements. Local authorities that are managing the fire risk should be consulted prior to any “de-energizing” events. Our first responders know our terrain, have well thought out mitigation plans and always have eyes on the ground.*

We welcome community engagement and will schedule additional opportunities to collaborate with Yakima County officials and local emergency service representatives. While the variable nature of de-energization events will not always allow for consultation with local authorities, we suggest a near term meeting to bring these parties together to collectively mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfires. We will also arrange a meeting with fire authorities to provide information about our system protection and wildfire mitigation programs, and where they can provide assistance to reduce impacts to the communities they support.

In Closing

Pacific Power has been providing safe, reliable and low-cost energy to customers for over 100 years – an essential service we consider part of the backbone of community health and economic development. Above all, we are committed to the safety of our customers, employees and the communities we serve.

We fully understand that our mitigation practices impact the community, and we are committed to working with customers, communities, regulators, legislators and public officials to find enduring solutions through strong public-private relationships and policies that adapt to extreme weather threats.

We appreciate your commitment to balanced outcomes and look forward to continued engagement.



Ryan Flynn
President, Pacific Power

Cc: Governor Jay Inslee
U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senator Patty Murray
U.S. Representative Dan Newhouse
Representative Chris Corry
Senator Curtis King
Senator Nikki Torres