



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

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CLERK OF THE BOARD  
OF SUPERVISORS

# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** March 2, 2021

**01**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

#### **SUBJECT**

**PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFFS (PSPS): ADDRESSING GAPS AND IMPROVING COORDINATION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The County of San Diego is a leader in the state when it comes to regional planning, coordination, and response to natural disasters, including large-scale emergencies and other threats to life and property, such as red flag conditions during high wind events. Since 2013, the region's utility provider, San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E), began utilizing Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) for public safety during adverse weather events. It is clear that power shutdowns initiated by SDG&E will persist and residents of San Diego County will continue to bear the costs and burden associated with the de-energizing of power lines during adverse weather events.

Recognizing that PSPS actions are growing in frequency, it's critical for the County to work with SDG&E and partners including Caltrans, public safety agencies, community-based organizations, and other affected jurisdictions to develop protocols and identify resources to address and minimize impacts caused by PSPS. Strides have been made to harden SDG&E infrastructure to increase fire safety. PSPS events are more targeted based on the actual threat to each community, but additional work is needed to identify gaps and look for opportunities to reduce the burden on the region.

On January 14, 2020, the Board of Supervisors took action to accept \$1,214,656 from the state to mitigate the impact of PSPS events on the region. Funding was used to better serve the community by installing emergency generators at County libraries and fire stations. Additionally, on today's agenda, the Board is considering another \$607,328 in funding from the state to further mitigate PSPS events.

Today's action requests the Chief Administrative Officer to consult with stakeholders to develop a coordinated plan to increase regional resiliency in the face of PSPS. In addition to helping prioritize the distribution of future grant dollars from the state, the plan can also assist with identifying other funding opportunities to better mitigate PSPS events.

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**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND AND SUPERVISOR JOEL ANDERSON**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to identify gaps in Public Safety Power Shutdown mitigations and opportunities to further reduce the impact on the region, including health and safety concerns, assistance to individuals with Access and Functional Needs, back-up power for road infrastructure and major intersections, and other actions to benefit areas frequently affected by a PSPS. This process shall involve consultation with stakeholders including county representatives, outside agencies, organizations and jurisdictions, and SDG&E.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer, after consultation with stakeholders and through discussions with state representatives, to pursue funding to address these gaps from public and private sources.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board within 120 days with a report and recommendations to further mitigate the PSPS impact on the region.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with these actions.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**BACKGROUND**

Red Flag emergencies were activated in the County of San Diego as recent as October 2019 and again in the fall and winter of 2020. Red Flag emergencies are the highest alert that the National Weather Service issues and are issued during times of extreme fire risk. These Red Flag emergencies can result in what are known as Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS). A PSPS is a fire preventive measure practiced by San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) and other utility companies, in which, SDG&E will cut power to fire-prone areas to prevent downed power lines from starting fires.

Since 2007, SDG&E made great strides to minimize the impact of potential wildfires and wildfire conditions, including the development of fire science tools, such as its state-of-the-art weather network, Fire Potential Index, Santa Ana Wildfire Threat Index and Wildfire Risk Reduction Model, which collectively afford more informed and precise operational decision making.

In 2013, SDG&E began utilizing PSPS as a last-resort measure to reduce the risk that utility infrastructure may be the cause of a catastrophic wildfire. SDG&E has since minimized the scope

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of PSPS-related impacts through technologies, such as sectionalizing devices, which enable it to surgically target a PSPS and created a PSPS notification portal on its website that allows customers and the general public, including customers in master-metered communities, to sign up to receive notifications in advance of, and throughout PSPS events. Additionally, SDG&E provides real-time mapping information to local governments to assist with public safety resource planning. With the input of fire agencies and academia, the PSPS practice has matured, helping to reduce devastating wildfires in the region.

Despite SDG&E's advancements in minimizing the impacts of PSPS events, they are still likely to occur to help protect the region's residents and property from catastrophic wildfires. In 2019, PSPS events impacted 48,740 customer meters for outages ranging between 1 and 24 hours. In 2020, PSPS events impacted 100,725 customer meters for outages ranging between 7 and 35 hours. To lessen the impacts of PSPS and maintain safety as our highest priority, it is critical for the County to collaborate with SDG&E and partners including Caltrans, public safety agencies, and other affected jurisdictions to develop protocols and resources to address and minimize impacts caused by the power shutoffs.

During PSPS events in 2019, sixty-six communities, including the areas within the City of San Diego and Indian Reservations were without power. Additionally, in 2020 forty-four communities, Indian Reservations and seven cities were impacted.

The County has worked to provide power resiliency for critical infrastructure and County facilities including fire stations, libraries, and traffic signals. The County has 200 traffic signals in the unincorporated areas. All traffic signals in the affected areas default to flashing red lights when power is shutoff. The flashing lights signal drivers to treat intersections as if there were stop-signs. However, extended PSPS can result in the loss of all traffic signal light function when the batteries have been used for extended periods.

Following a shutoff, blackout, or malfunction, most traffic signals will flash red for 4-8 hours. After the 4-8-hour period, the traffic signal lights will lose energy. Without traffic signals and lights, driving at night can be especially challenging. The County has already begun to explore innovative ways to enhance traffic safety at these intersections and this Board action will provide greater direction.

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Today's action would request the CAO to consult with stakeholders to develop a coordinated plan to increase regional resiliency in the face of PSPS. In addition to helping prioritize the distribution of future grant dollars from the state, the plan can also assist with identifying other funding opportunities to better mitigate PSPS events

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**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed actions of directing the CAO to identify gaps in Public Safety Power Shutdown mitigations supports the Safe Communities initiative of the County of San Diego's 2020-25 Strategic Plan by promoting safe communities throughout San Diego County.

Respectfully submitted,



**JIM DESMOND**  
Supervisor, Fifth District



**JOEL ANDERSON**  
Supervisor, Second District

**ATTACHMENT(S)**  
N/A

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**

**REQUIRES FOUR VOTES:**       Yes     No

**WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED**  
 Yes     No

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:**  
N/A

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**  
N/A

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**  
N/A

**MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:**  
N/A

**ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):**  
N/A

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** District 5, Supervisor Jim Desmond  
District 2, Supervisor Joel Anderson

**OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):**    N/A

**CONTACT PERSON(S):**

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