

Safety Note #199

PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFFS (PSPS)



The risks of wildfire and extreme weather conditions in California are increasing. The threat of fire is no longer seasonal and extremes in weather, such as high heat, dry conditions, and gusting winds can endanger our public safety. While we rely on the power grid and our electrical infrastructure to help comfort us during extremes in weather, that same infrastructure can be a threat or even the source which sparks a wildfire. As a safety precaution, to help protect communities during extreme weather events, electrical power *may be shut off for public safety* in an effort to prevent a wildfire. This is called a **Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS)**.

Similar to other emergency situations, when a PSPS occurs and employees are unable to work in the office, ANR supervisors should encourage employees to work remotely if possible. If your office is closed due to a PSPS or other emergency, please notify ANR Risk & Safety Services by contacting Brian Oatman (baotman@ucanr.edu). If employees aren't able to work due to a natural disaster or emergency, ANR Human Resources (anrstaffpersonnel@ucanr.edu) should also be notified so that arrangements may be made to track and report employee leave time during the emergency.

How to Prepare for Power Outages:

California's three largest energy companies, in cooperation with the Public Utilities Commission, urge all Californians to prepare for the threat of wildfires and power outages during times of extreme weather. Visit prepareforpowerdown.com to learn more about the power of being prepared. The decision and action to turn off power is made by each individual energy company and is based on a combination of factors. Decision factors include, but are not limited to: high winds—including red flag warnings, low humidity, dry vegetation serving as fuel, fire/wind threat to electric infrastructure, on-the-ground observations, and overall risk to public safety. Monitor these conditions in your immediate area and be prepared to act.

While Public Safety Power Shutoff events are more likely to occur in high fire-risk areas, all of us could be impacted by emergency events and need to be prepared with a plan. Create your plan by:

- **Sign Up for Alerts!** Update your personal and office location contact information with your local energy company. You can do so by contacting the company, visiting their website, or by visiting <http://prepareforpowerdown.com>.
- If you are alerted of a possible shutdown, look for more detailed information from your utility company's website or social media accounts to better understand how the shutdown may affect you. A PSPS will usually affect a specific area or neighborhood, not an entire city or county. In some cases, the utility will post maps of the affected area.
- Identify backup charging methods for phones and keep hard copies of emergency numbers.
- If your office location uses "Voice Over Internet Protocol" or VOIP phones, telephone service will be disrupted during a power outage. It is recommended that offices maintain a backup "landline" phone that does not plug into power and only requires a cord and telephone jack. Identify the landline phone jack in your office that continues to pull power through the phone line without extra electricity—this might be the fax line or other non-VOIP hardline.
- Plan for medical needs like medications that need to be refrigerated or devices that require power.
- Plan for the needs of yourself and your office location, and don't forget to include pets and livestock.
- Emergency preparedness can cover a variety of hazards if you Stay Informed, Have a Plan, and Build a Kit of Supplies. See Safety Notes: [#167 Be Informed](#); [#168 Make a Plan](#); [#169 Build a Kit](#).
- It may seem obvious, but think ahead about what may not function without power. Know how to manually lock up your office or open your garage door, for example.
- Designate an emergency meeting location away from your home, and during a prolonged PSPS outage, consider staying with a friend or relative away from the area of power outages.
- Keep freezers and refrigerators closed. The refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours. A full freezer will keep the temperature for about 48 hours. Use coolers with ice if necessary. Monitor temperatures with a thermometer and practice food safety.
- As reasonable, keep mobile phones and other electric equipment charged and gas tanks at least half full.

If a PSPS is initiated due to extreme weather conditions, you can expect: early warning notification and alerts to be sent by energy companies before shutting off power; ongoing updates provided to those signed-up and through social media and news outlets; safety inspections after extreme weather has passed, followed by power restoration. Power outages could last multiple days in extreme situations depending on the severity of weather and other factors. It is important that your office and home have an emergency preparedness plan in place.