



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: June 23, 2009

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO SAN DIEGO GAS AND ELECTRIC'S POWER SHUT-OFF PLAN (DISTRICTS: ALL)

SUMMARY:

Overview

The region's regulated electric utility, San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E), has asked the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to review a plan that would cut power to as many as 60,000 customers during high-risk fire weather. The plan has been met with fierce opposition from residents, telecommunications companies, water districts, the County Office of Education and the CPUC's Division of Ratepayer Advocates as well as the CPUC's Consumer Safety Division.

Opponents have demonstrated that the risks of cutting power to homes and businesses during extreme fire conditions outweigh the potential benefits. The plan would severely compromise the water supply to high fire areas and terminate life-saving emergency instructions to high-risk areas at moments when residents rely on those instructions most.

Last month, SDG&E requested that the County enter into a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the utility to delineate responsibilities in the event of a proactive shut off. County staff has advised SDG&E that such an MOU is "not necessary or prudent" because first responders need flexibility to react to the unique circumstances of each incident, rather than being bound by the rules of a pre-established MOU. In addition, a formal MOU of this nature could expose the County to numerous lawsuits.

Today's action would add the County to the growing number of entities opposed to SDG&E's shut-off plan by registering the Board's opposition with the CPUC.

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO SAN DIEGO GAS AND ELECTRIC'S POWER SHUT-OFF PLAN (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Recommendation(s)

CHAIRWOMAN JACOB AND VICE CHAIRWOMAN SLATER-PRICE

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to draft a letter to the California Public Utilities Commission for the Chair's signature communicating the Board's opposition to the SDG&E power shut-off plan.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with this recommendation.

Business Impact Statement

N/A

Advisory Board Statement

N/A

BACKGROUND:

The region's regulated electric utility, San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E), has asked the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to review a plan that would cut power to as many as 60,000 customers during high-risk fire weather.

Several criteria must be met before the utility would implement the plan: a red-flag warning from the National Weather Service, sustained winds of at least 35 miles per hour, or gusts of at least 55 miles per hour or more with sustained winds of at least 30 miles per hour, along with humidity below 20 percent with moisture levels below 6 percent for dry brush and 75 percent for live plants.

Last month, SDG&E requested that the County enter into a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the utility to delineate responsibilities in the event of a proactive shut off. In a letter dated June 16, 2009, County staff advised SDG&E that such an MOU is "not necessary or prudent" because first responders need flexibility to react to the unique circumstances of each incident, rather than being bound by the rules of a pre-established MOU.

Specifically, SDG&E requested that the County commit communications resources and assume responsibility for dispatching generators during a controversial shut-off event. The County's June 16 letter concluded: "We believe that SDG&E is the agency best positioned to make notifications to its customers using their internal mass notification capabilities. Likewise, management of any backup generators that SDG&E may own or purchase would be best managed by SDG&E."

It is our very strong belief that a formal MOU of this nature could expose the County to numerous lawsuits.

The plan has been met with fierce opposition from residents, telecommunications companies, water districts, the County Office of Education and the CPUC's Division of Ratepayer

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO SAN DIEGO GAS AND ELECTRIC'S POWER SHUT-OFF PLAN (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Advocates. These opponents have demonstrated that the risks of cutting power to homes and businesses during extreme fire conditions far outweigh any potential benefits.

According to water districts, the plan would cut electricity to pumps that supply water to customers, including fire departments. The Valley Center, Ramona, Padre Dam, Rainbow, Fallbrook and Yuima water districts have formally protested the plan and have challenged SDG&E's legal authority to cut off power.

In addition, many backcountry residents rely on electricity to power individual water wells. The Second and Fifth Supervisorial Districts have received numerous letters and messages from rural residents and businesses concerned about health impacts on people, crops and livestock. Many seniors and parents of infants fear the unscheduled loss of water and air-conditioning during hot summer months.

According to communications groups, including AT&T, the plan would, literally, terminate life-saving emergency instructions to high risk areas at moments when residents rely on those instructions the most. Land lines, Internet service and wireless devices would fail, according to AT&T officials. Residents would be unable to make or receive calls, including emergency calls from Alert San Diego, an important component of the County's evacuation notification system.

The San Diego County Office of Education has registered its opposition to the plan. In legal documents, the Superintendent of Schools claims that if the plan is activated, school sites will not meet the applicable health and safety requirements to adequately house school children. "To date, SDG&E has not made serious efforts to establish protocol with the County Superintendent to address significant schoolchildren health and safety issues posed by the proposed de-energization plan," the documents state.

According to a February 5, 2009 article in The San Diego Union-Tribune, the CPUC's Consumer Protection and Safety Division pointed out that the SDG&E system is designed to withstand winds up of 54 miles per hour. "When safety factors are added into the wind calculations, the system must withstand winds up to and between 54 and 108 miles per hour," according to engineer Raymond Fugere.

Evidence presented by opposition groups is clear: the dire consequences the SDG&E power shut-off plan are not worth gambling on its implementation. Because the County is responsible for the health and safety of people in areas targeted by the plan, it is important to add our County to the growing list of entities opposed to plan by registering the Board's opposition with the CPUC.

We urge your support!

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO SAN DIEGO GAS AND ELECTRIC'S POWER SHUT-OFF
PLAN (DISTRICTS: ALL)

Respectfully submitted,

DIANNE JACOB
CHAIRWOMAN

PAM SLATER-PRICE
VICE CHAIRWOMAN

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO SAN DIEGO GAS AND ELECTRIC'S POWER SHUT-OFF PLAN (DISTRICTS: ALL)

AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

CONCURRENCE(S)

COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	
Written Disclosure per County Charter Section 1000.1 Required	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY FINANCE DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Requires Four Votes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Other Concurrence(s): N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: District 2

CONTACT PERSON(S):

Jennifer Stone

Name

619-531-4766

Phone

Fax

A-500

Mail Station

Jennifer.Stone@sdcounty.ca.gov

E-mail

Name

Phone

Fax

Mail Station

E-mail

AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE: _____