

Moving Utilities Underground

It is high time, nay it is past time, **for Oregon for TO STEP UP** and move utility lines underground. The recent ice storm put up to **600, 000 Oregonians without power for an extended period of time, including many folks for up to 7 days**. Last summer, many thousands of folks were affected by the fires and many of them who were not even near the fires lost power. Unfortunately, these disasters will continue to happen. What can be done? It very clear that these events, although maybe not preventable, can be reduced in effect and pain and cost if more of the utility lines in Oregon are underground.

I ask you as Oregon legislative leaders to raise the issue to all appropriate groups to get the conversation started and the ball rolling for the benefit of the whole state of Oregon. Somebody has to STEP UP and take a leadership role in changing the narrative about how the State of Oregon and specifically the utilities prepare for and handle disasters.

Who suffers when the utility lines are down?

1. We all affected
 - a. Some lose power and communication.
 - b. Some lose the ability to communicate to those in the affected areas.
2. Who suffers the most when the utility lines are down?
 - a. Those on the wrong side of the **Electric Divide**
 - i. Areas/residences were built before 1976 when underground power was mandated by Oregon law.
 - ii. Mostly, it is the elderly, low income, BIPOC communities most affected.
 - b. Those whose life, because of medical issues, are dependent on electrical power.
 - c. Those whose homes and/or businesses were destroyed.
 - d. Those who work or attend school from home.

What is the long-term effect on the utilities of a major outage?

1. Camp Fire near Paradise, California – Summer 2018 - **85 lives lost** – Pacific Gas & Electric was sued and settled for \$13.5 BILLION dollars and has declared bankruptcy.
2. Fires in western Oregon - Summer 2020 – **9 lives lost** - Pacific Corp and PGE have both been sued; other lawsuits may follow against PGE, Pacific Corp and possibly other utilities.

What can the State of Oregon do to prevent or minimize future disasters?

1. **Work together** to find ways to fund moving utilities underground. **If the state has money for disaster recovery, it needs to have money for preventing or minimizing a disaster as well.** This is clearly a disaster minimization situation. If this needs to start as a legislatively generated task force, so be it.
2. **Fund seed money** to get the program started in specific high value areas.
3. **Give Tax breaks (Credits or Deductions)** for the utilities and/or taxpayers to move utilities underground. We do this for alternate energy. Let's do for saving lives, homes and businesses.
4. **Require ALL electric** utilities to develop and maintain a list of customers who are dependent on electrical medical devices for their care.
5. **Change** the laws and/or PUC regulations so that more new utility lines are required to be underground. Especially focus on older neighborhoods.

What can utilities do NOW toward resolving the problem?

1. Utilities - Develop an accurate list of the folks whose life is absolutely mostly dependent on electrical power - e.g., those who have in home medical devices to help them live. You should not be penalized for trying to help those who have higher availability requirements for utility services.
 - a. → **NOTE:** PGE, Pacific Power and Idaho Power are all already **REQUIRED** to do this.
2. Utilities - Have the courage to poll all your ratepayers asking in a fair and balanced way how much more would they would be willing to pay to have their utility start moving above ground utility lines underground. **Tillamook PUD has agreed to do this in the fall.** Give them real choices - a percentage (1,2,3,5,7,10,15,20%) or fixed amounts (\$5,10,15,20) per month. Explain what results the various amounts would generate. Ask also for their comments and suggestions in this area. Then, take the results and propose an appropriate fixed amount or percentage rate increase.
3. Utilities – Publicly communicate what they can do without a rate increase. This is, in part, the utility actually admitting that there is a problem.
4. Utilities – Publicly communicate and clearly provide a process for an individual or group to fully or partially fund moving utility lines underground in an area/street/neighborhood.
5. Utilities – Commit to moving a fixed number of lines underground per year.
6. Utilities – Raise as high as possible the priority of moving utility lines underground.
7. Utilities – Develop their own plan, whether trenching or horizontal drilling or both, to start the process of moving utilities underground. Do the high value opportunities first followed by the easiest and cheapest.

What are weather effects on above ground and underground utility lines?

Above ground utility lines **SEVERELY** affected by

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Wind | 5. Tornadoes |
| 2. Ice storms | 6. Earthquakes |
| 3. Snow storms | 7. Falling trees |
| 4. Fires | |

Underground utility lines **NOT** affected by

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Wind | 5. Tornadoes |
| 2. Ice storms | 6. Salt air |
| 3. Snow storms | 7. Falling trees |
| 4. Fires | |

Above ground affected by

1. Salt air
2. Vandalism

Underground affected by

1. Earthquakes
2. Vandalism

Proposal

Move most utility lines underground removing utility poles but NOT including major high transmission lines. Do continue and/or expand the work of keeping areas near high transmission lines clean and clear of fuel for fires.

Benefits:

1. Safety - protects vulnerable citizens who need electrical power to survive.
2. Safety - allows affected individuals and communities to communicate and be informed during and after weather and other disasters.
3. Safety – fewer down live electrical wires will be on roadways, businesses and yards due to disasters.
4. Safety - fewer times someone has to climb a pole or be in a bucket.
5. Safety - fewer vehicle accidents where a vehicle hits a pole.
6. \$\$\$\$ - decreases material cost of recovery from disasters.
7. \$\$\$\$ - decreases staff time needed to recover from disasters.
8. \$\$\$\$ - lowers the insurance costs for the utilities.
9. \$\$\$\$ - decreases initial and maintenance costs for boom and trucks.
10. \$\$\$\$ - will decrease lost revenue due to disasters for the utility companies.
11. \$\$\$\$ - protection from corrosion by salt air decreases maintenance.
12. Equality - it moves all customers to equal access to utilities.
13. Customer Uptime - less customer downtime due to weather and other disasters.
14. \$\$\$\$ - allows work and schooling from home to continue during and after disasters.
15. Tourism and quality of life – Beautiful Oregon becomes even more beautiful.

Cost:

Yes, costs will be significant. This can and should be funded in multiple ways.

1. This will be a long-term program taking several (10,20,30?) years thus spreading the cost over out over a long period.
2. Currently, interest rates are very very low making even more attractive.
3. It will cost more at first but as a larger and larger portion of the userbase is on underground utilities monies will be saved due to less downtime and overtime.
4. The State of Oregon should fund seed money to get the program started in specific high value areas.
5. Tax breaks (Credits or Deductions) for the utilities and/or taxpayers to move utilities underground. We do this for alternate energy. Let's do for saving lives, homes and businesses.
6. A rate increase should be done as much as the local ratepayers will support.

They said we couldn't do it but we did it – Open Beaches Law

They said we couldn't do it but we did it – Bottle Bill

They said we couldn't do it but we did it – Vote By Mail

They said we couldn't do it but we did it – Initiative, Referendum and Recall

Think of this as the next great step forward in making Oregon Better!

Physics laws: A body at rest tends to stay at rest. A body in motion tends to stay in motion.

Let's get Oregon in motion to move utility lines underground!

Thanks for your support on this important challenge!