



The necessity and means by which electricity is provided across the western landscape obviously presents a fire risk. However, legislators are focusing more on this issue as fires become more frequent, more intense and inflict more damage.

As with many issues related to wildfire, the intersection of land management and the built environment is the foundation for changes to the way wildfire is prevented and managed. More electrified homes and structures in the wildland urban interface means more lines, more chances for ignitions, and higher costs when a fire rages. Legislators are confronted with utility business models, liability frameworks, and public safety obligations.

These are issues related to utilities being debated across the West:

- Vegetation management. Keeping trees and other vegetation away from powerlines is the first line of defense against fire. While clearing out a corridor under the line is still viable, utilities and states are looking at ways to be more efficient and strategic with limited resources.
  - This includes using satellite imagery and 3D modeling to identify encroaching vegetation, structural integrity issues, and early detection of dying trees.
  - Predictive analytics can eliminate unnecessary trimming, and artificial intelligence can produce risk maps based on environmental trends and weather.
- Grid hardening. Burying lines is the most guaranteed way to prevent fire and in the long run reduces vegetation management costs, but it is also expensive to implement. Other options include wrapping lines and steel poles.
- Power shut offs. When conditions are ripe for a fire, utilities may shut off power in an area. While reducing fire danger, the implications are widespread. From food spoiling in the fridge to leaving people who rely on electric devices for medical reasons without that lifeline.
- Mitigation and Liability

- Several states require utilities to produce and implement wildfire mitigation plans. These may include measures that address vegetation management and shut offs.
  - In recognizing the need for electricity service, some states reduce the liability for utilities that follow wildfire mitigation plans.
- The risk of soaring wildfire damage costs is making insurance more expensive or harder to get not only for homeowners, but utilities as well.
  - Requiring mitigation plans is a way states may try to stabilize insurance risk.
  - States may also look at mechanisms designed to reduce costs to ratepayers, including damage funds, or allowing the utility to sell recovery bonds, paid over time by customers.
- When a fire does start and does damage, the question arises who pays. This issue along with the financial stability of utilities and the costs to victims and ratepayers is much debated across the West.