



## IN BRIEF

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SB 548 requires the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to establish minimum timelines for electric transmission inspections.

## BACKGROUND

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The CPUC has broad oversight of electrical corporations, including prescribing rules to ensure the safe service of electrical facilities.<sup>1</sup>

The CPUC issues General Orders (GOs) to govern electrical utility infrastructure,<sup>2</sup> including GO 165 which establishes requirements for inspections of electric facilities.<sup>3</sup> GO 165 was last updated in 2012 in response to the devastating 2007 wildfires in Southern California.<sup>4</sup>

In 2012, the CPUC expanded the requirements on distribution infrastructure including establishing reporting requirements and minimum timelines for inspecting all distribution equipment. *However, the CPUC did not extend these same requirements to transmission infrastructure; leaving inspections and maintenance activities at the discretion of the utilities to establish.*

## THE PROBLEM

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Fire ignitions on transmission infrastructure is not uncommon. In PG&E service territory, for instance, transmission lines are roughly 18% of overhead circuit miles and account for about 6% of ignitions.<sup>5</sup>

One of the main drivers of ignitions on transmission lines is equipment failure. These equipment failure caused ignitions signal the need for thorough inspections and maintenance of these facilities.

However, recent news reports signal utilities may go too long between inspections or overlook key

equipment failures due to limitations of aerial patrols.<sup>6</sup> The Camp Fire in Paradise last year points to this possibility. A faulty connector hook on a transmission tower is suspected to have led to the blaze.<sup>7</sup> Previous aerial inspections of the tower failed to identify this risk.

## THE SOLUTION

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This bill simply requires the CPUC to adopt inspection schedules for electric transmission facilities, a schedule currently missing from the CPUC's rules.

The Wildfire Mitigation Plans recently filed by the electric utilities highlight this need. All plans call for transmission inspection and maintenance. However, these documents only characterize the work scheduled for 2019. PG&E, for instance, has called for complete enhanced inspections of all transmission facilities by May.<sup>8</sup> This recommendation is presumably to establish a baseline of potentially hazardous equipment, but makes no recommendation on reasonable inspection timelines moving forward.

## SUPPORT

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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<sup>1</sup> PU Code §761

<sup>2</sup> These primarily include GO 95, 128, 165, 166 and 174;  
<http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/gos/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PUBLISHED/GENERAL\\_ORDER/159182.htm](http://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PUBLISHED/GENERAL_ORDER/159182.htm)

<sup>4</sup> D.12-01-032

<sup>5</sup> Pg. 28; PG&E Wildfire Mitigation Plan; Feb. 2019;  
[https://www.pge.com/pge\\_global/common/pdfs/safety/emergency-preparedness/natural-disaster/wildfires/Wildfire-Safety-Plan.pdf](https://www.pge.com/pge_global/common/pdfs/safety/emergency-preparedness/natural-disaster/wildfires/Wildfire-Safety-Plan.pdf)

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/Records-Show-PGE-Only-Inspected-Transmission-Tower-From-the-Air-505679631.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/12/11/camp-fire-pge-found-bullet-holes-in-butte-county-power-pole-fallen-hook-other-damage-at-transmission-tower/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.pge.com/pge\\_global/common/pdfs/safety/emergency-preparedness/natural-disaster/wildfires/Wildfire-Safety-Plan.pdf](https://www.pge.com/pge_global/common/pdfs/safety/emergency-preparedness/natural-disaster/wildfires/Wildfire-Safety-Plan.pdf)