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Via Electronic Filing

Caroline Thomas Jacobs, Director
Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety
California Natural Resources Agency
Sacramento, CA 95814
ElectricalUndergroundingPlans@energysafety.ca.gov

Subject: Public Advocates Office's Comments on the Second Revised Draft of Guidelines for the 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plans (Revised EUP)

Docket: 2023-Ups

Dear Director Thomas Jacobs,

The Public Advocates Office at the California Public Utilities Commission (Cal Advocates) respectfully submits the following reply comments on the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety's *Second Revised Draft 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan Guidelines*. Please contact Nat Skinner (Nathaniel.Skinner@cpuc.ca.gov) or Henry Burton (Henry.Burton@cpuc.ca.gov) with any questions relating to these comments.

We respectfully urge the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety to adopt the recommendations discussed herein.

Sincerely,

/s/ **Angela Wuerth**

Angela Wuerth
Attorney

Public Advocates Office
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, California 94102
Telephone: (415) 703-1083
E-mail: Angela.Wuerth@cpuc.ca.gov

555817143

The Public Advocates Office
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102-3298
www.publicadvocates.cpuc.ca.gov

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Public Advocates Office at the California Public Utilities Commission (Cal Advocates) submits these comments in response to the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety’s (Energy Safety) *Second Revised Draft 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan Guidelines* (Second Revised Draft), issued January 6, 2025.¹ The Second Revised Draft provides guidelines for electric utilities to submit electrical undergrounding plans (EUPs) pursuant to Senate Bill (SB) 884.² SB 884 authorizes large electric utilities³ (utilities) to submit ten-year plans to underground distribution lines⁴ and tasks Energy Safety and the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC or Commission) to determine whether to approve, conditionally approve, or deny a utility’s ten year plan.⁵

II. ISSUES

A. Cal Advocates supports the improved requirements for analysis of alternatives mitigations.

In comments on a previous draft of the EUP guidelines, Cal Advocates noted that the draft guidelines allowed utilities to select their own alternatives to compare to undergrounding, which could lead to unreasonable and unrealistic comparisons that are designed to favor undergrounding.⁶ Cal Advocates recommended that Energy Safety revise the EUP guidelines to require utilities to evaluate the combination of covered conductor paired with fast-trip settings and other operational mitigations.

The Second Revised Draft adopts this recommendation and requires utilities to analyze a design variation that consists of “aboveground hardening including installation of covered

¹ Energy Safety, *Second Revised Draft 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan Guidelines* (Second Revised Draft), January 6, 2025, docket 2023-UPs.

² McGuire, Stats. 2022, Chap. 819. SB 884 is codified at Public Utilities Code Section 8388.5.

³ Per statute, a large electrical corporation refers to an electrical corporation with at least 250,000 customer accounts within the state. (Pub. Utilities Code §§ 3280, 8385.) Public Utilities Code Section 8388.5(b) limits participation in the electric utility distribution undergrounding program to these entities. These comments use the term “utilities” to refer to large electrical corporations.

⁴ Pub. Utilities Code § 8388.5(c).

⁵ Pub. Utilities Code §§ 8388.5(d), (e) and (f).

⁶ *Public Advocates Office’s Comments on the Updated Revised Draft Guidelines for the 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan* at 1-3, October 3, 2024.

conductor on the entire Circuit Segment and some type(s) of protective equipment and device settings used to reduce wildfire ignition.”⁷ This requirement will establish a standard alternative to undergrounding that all utilities must assess. It is an important improvement because it will ensure that utilities are comparing undergrounding to at least one realistic and comprehensive alternative mitigation. This will make the analyses of alternatives in the plans more meaningful and useful. Cal Advocates supports this revision to the EUP guidelines.

B. Energy Safety must not allow utilities to include undergrounding outside of tier 2 or tier 3 High Fire-Threat Districts (HFTDs) and rebuild areas.

The Second Revised Draft allows electrical line undergrounding outside of Tier 2 and 3 HFTDs and rebuild areas.⁸ Specifically, the Second Revised Draft allows the span that crosses the HFTD boundary and “up to two adjacent spans” outside of HFTDs to be included in the EUP.^{9, 10}

Allowing utilities to submit EUPs that include undergrounding outside of the CPUC-designated tier 2 or 3 HFTDs is inconsistent with the plain language of the statute, which states that “only undergrounding projects located in Tier 2 or 3 high fire-threat districts or rebuild areas may be considered and constructed as part of the program.”¹¹ Cal Advocates and The Utility Reform Network (TURN) have raised this concern in previous comments.^{12, 13, 14, 15}

⁷ Second Revised Draft at 44.

⁸ Second Revised Draft at 14-15 (Section 2.4.3.1).

⁹ Second Revised Draft at 14-15.

¹⁰ Second Revised Draft does not define “span”.

¹¹ Pub. Utilities Code § 8388.5(c)(2).

¹² *Public Advocates Office’s Reply Comments on the Development of Guidelines for the 10-Year Undergrounding Distribution Infrastructure Plan* at 10, January 18, 2024.

¹³ *Public Advocates Office’s Reply Comments on the Updated Revised Draft Guidelines for the 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan* at 2-3, October 14, 2024.

¹⁴ *Public Advocates Office’s Reply Comments on Draft Resolution SPD-15 and the Staff Proposal for the SB 884 Program* at 11-12, January 11, 2024.

¹⁵ TURN, *Reply Comments On Draft Resolution SPD-15 Implementing SB 884* at 3, January 11, 2024.

The Second Revised Draft, which allows for “up to two adjacent spans outside of a Tier 2 or 3 HFTD,” does not comport with a plain reading of the statute.^{16, 17} Moreover, the modification goes beyond PG&E’s proposal in previous comments, in which PG&E only recommended that “if any portion of a span is in the HFTD then the entire span should be considered to be in the HFTD and eligible for inclusion in the EUP.”¹⁸

The language of the Second Revised Draft remains non-compliant with the statutory requirements of Public Utilities Code Section 8388.5(c)(2). Energy Safety should strike the words “and up to two adjacent spans outside of a Tier 2 or 3 HFTD” from the Second Revised Draft.¹⁹ If utilities wish to underground circuits outside of Tier 2 and Tier 3 HFTD areas, a utility’s General Rate Case is the appropriate venue to request funding.

C. Energy Safety should require wildfire rebuild projects to include information on ignition source and wildfire name.

Cal Advocates appreciates that Energy Safety has adopted our recommendations on disallowing rebuild projects from bypassing thresholds.^{20, 21} However, Energy Safety should also adopt Cal Advocates’ recommendation to require additional information from rebuild areas such as the names and causes of utility-related fires.²² Utilities should, at minimum, be required to provide “utility-related ignition source” and “wildfire name” data.²³

The Commission needs the aforementioned data to identify appropriate funding sources for rebuild projects. For some wildfire rebuild projects, Catastrophic Events Memorandum

¹⁶ Second Revised Draft at 15 (Section 2.4.3.1).

¹⁷ Pub. Utilities Code § 8388.5(c)(2).

¹⁸ Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), *Comments on the Revised Draft 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan Guidelines* at 14, October 3, 2024.

¹⁹ Second Revised Draft at 15.

²⁰ *Public Advocates Office’s Comments on the Updated Revised Draft Guidelines for the 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan* at 10-11, October 3, 2024.

²¹ Second Revised Draft at 9-10 (Section 2.3.5): “**Project Threshold** (see Sections 2.4.3.2, 2.7.5 and Appendix C.1.10): The Pre-Wildfire distribution infrastructure and associated risk scores are used to determine if the Circuit Segment meets the Project Thresholds.”

²² *Public Advocates Office’s Comments on the Updated Revised Draft Guidelines for the 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan* at 9-10, October 3, 2024.

²³ In Decision (D.) 14-02-015 at C-2, the Commission established a Fire Incident Data Collection Plan, which defines criteria for “reportable events” that trigger fire-related reporting requirements.

Accounts (CEMA) or Wildfire Expense Memorandum Accounts (WEMA) would be more appropriate vehicles for recording costs than the balancing account that will be established for EUP costs.²⁴ The differences between these accounts are important, because they entail different standards of review for cost recovery.^{25, 26}

D. Energy Safety should clarify some definitions in the EUP Guidelines.

In Appendix A, Energy Safety should add or clarify the following definitions:

1. Span

The Definitions section should include a definition for “span.”²⁷ “Span” is used in Section 2.4.3.1 but does not have a definition. Without a definition, utilities and interested parties could interpret “span” in several different ways. Cal Advocates suggests that Energy Safety define “span” as the stretch of overhead electric line between two adjacent poles, which is similar to the definition proposed by PG&E.²⁸

2. Project as Scoped

The Definitions section should include a definition of “Project as Scoped.” “Project as Scoped” is not defined in the appendix and the first usage of the term in the document is not fully explained.²⁹

²⁴ D.23-11-069 (in Application 21-06-021), *Decision on Test Year 2023 General Rate Case for Pacific Gas and Electric Company*, at 480-481:

The Commission clarifies that all costs related to the [Camp Fire] “rebuild” shall be interpreted broadly and ... shall be presented to the Commission for a reasonableness review consistent with Pub. Util Code Section 454.9. ... We reject PG&E’s position that the cost forecasts for the Community Rebuild Program from 2023-2026 should not be subject to CEMA cost recovery because they relate to activities beyond traditional CEMA restoration work, to include undergrounding work that will provide superior and longer-lasting benefits to customers.

²⁵ CPUC, *Cost Recovery Application 23-06-008 Performance Audit* at 3, July 11, 2024.

²⁶ An example is PG&E’s Community Rebuild Program relating to the Camp Fire, where the appropriate vehicle for recording undergrounding costs is CEMA. See D.23-11-069 at 479-482.

²⁷ Second Revised Draft at A1 - A6.

²⁸ Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), *Comments on the Revised Draft 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan Guidelines* at 14, October 3, 2024: “A span is the overhead electric line between two poles and is generally several hundred feet in length.”

²⁹ Second Revised Draft at A1-A7 and at 19.

3. Circuit-segment

The definition of “circuit segments” should be expanded and clarified. “Circuit segment” is defined as “isolatable circuit segment,” but Energy Safety does not go further in defining “isolatable.”³⁰ Energy Safety should make it clear that the definition of a circuit segment is based on physical asset categories; Energy Safety should specify exactly what class or type of assets are doing the isolating and what class or type of assets are being isolated. Cal Advocates suggests the following definition:

“Circuit segment,” “circuit-segment,” or “segment” means the shortest stretch of a distribution circuit that can be electrically isolated by the operator – that is, a portion of a circuit with a switch or protection device at each end and no switches or protection devices in the middle. (Fuses are not considered protection devices for this purpose.) Circuit-segments are also sometimes referred to as “circuit protection zones,” “zones of protection,” or “isolatable circuit segments.”

Energy Safety should also align its terminology with Resolution SPD-15.³¹

E. Energy Safety should make the data submission templates mandatory and host a workshop on data templates.

Energy Safety’s cover letter for the Second Revised Draft indicates that data templates are optional.³² Optional templates may make it difficult to compare and analyze data across utilities, if more than one utility submits an EUP.

The Second Revised Draft has a mixture of tabular, JavaScript Object Notation (JSON), and Geographic Information System (GIS) data requirements.³³ The complexity and magnitude of the data requirements call for a stakeholder workshop to refine the guidelines. Additional template revisions may be needed to ensure that data submissions are clear, comparable, and compliant with the data requirements.

³⁰ Second Revised Draft at A1.

³¹ *Resolution SPD-15* at 16, March 7, 2024: “A Circuit Protection Zone [also referred to as circuit segment] is a segment of distribution circuit between two protection devices”.

³² Energy Safety, *Edits to Revised Draft 10-Year Electrical Undergrounding Plan Guidelines* at 1, January 6, 2025.

“Energy Safety is also providing sample data submission templates for stakeholder review. These templates are optional for large electrical corporations and will be available for reference separate from the Guidelines.”

³³ Second Revised Draft at C1 - C60.

In addition, Energy Safety should ensure the data templates in the 10-year EUP are comparable with Energy Safety’s Wildfire Mitigation Plan Quarterly Data Reports (WMP QDRs).³⁴ A 10-year EUP could dramatically affect the data seen in the WMP QDRs, and it will be beneficial to understand the interactions between a utility’s EUP and its WMP. The workshop recommended earlier could also address this question.³⁵ Furthermore, the workshop should address alignment between Energy Safety’s data templates for EUPs and the data required in Resolution SPD-15. Resolution SPD-15 includes language that authorizes Safety Policy Division (SPD) to convene a Technical Working Group to review and align CPUC SB 884 Project List Data Requirements and Energy Safety’s GIS data requirements.³⁶ Energy Safety could participate in the Technical Working Group. Such collaboration would be consistent with Executive Order N-5-24, which directs Energy Safety and the Commission to consult with each other on cost-effective wildfire mitigation measures.³⁷

F. Energy Safety should require substation names and regional information for tabular data submissions.

Energy Safety should require utilities to identify the substation and geographic region of each EUP project. The substation name should be required along with “circuit_id” in tabular data submission templates 061-151.³⁸

Requiring substation names would allow Energy Safety and the Commission to analyze whether a utility’s 10-year EUP entails multiple projects associated with the same substation. If so, the utility should analyze alternative risk mitigations that are based at the substation, such as rapid earth fault current limiters.

³⁴ Energy Safety, *Data Guidelines v3.2*, January 30, 2024.

³⁵ Crosswalk is defined as mapping of data values from one schema to another. A crosswalk discussion would entail adding data fields that are joinable between the 10-year EUP and WMP QDRs.

³⁶ *Resolution SPD-15* at 21, March, 7 2024.

³⁷ Executive Order N-5-24, October 30, 2024. <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/energy-EO-10-30-24.pdf>.

³⁸ Energy Safety, EUP Data Templates. <https://energysafety.ca.gov/what-we-do/electrical-infrastructure-safety/https-energysafety-ca-gov-what-we-do-electrical-infrastructure-safety-electrical-undergrounding-division-sb-884/>.

Energy Safety should also direct utilities that submit EUPs to identify the geographical district or division associated with each project, in templates 061-151.³⁹ This information will enable analysis of regional patterns. A high concentration of projects in a specific district or division could lead to discussion on alternatives to address regional issues such as community partnerships.⁴⁰

III. CONCLUSION

Cal Advocates respectfully requests that Energy Safety adopt the recommendations described herein.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ *Angela Wuerth*

Angela Wuerth
Attorney

Public Advocates Office
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, California 94102
Telephone: (415) 703-1083
E-mail: Angela.Wuerth@cpuc.ca.gov

³⁹ Only tabular template 101 requests division information.

⁴⁰ PG&E, Community Partnerships. <https://www.pge.com/en/outages-and-safety/outage-preparedness-and-support/partnerships/community-partnerships.html>.