

Media Release

The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy, the Environment and Climate Change
Minister for Solar Homes



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REDUCING POWERLINE BUSHFIRE RISK TO COMMUNITIES

The Andrews Labor Government's Powerline Bushfire Safety Program has led to a huge reduction in bushfire risk according to an independent report.

Aurecon's Powerline Bushfire Safety Program Benefits Realisation Report found the program has resulted in a 44.1 per cent reduction in powerline bushfire risk across the state.

The \$750 million program – the biggest powerline safety project in Australia – was implemented following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, which found more than 70 per cent of deaths in the Black Saturday fires were caused by fires started by electrical infrastructure.

The program includes electricity asset and network control measures including the installation of giant safety switches – Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiters (REFCLs). The switches (located in high bushfire risk areas) prevent fires starting by shutting off a powerline's power when it makes contact with vegetation.

The second tranche of the REFCL rollout is complete with the third and final tranche now underway. By May 2023 more than 30,000 kilometres of high voltage powerlines across rural and regional Victoria will be protected.

In the summer of 2019-20 alone, it was estimated that the (then) 19 operational switches prevented 33 potentially catastrophic fire starts. Victoria has already had one REFCL activation this summer in Mildura.

The program also includes the Powerline Replacement Fund, which has seen more than 700 kilometres of bare-wire powerlines in high bushfire risk areas replaced with underground or insulated overhead conductors.

The REFCL rollout and Powerline Replacement Fund have both been underpinned by research and testing through the dedicated \$10 million Research and Development Fund, which has improved understanding of the impact of electrical infrastructure on bushfires and identified the most effective technologies for mitigating that risk.

The report also found the Powerline Bushfire Safety Program reduced the risk of electrocution of people working near powerlines, improved the overall resilience of the electricity network and promoted local industry development and job creation.

For more information visit: energy.vic.gov.au/safety-and-emergencies/powerline-bushfire-safety-program.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio

"The Powerline Bushfire Safety Program has delivered on its promise to significantly reduce the risk of bushfires started by bare-wire powerlines."

"It now has a proven track record with this report detailing a great outcome for the Victorian community, especially those in high bushfire risk areas."

"This program – along with our record \$517 million investment in the 2021/2022 budget to reduce bushfire risk – is helping to keep Victorians safe."

Media contact: Lorraine Haase 0447 763 735 | lorraine.haase@minstaff.vic.gov.au