

Media Release

The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Climate Action
Minister for Energy and Resources
Minister for the State Electricity Commission



Friday, 3 November 2023

WORLD LEADING BUSHFIRE SAFETY TECH INSTALLATION COMPLETE

The Allan Labor Government is helping keep Victorians safe with the installation of world-leading bushfire safety technology completed across the state.

Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio today announced the 45th and final cutting-edge Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter (REFCL) had been installed at Benalla - completing the state's single biggest investment in powerline bushfire safety.

The Benalla REFCL is servicing one of the longest powerlines in Victoria at more than 1000km long.

A REFCL works like a giant safety switch that shuts off power when the powerline comes into contact with vegetation or the ground - significantly reducing the chance of ignition.

The use of REFCLs for bushfire prevention is a world first – now countries across the globe are following Victoria's lead with trials of the technology underway in fire prone parts of California.

During the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, REFCLs were triggered 33 times on total fire ban days by faults that could have ignited catastrophic bushfires.

In response to the *Royal Commission into the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires*, REFCLs were proposed as the most efficient and cost-effective way to reduce the risk of fires caused by powerlines.

Their installation better protects Victorian communities by reducing the risk of bushfires starting from powerlines by up to 70 per cent, across more than 31,000km of high-voltage (22 kilovolt) lines through the state's high-risk bushfire areas or half the network in Victoria.

Working from zone substations, REFCLs deliver this reduction in fire starts from powerlines for both regional and rural communities by detecting and suppressing energy from dangerous faults on fallen high-voltage powerlines within milliseconds.

The Victorian Government's Powerline Bushfire Safety Program has worked closely with the state's energy safety regulator, Energy Safe Victoria, to ensure compliance and successful operation of the \$682 million program.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio

"REFCLs are a life-saving technology that act as a giant safety switch when powerlines come into contact with vegetation, reducing the risk of bushfires igniting."

"Bushfire prone areas around the world, including in California, are now looking to Victoria's leading use of this important technology to better protect their own communities."

Quote attributable to Member for Northern Victoria Jaclyn Symes

"As climate change continues to drive an increase in the frequency and intensity of catastrophic bushfires, REFCLs will play a critical role in reducing the risk to communities across the state."

Media Contact: Siobhan McKenna 0480 147 921 | siobhan.mckenna@minstaff.vic.gov.au