

PSE wildfire preparedness community meeting summary report

Cle Elum, WA

Report date | November 2022

Overview

Wildfires are a growing public safety concern for much of the Western United States PSE is taking a comprehensive approach to wildfire preparedness to help prevent wildfires while maintaining the reliable delivery of energy.

PSE's latest [Wildfire Mitigation and Response Plan for 2022](#) outlines the year-round efforts to prepare for and help prevent wildfires in our service area. Many of PSE's wildfire-related actions also help protect our system from other hazards, like high winds and winter storms.

A series of meetings for communities at higher risk for wildfires are planned for 2022. As part of this effort, the residents of south Cle Elum met virtually and in person on October 5. PSE shared current activities to mitigate wildfire risk and tools available for potential use in the future.

The purpose of the community meeting was to:

- Share information about PSE's active planning and preparation for wildfires.
- Communicate the ongoing and evolving coordination with other partners regarding wildfire planning and response.
- Seek information from participants about Public Safety Power Shutoffs concerns, considerations and questions.

PSE is in the early planning stages of developing a Public Safety Power Shutoff wildfire mitigation plan. If implemented in the future, PSPS would be one of several tools in our wildfire mitigation and response toolkit and would be a tool used as a last resort.

Feedback received will help shape the way PSE plans for and uses Public Safety Power Shutoffs in the future.

Community meeting notification

To encourage participation of community members served by the identified higher wildfire risk electric distribution circuits, PSE shared information in myriad ways.

- Two direct-mailed pieces to all customers served by the higher wildfire risk circuits.
- Two emails to all customers served by the higher wildfire risk circuits with an email address listed on their PSE account.

- A fact sheet on wildfire mitigation and response, which was sent to customers via mail and posted on the wildfire webpage, pse.com/wildfirepreparedness. The fact sheet was also translated into Spanish.
- Shared information with local community groups, key stakeholders, fire response agencies, and elected officials with a request for them to share information through their established communications channels.
- Advertised the meeting in two local papers, the Northern Kittitas County Tribune and the Kittitas Valley Daily Record
- Issued a media release to local publications, including the Northern Kittitas County Tribune and the Daily Record.

To minimize barriers to participation, PSE held the community meeting virtually and in-person, while providing other learning and feedback-sharing opportunities, including one-on-one conversations with PSE’s Wildfire Task Force team members and sharing thoughts via an online comment form, email or phone. PSE also encouraged people to let us know if they have accommodation needs to fully participate in the community meeting so that we may address their needs.

Community meeting attendance

The community meeting was attended by PSE customers, PSE staff, and state and local partners including the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Office of the Attorney General, Kittitas County Fire Districts 1 and 7, and the COAL Center; a local organization that serves vulnerable populations. PSE worked with the Putnam Centennial Center in Cle Elum to host the in-person event. In total, 30 community members and agency partners participated in the community meeting.

Community meeting date	In-person attendees	Virtual attendees
October 5, 2022	15 Community members	15 Community members

Community meeting details

The in-person community meeting offered a 30-minute open house before the meeting began. The Kittitas County Fire District 7 staffed an informational booth sharing resources about way to reduce wildfire risks at home. HopeSource provided information about their energy assistance program, which was made available at the open house. PSE's energy efficiency team also staffed a booth.

Following the open house, PSE began the event for both virtual and in-person attendees. Presenters and the meeting facilitator were in-person and live-streamed to the Zoom meeting for virtual attendees. This setup allowed for both virtual and in-person attendees to participate fully throughout the community meeting with two-way communication.



Kittitas County Fire District 7 at the October 5 PSE wildfire preparedness community meeting in Cle Elum.

The community meeting began with a 30-minute presentation led by PSE staff. Representatives from PSE's wildfire mitigation planning team, system planning, and electric operations shared information concerning PSE's Wildfire Mitigation and Response Plan for 2022 including situational awareness methods and tools, proactive infrastructure projects to mitigate wildfire risk in Cle Elum., fault reduction and protection, operational procedures and emergency response, and conceptual Public Safety Power Shutoff timeline of events and the process to restore power.

Following the presentation, a question-and-answer session was held. The meeting facilitator alternated between taking questions in-person and from the virtual attendees. A community dialogue session was then held with small group discussions and large group report outs. This was done both in virtual breakout rooms and small round-table discussions in-person. The community meeting concluded with another question-and-answer session and short presentation to wrap up the event for both virtual and in-person attendees.



Question-and-Answer session for both virtual and in-person attendees.

Additional information detailed below summarizes the community meeting date, location, and target audience.

Community meeting date and time	Community meeting location	Community meeting target audience
<p>October 5, 2022</p> <p>In-person open house: 5:00 – 5:30pm PST</p> <p>Community meeting: 5:30 – 7:30pm PST</p>	<p>Virtual and in-person at the Putnam Centennial Center (719 E. 3rd St., Cle Elum, WA 98922)</p>	<p>Customers in south Cle Elum</p>

Community feedback summary

To effectively collect feedback from customers during the meeting, PSE facilitated small group discussions. Groups of no more than eight customers were presented three scenarios and asked a series of questions based on those scenarios. Each group had a PSE or consultant table host that supported walking through the questions and gathering feedback. Following each round of small group discussion, groups shared main themes and concerns with the larger

group. The meeting facilitator alternated between asking for report-outs in-person and from the virtual attendees. The scenarios, questions asked, and key findings are summarized below.

Small group discussion: round 1

Scenario

It's hot, really hot out. You can't remember the last time it rained. And now the winds have started to pick up. You know that this is a recipe for wildfire, and it's time to be aware and prepared.



Questions asked

- Looking back to previous emergencies or wildfires you may have experienced, where would you typically get news or updates?
- Are there local organizations or services that provide emergency information?
- How would you want to get information about wildfire risks or other emergencies?

Observations

- Residents receive information from the PSE app; PSE website; email and text alerts; local social media pages; the Eventbrite Emergency Management tool; Everbridge notifications; KXLE radio; homeowner associations and neighborhood groups including Sunlight Waters; local police, fire, and emergency management staff; and the National Weather Service and Department of Natural Resources websites.
- Many were interested in PSE increasing their use of Twitter and work with partners to ensure that they provide timely updates.
- Sky Meadows, a residential development with 385 lots, has an emergency alert bell and ways of contacting residents during an emergency.
- Kittitas County fire districts, local sheriffs, and emergency managers provide information about emergencies to the public in several ways including door-to-door, press releases, and social media. Many residents also look to the Washington Department of Transportation social media pages, as they do a lot of work in the area and share emergency information.
- The Putnam Centennial Center, locally known as the senior center, acts as an emergency shelter and provides community members emergency information. Information about emergencies is also shared at local schools and the fairgrounds.

Small group discussion: round 2

Scenario

Think about the possibility of having the power turned off from anywhere from a few hours to a few days during high wind periods. The purpose of these proactive power shutoffs is to prevent trees and other debris from damaging electric lines and potentially causing wildfires.



Questions asked

- What steps do you already take to prepare for emergencies or power outages?
- What would worry you about having power turned off?
- How much notice do you need before an emergency power shutoff, knowing that alerts will be based upon unpredictable winds and weather?

Observations

- **Residents are prepared by having some food stores on hand and have flashlights and other supplies ready and available year-round. Some have generators, but because extended power outages are infrequent, many cannot justify the expense of purchasing a generator.**
- **Top concerns when having the power turned off include water availability, food spoilage, vulnerable neighbors, and backup power for cell phones and other electronics.**
- **Some rely on electricity to work from home and have concerns about their ability to work during extended power outages.**
- **A representative from the water district was present and was concerned about having enough advanced notice to prepare, maintaining water availability for the community during an extended power outage, power surges, and being flagged as critical infrastructure with PSE to quickly restore power.**
- **The attendees requested a wide range of time needed to prepare for a power outage. Some needed only one to two hours, while others requested a minimum of 12 hours' notice. They noted that Cle Elum is a small town and they would need the notice window to span during the day when stores are open to purchase supplies.**

Small group discussion: round 3

Scenario

Now imagine that the power is off, but there is NOT an active wildfire right now. Think about where you are, what you need, and how you're going to stay informed.



Questions asked

- Think about your family and your community – who might need resources or assistance during a power outage?
- How could PSE and its partners help you and your neighbors when the power is out?
- How do you want to receive information during an outage?
- How frequently would you want to receive updates on the outage?

Observations

- **Members of the community that may need resources or assistance during a power outage include:**
 - **Elderly, medically dependent, non-English speaking, and vulnerable residents.**
 - **Those with livestock (including dairy farmers) and farms rely on electricity and electric water pumps for their operations.**
 - **Residents with large amounts of food stored in freezers and those who have food insecurities and may be disadvantaged by a loss of perishable food.**
- **PSE and their partners can help by providing clear information about state-wide renewable energy programs, information on proper generator use, and power outage safety.**
- **PSE can support customers by providing reliable, accurate, and timely information about the power outage and work to quickly re-energize lines after the weather conditions have improved.**
- **Cooling and resource centers could provide places of refuge and charging stations during outages.**
- **The Sheriff's offices can continue to do door-to-door checks on known vulnerable residents.**
- **The Fire Department is knowledgeable about who might need help during an emergency.**

Question and answer recap

Following small group discussions, PSE facilitated a question-and-answer session. A summary of the questions asked, and the responses provided are included below.

Q: Can PSE selectively turn the power off to avoid impacting critical infrastructure like the Water District #7 water reservoir pumps?

A: Critical infrastructure can be flagged in PSE's system. Depending on the configuration of the electric system and specific de-energization needs, it may be possible to selectively keep the power running in some instances. If the power is turned off, flagged critical infrastructure is prioritized when re-energizing the lines.

Q: What can be done to help homeowners remove branches from power lines close to their homes? What is being done to educate homeowners on the risk that they are putting themselves and the community by not removing branches?

A: At the local level, the fire station can provide residents information about home protection against wildfire through their Firewise program.

PSE has an arborist program and can send a local arborist to homes to assess trees near powerlines. [PSE | Maintaining Power by Trimming Trees](#)

Before each wildfire season begins, PSE staff drive and walk all lines to check for trees that pose danger to nearby power lines. If trees are identified, vegetation management crews are deployed to remove branches.

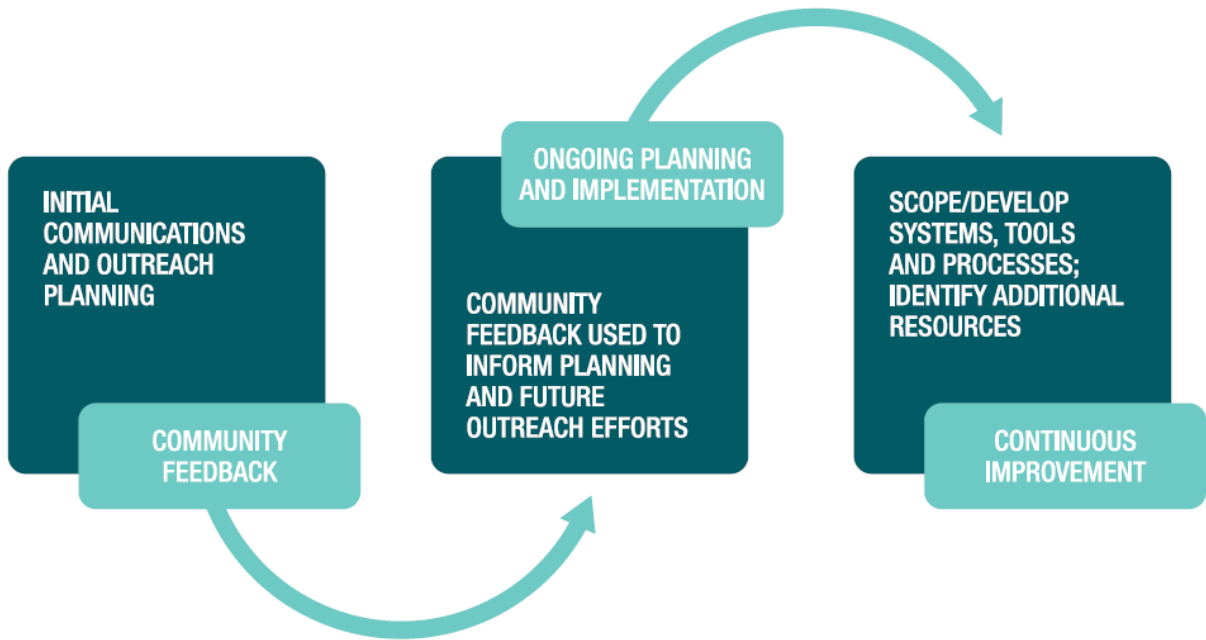
On October 12, the fire district will kick-off a wildfire readiness campaign in the community. Local events and one-on-one support will inform residents on how to protect their homes and prepare for wildfire.

Q: Who is PSE working with to come up with the criteria to implement a PSPS? When will you have the criteria finalized and roll out a PSPS?

A: PSE will be looking to other utilities for their best practices and will tailor their approaches to local conditions. PSE also plans to look at historical data and consult local fire departments and agencies working to mitigate wildfire risk. Additionally, may engage third party consultants that specialize in PSPS and wildfire mitigation to mature our Wildfire Mitigation Plan. As to when we roll out a PSPS, we don't have a date right now. This is a process, and a priority for PSE, we want to be thoughtful in our approach

Next steps

The feedback and input shared at this community meeting, and others held in other areas in 2022, will help shape the way PSE plans for and uses Public Safety Power Shutoffs in the future. PSE will proactively share updates with the community as we continue the planning process.



Additional information

To learn more about how PSE is preparing for wildfire mitigation, stay updated on our Public Safety Power Shutoff plan, and provide comments and questions to PSE staff, visit [PSE's Wildfire Preparedness webpage](#), email wildfire.response@pse.com, or call 1-888-404-8773.