

# PSE wildfire preparedness public town hall summary report

## Communities of Cle Elum, Ronald, and Roslyn

Report date | August 2022

### Overview

Wildfires are a growing public safety concern for much of the Western United States. At Puget Sound Energy (PSE), we are taking a comprehensive approach to wildfire mitigation that will help keep our customers safe 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 town halls for communities at higher risk for wildfires are planned for 2022. As part of this effort, the residents of Cle Elum, Ronald, and Roslyn met virtually on June 8. At the community meeting, PSE shared current activities to mitigate wildfire risk and tools available for potential use in the future. Future tools include proactively turning off power during high-risk weather conditions — a practice known as Public Safety Power Shutoffs, or PSPS. During severe high-risk weather conditions debris, such as tree limbs, can damage electric lines which can cause energy to be released in the form of heat and sparks. A utility may shut down select power lines to help avoid this.

The purpose of the town hall was to:

- Share information about PSE's wildfire planning our active planning and preparation.
- 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 and does not intend to use a Public Safety Power Shutoff in 2022. 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, summarized in this report, will help shape the way PSE plans for and uses Public Safety Power Shutoffs in the future.

## Town hall 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 factsheet on wildfire mitigation and response, which was sent to customers via mail and posted on the wildfire webpage, [pse.com/wildfirepreparedness](https://pse.com/wildfirepreparedness).
- 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 a local paper, the Northern Kittitas County Tribune.
- 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 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. We 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.

## Town hall meeting attendance

The town hall meeting was attended by PSE customers, PSE staff, and wildfire mitigation state and local partners including the Washington Department of Natural Resources and Roslyn Fire Department. In total, 39 community members participated in the town hall. Virtual town hall attendees were asked to register for the event. The town hall registration and attendance numbers are below.

Town hall date	Registered attendees	Town hall attendees
<b>June 8, 2022</b>	<b>56</b> Community members	<b>39</b> Community members

## Town hall details

The town hall began with a 30-minute presentation led by PSE staff. Michelle Boll, Wildfire Mitigation Program Manager, presented PSE’s Wildfire Mitigation and Response Plan for 2022. Jens Nedrud, Manager of Electric Systems Planning, provided information on PSE’s situational awareness methods and tools, as well as proactive infrastructure projects to mitigate wildfire risk and improve electric service reliability. Ryan Murphy, Director of Electric Operations, discussed fault reduction and protection, and operational procedures and emergency response. Ryan also shared a conceptual Public Safety Power Shutoff timeline of events.

Following the presentation, community dialogue was held in small group discussions and large group report outs. The town hall concluded with a question-and-answer session.

Additional information detailed below summarizes the town hall date, location, and target audience.

Town hall date and time	Town hall location	Town hall target audience
<b>June 8, 2022</b> 5:30 – 7:30pm PST	Virtual	Customers in Ronald, Roslyn and west Cle Elum* <i>*These communities are served by two distribution circuits in a higher wildfire risk area</i>

## Community dialogue key findings

To effectively collect feedback from customers during the town hall, PSE facilitated small group discussions. Groups of no more than five 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 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 have heard that this is a recipe for wildfire, and it's time to be aware and prepared.



#### Questions asked

- What thoughts come to mind?
- Where would you expect to get news?
- Where do you go to get news about wildfire?
- How would you want to get information about the wildfire risks and what is being done?

#### Key findings

- **Dry, hot, windy conditions are a common occurrence and are to be expected in this area.**
- **PSE would need several different alert methods because not everyone has internet or reliable cell service.**
- **Full-time neighbors keep part-time residents informed of what is happening while they are gone.**
- **Residents who live in the Suncadia community would expect Suncadia to send out notifications.**

- **Many would rely on the Fire Department and the Washington Department of Natural Resources online maps, notifications, and social media pages for regional wildfire updates.**
- **Most would look to local media outlets, Kittitas County social media pages, and the Kittitas County Everbridge alert system for information about the wildfire risks and what is being done.**
- **Isolation is a concern if the power goes out.**

## 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. This power shutoff would prevent trees and other debris from damaging electric lines and potentially causing wildfires.



#### Questions asked

- What comes to mind?
- 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 triggered by unpredictable winds and weather?
- How would you prepare?

#### Key findings

- **Top concerns when having the power turned off include water availability for those relying on electric water pumps, food storage, medical equipment, and loss of cell service and internet access.**
- **Additional concerns included ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations, keeping livestock contained if electric fences were powered off, and questions if PSPS is the best tool for the risk.**
- **The most common response was that providing 12 to 24 hours' notice before a Public Safety Power Shutoff would offer enough lead-time for residents to prepare.**
- **Residents expressed that it will be very important for PSE and their partners to tell people how to prepare for these events.**
- **Residents would prepare by charging battery operated devices, storing water or finding other ways to access water if relying on an electric pump, purchasing generators, stocking up on gas and other supplies, and checking in on their neighbors.**
- **Planning ahead of the wildfire season was mentioned multiple times as a best practice.**

### Small group discussion: round 3

#### Scenario

Now the power is off. Think about where you are, what you need, and how you're going to stay informed.



#### Questions asked

- How could PSE and its partners help you and your neighbors when the power is out?
- How do you want to receive information?
- How frequently would you want to receive updates on the outage?

#### Key findings

- **PSE can support customers by partnering with local police departments, fire departments, and Kittitas County to leverage their existing communication tools and alerts.**
- **PSE and their partners can provide charging stations, cooling centers, and water stations during PSPS.**
- **Cell phone coverage is a concern and PSE should coordinate with cellphone providers to ensure that cell services would remain available during power outages and mitigate any challenges that may arise.**
- **Texting, the PSE app, and PSE's website would be the preferred source of notifications during a power outage. However, multiple methods of communication will be needed as cell phones die and residents' access to internet becomes limited.**
- **Residents would expect notifications as updates are available; not exceed 2 hours between notices to reassure people that their technology is working correctly. Updates should include as much information as possible to set expectations.**
- **Residents suggested that PSE time stamp and announce when the next notification would be sent.**

## 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:** Looking back 20 years, or so, how many fires were caused by power utilities in our area?

**A:** PSE doesn't have the statistics, but we are not aware of any wildfires being directly caused by utilities in this area.

**Q:** What kind of imaging and remote sensing technology has PSE used to reduce risk? How successful has this been and what types of data are you looking for?

**A:** PSE uses optical cameras, LIDAR mapping, thermal imaging, GIS mapping, and people on the ground to determine the vegetation around power lines and the health of the trees. We plan to use satellite imagery in the future.

*Note: information on these tools is located in PSE 2022 Wildfire Mitigation and Response Plan*

**Q:** Why isn't more effort being put into undergrounding wires?

**A:** Installing power lines underground is one of several tools PSE uses to reduce wildfire risk in its service area. When determining the best tool to use, PSE's system planners review system needs on a case-by-case basis and look at criteria like unique wildfire risk, outage history, configuration of the existing electric system, local geography and terrain, environmental impacts of underground solutions, and costs.

Most new distribution lines today tend to be installed underground, with the majority of new residential developments being served by underground power lines. Choosing to move existing overhead power lines underground is possible, although these projects can be challenging from an engineering, environmental, construction and cost standpoint – especially with higher voltage transmission lines.

**Q:** What can customers do to help PSE staff mitigate wildfire risks?

**A:** Customers can help by being prepared for emergency and by sharing information.

- Provide PSE your contact information.
- Identify problematic trees on your properties.
- Let PSE know if you rely on electricity for medical equipment.
- Participate in the Kittitas County Firewise program.
- Be prepared for all hazards. Have a plan for communication, supplies, and evacuation.

**Q:** Does PSE provide support for tree branch removal on residential properties that are near power lines?

**A:** PSE can disconnect power service while tree branches are removed. Calling customer service can start this process (1 (888) 225-5773).

It should be noted that service lines, the lines that come from transformers to homes, have a lower voltage and are not as high of a risk for fire ignition.

**Q:** What is the timeline of a Public Safety Power Shutoff Plan at PSE?

**A:** PSE is hoping that the Public Safety Power Shutoff Plan will be done in about a year, but we want to take the time that is needed to get it right. To do this we need to mature the ways that we are modeling risk. The PSE [wildfire landing page](#) will provide updates on the Public Safety Power Shutoff planning process.

**Q:** Why is PSE modeling their Public Safety Power Shutoff Plan off Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E)?

**A:** PSE is integrating lessons learned from many of our peer utilities on the West Coast – learning from both the things they did well and from the challenges they encountered so we can build our plan using their best practices.

**Q:** How are other local agencies communicating alerts in the area?

**A:** The Kittitas Fire Department is installing signs with QR codes that link to alert sign-up pages for their wildfire alerts.



## 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](mailto:wildfire.response@pse.com), or call 1-888-404-8773.