

# **SAFETY STARTS UNDERGROUND**

**STOP THE FIRES. BURY THE WIRES.**

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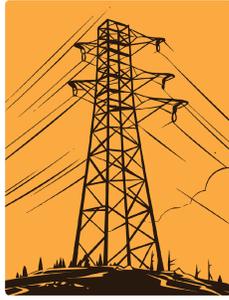
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Dear Senator Seyarto and Assemblymember Johnson,

I am writing to urgently request for your assistance in working with Governor Newsom to direct the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to require Southern California Edison (SCE) to underground the proposed Riverside Transmission Reliability Project (RTRP) transmission lines in the City of Norco. We all continue to see above-ground transmission lines lead to destructive and deadly wildfires in communities just like Norco. Even after legal action for alleged negligence causing recent wildfires, it is hard to understand how the CPUC and SCE can still support plans to construct high-voltage, overhead transmission lines in Norco, through one of the region's most fire- and wind-prone areas along the Santa Ana Riverbed.



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After witnessing the tragic wildfires around us, including the Eaton Fire, the Palisades Fire and the Fairview Fire, Norco faces the very real threat of becoming the next headline. The proposed 230,000-volt (230kV) electric transmission line route, which is similar to the transmission system under investigation as the potential cause of the Eaton Fire, runs through the same location as the 180-acre Mann Fire (a wind-driven brush fire in the Santa Ana Riverbed) originated in 2020, that caused severe damage to homes and property and threatened animal safety. With the wildfire devastation we've seen this year, how can anyone still deem this project safe and responsible?

Fire experts have warned the CPUC, SCE and the City of Riverside that building such a massive overhead transmission project in the same highly flammable, vegetation-ridden corridor will inevitably spark another, even larger, catastrophic wildfire. To make it worse, the overhead lines will limit firefighting capabilities and prevent air support in an area where high winds already make ground firefighting difficult and, at times, impossible. Additionally, evacuations in Norco are complicated by the Santa Ana River blocking escape routes to the north, hills to the east, narrow streets, and the many horses and animals that also need evacuation.

Regrettably, the expert testimony of fire professionals and the pleas from the Norco community have been ignored. After witnessing these recent catastrophic fires, our local communities, state, and nation should be reconsidering dangerous, above-ground transmission lines like the RTRP and advocating for full undergrounding to prevent further tragedies.

When asked to underground the RTRP, SCE and the City of Riverside deflect and point to the CPUC's approval of the hazardous, overhead design. The CPUC, appointed by Governor Newsom, has the authority to change this project and set the precedent that safety starts underground—a feasible and responsible solution. While SCE is most concerned about the cost of undergrounding, the potential cost of a wildfire—property damage, legal settlements, regulatory consequences and loss of life—is far greater.

The additional steps to underground this project will not compare to the devastation that follows a preventable catastrophe. I respectfully request that you and your colleagues encourage Governor Newsom to instruct the CPUC to direct SCE to underground their planned RTRP transmission lines in Norco to protect our community and mitigate the risk of a costly disaster. There is still time for the CPUC to do the right thing. The safety, well-being and future of Norco depend on it.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.