



Pend Oreille County Public Utility District

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Pend Oreille PUD Activates Fire-Safe Mode to Reduce Wildfire Risk

NEWPORT, Wash. – As summer temperatures rise and wildfire risk increases across the region, Pend Oreille PUD has activated Fire-Safe Mode, a critical operational shift designed to reduce the likelihood of wildland fires caused by the electrical system. The PUD will remain in Fire-Safe Mode until weather conditions improve and fire danger subsides.

During high fire-risk conditions, the PUD switches its electric system to Fire-Safe Mode, which automatically shuts off power if there's a problem, like a tree branch falling on a power line. Under normal conditions, breakers automatically attempt to re-energize the line up to three times. In Fire-Safe Mode, the system does not attempt to turn the power back on automatically. This may result in more outages, but it greatly reduces the risk of sparks that could potentially start a wildfire in dry conditions.

"Wildfire safety is a shared responsibility, and we're doing our part by modifying our system operations during fire season," said Stacie Maier, Director of Engineering & Operations for the PUD. "Each attempt to restore power automatically has the potential to generate a spark. By limiting those attempts, we help reduce the risk of igniting a wildfire."

When a fault (or issue) occurs, the system will shut power off after the first trip. PUD line crews must then inspect the line and confirm it is safe before restoring power, an approach that prioritizes safety but may lead to more frequent and longer outages during the summer months.

In addition, when Red Flag Warnings or other extreme fire weather events are issued by the National Weather Service, the PUD may implement Elevated Fire-Safe Mode. This even more sensitive setting further reduces automatic operations and requires in-person line inspections before any power restoration, potentially extending outage durations but ensuring maximum precaution.

"Safety is always our top priority," said Maier. "While we recognize the inconvenience outages can cause, these precautions help protect homes and property in Pend Oreille County."

Pend Oreille PUD has implemented Fire-Safe Mode seasonally for several years and continues to evaluate system settings, vegetation management, and community preparedness as part of its broader wildfire mitigation strategy.

Customers are encouraged to prepare for possible extended outages, follow local fire restrictions, and also sign up for emergency notifications from the county at <https://www.pendoreille.gov/emergency-management/page/nixle>

Tips for Preparing for a Power Outage:

- Fully charge cell phones and other essential devices.
- Gather food, water, medications, batteries, pet supplies, and other necessities your family may need during an outage or evacuation.
- Fuel up your vehicle in advance, as gas stations may lose power during outages.
- Make sure Pend Oreille PUD has your current contact information to ensure you receive important notifications.
- If using a generator, follow all safety guidelines to prevent dangerous backfeed onto power lines, which can endanger crews and the public. All backup generators should be installed with a transfer switch that meets National Electric Code requirements. Installations must be inspected by L&I, and the PUD requests that customers provide a copy of the permit.

For outage updates and additional wildfire safety tips, visit www.popud.org or follow Pend Oreille PUD on social media.

About Pend Oreille County Public Utility District

Pend Oreille PUD was established in 1936 and began operations in 1948. The PUD is governed by three locally elected Commissioners. A General Manager and staff operate the utility within policies set by the Board of Commissioners. The PUD has four operating systems: The electric system distributes electricity to the county, the production system produces power from the Box Canyon Hydroelectric Project, the water system consists of nine individual water distribution subdivisions, and the community network system provides wholesale broadband communication services. For more information visit: <http://popud.org>.