

OPINION

MORE THAN 4,000 HOMES LOST IS ENOUGH!
We Must Demand No More Overhead Electric Lines

by

Bob Stuart

The 1970 Laguna Fire is the first large wildfire I experienced. It was the biggest wildfire in County history at the time and it consumed 382 homes and killed eight people. Its cause; a downed power line.

The Pines Fire in 2002 burned 37 homes and scorched 62,000 acres. Its cause; a power line struck by a Federal helicopter.

The Cedar Fire in 2003 destroyed about 2,200 homes and was the largest wildfire in California history. The cause – a disoriented hunter, who should have been excluded from the Cleveland National Forest during a time of extreme fire hazard, started a signal fire so he could be rescued. It burned many miles of overhead power lines causing hundreds, if not thousands, of homes to lose all their refrigerated perishables.

The 2007 wildfires burned about 1,600 homes. The cause – at least three of the numerous fires resulted from overhead power lines damaged by horrendous Santa Ana winds.

California's Senator Dianne Feinstein is now making several proposals to improve the Federal government's financial participation in national firefighting, including the requirement that cities and counties adopt a uniform, Federally approved fire code. A good start, but Feinstein has made no mention about prohibiting overhead power lines.

Such a prohibition must be part of any such effort. It is not enough to simply increase funding to fight wildfires after they have destroyed many more thousands of homes and businesses.

New power lines, including the Sunrise Powerlink, must be placed underground if they are truly needed. Overhead lines not only cause many of the increasingly destructive wildfires, but when they are not directly to blame, they are burned by the fires.

Millions of dollars are spent by the taxpayers to fight the fires. SDG&E has indicated it would cost too much to place such power lines underground, but we are spending more to replace lost homes, with no cost estimate possible for the loss of life of residents and firefighters.

SDG&E has estimated it would cost at least a million dollars a mile to underground the Powerlink, which would add about \$150 million to this 1.2 billion dollar project. Far

more than \$150 million has been spent fighting the fires referenced above, with no overall figure available for the cost of replacing the homes that have been lost.

Wildfires are becoming more frequent and destructive due to extreme drought conditions that appear to be getting worse each year.

Now is the time for taxpayers to insist that their elected officials enact regulations that will prevent new power lines from being placed above ground and provide for a gradual under grounding of existing overhead lines.

For the Julian area, officials that should be able to assist us in this effort are:

County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, 1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego 92101, e-mail –

Senator Dianne Feinstein, 750 B Street, Suite 1030, San Diego 92101, e-mail – feinstein.senate.gov.

Congressman Darrell Issa, 1800 Thibodo Road, Suite 310, Vista, 92083, e-mail –

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, State Capitol Building, Sacramento 95814, e-mail –

State Senator Dennis Hollingsworth, 1870 Cordell Court, Suite 107, El Cajon 92020.

We must be adamant in our demands. Simply sacrificing more taxpayer dollars, homes and lives to continue fighting fires caused or made worse by overhead power lines is not a wise approach and we need to inform our public representatives that they must get to the root of the problem if they wish to continue to speak for us.