# Avista prepares for wildfire season

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**Announces Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) added to utility's wildfire plan**

SPOKANE, Wash., May 07, 2024 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Avista is adding a new strategy to its wildfire mitigation plan. The utility announced today at a press conference with regional partners that if extreme weather conditions are forecast, like low humidity and strong winds, Avista may turn off power in specific locations to help protect public safety. This is called a Public Safety Power Shutoff, or PSPS.

"Based on learning from other utilities who have implemented PSPS, it would only be used in the most extreme weather conditions," said Heather Rosentrater, Avista President and COO. "We have other operational changes we can make, and we have been working for years to make our system stronger and more resilient. However, as we encounter more extreme weather events, we want to be prepared for all possibilities, and this is now a best practice in our industry."

For more than 20 years, Avista has made temporary changes to power line operations during the summer. This is called Fire Safety Mode. During normal operations, the lines are set to try several times to clear a fault, reducing outage times. In Fire Safety Mode, to reduce the risk of fire, the line stays out until Avista crews determine it's safe. Only then will they turn it back on. This can require more time to restore service but decreases the potential fire danger.

In 2022, Avista enhanced Fire Safety Mode by pairing it with a fire-weather monitoring system. This allows system operators and field managers to make more informed decisions to reduce fire risk. They can change the sensitivity further on a line if high winds or other high wildfire risk conditions are predicted.

"Our enhanced protection settings are the right safety measure for most of the forecasted weather conditions we see in our region," added Rosentrater. "Preparing our company and our customers for the possibility of a PSPS event is protection for the future. We need to be ready for anything, and safety is guiding our plans."

Building on existing prevention and response strategies, Avista committed to a comprehensive 10-year Wildfire Resiliency Plan in 2020. Avista has completed grid hardening projects in areas of high fire risk. Some of these projects include replacing wooden transmission poles with steel, installing a special fire-retardant wire mesh around the bottom of wood poles and replacing wooden crossarms on poles with a stronger fiberglass to better protect the electrical equipment and reduce the likelihood of spark-ignition sources. The company has also increased vegetation management to reduce contact between trees and power lines.

"We applaud Avista's proactive approach to mitigating fire risk," said Tom Jenkins, Cheney Fire Chief and Chair of the Inland Empire Fire Chiefs Association. "By prioritizing safety and preparedness, they have demonstrated a commendable commitment to protecting our communities."

Spokane Mayor Lisa Brown was also in attendance to support the new strategy adding, "As we have seen an increased threat to our safety from wildfire, we all need to come together as a community on prevention efforts."

Ara Andrea, Idaho Statewide Shared Stewardship Coordinator from Idaho Department of Lands spoke about the department's wildfire prevention, risk mitigation and suppression programs. "The Idaho Department of Lands works collaboratively with partners to carry out fire risk-mitigation projects, convey fire-prevention messaging and plan effective fire-suppression strategies. Our agency supports Avista's fire-resiliency program, which proactively reduces wildfire threats through grid-hardening and fuels-reduction project funding."

Avista is urging customers to prepare to get through an outage in hot summer weather safely. Customers are encouraged to make sure their contact information is up to date with Avista so they can be notified when the utility is considering a PSPS.

Learn more about Avista's plans and how you can be prepared at www.myavista.com/PSPS.

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Avista Utilities is involved in the production, transmission and distribution of energy. We provide energy services and electricity to 418,000 customers and natural gas to 382,000 customers in a service territory that covers 30,000 square miles in eastern Washington, northern Idaho and parts of southern and eastern Oregon, with a population of 1.7 million. Avista Utilities is an operating division of Avista Corp. (NYSE: AVA). For more information, please visit www.myavista.com.

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**Contact:**
Media: David Vowels, david.vowels@avistacorp.com
Avista 24/7 Media Access (509) 495-4174

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