

ELECTRICITY RELIABILITY AT APOLLO BAY

We're working hard to provide safe, reliable and affordable power to our customers. But we know that in the past few months, people and businesses in the Colac Otway region have not received the continuity of supplies they have come to expect from Powercor.

We'd like to let you know why and what we are doing to improve services as a result.

What happened?

Power to Apollo Bay is supplied by two feeders located through the Otways from the Colac Zone Substation. The heavily forested area means that outages can and do occur from vegetation, and is also why a bushfire safety device was installed in the region.

The bushfire safety device, known as a Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter (REFCL) has been operating in the Apollo Bay area since June 2019. The REFCL rollout was directed by the State Government in response to Black Saturday's Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission.

They are designed like a large safety switch and cut power almost instantaneously if a powerline comes in contact with the ground or a tree limb. This reduces the risks of live powerlines sparking and potentially causing fires.

Colac was the eighth zone substation in high bushfire risk areas of our network to receive this new technology.

The two feeders that supply Apollo Bay have an Auto Switchover Scheme in place to boost reliability. It is this scheme that enables power to be automatically redirected to flow in an alternative direction if a fault occurs on one of the high voltage feeders.

What does this mean?

The experience in the Apollo Bay region is that the REFCL bushfire safety device is not compatible with the Auto Switchover Scheme.

While REFCLs have been in Europe for other reasons, this is the first time in the world

the technology has been used in relation to fire safety measures. As a result, Powercor's program has involved significant research and development.

What are we doing?

In response to reliability concerns we have assessed the current fire danger risks in the region and have chosen to temporarily disable the REFCL. This has allowed Apollo Bay's Auto Switchover Scheme to be turned back on.

In parallel we are actively working with our suppliers and other industry bodies to innovate and develop a permanent solution to this issue.

We will be monitoring the fire conditions weekly for any increase in bushfire risk as we head into summer and working closely with emergency services.

How will this benefit the community throughout the fire season?

Last summer showed that REFCLs are keeping communities safer. On Total Fire Ban days over the 2018-2019 summer, REFCLs activated 12 times on the Powercor network potentially preventing fire starts from our assets. In order to protect the forests and communities of the Otway region, REFCLs will be operating during the 2019-2020 summer.

We will continue exploring different solutions to ensure we can continue to maintain reliability for the community while operating the REFCL bushfire

safety device, working closely with emergency service agencies to assess the fire danger risks in our regions. This will allow us to determine when we switch the REFCL back on.

We will keep informing customers via SMS of any unplanned outages and will again be promoting a safety program over the summer to help people prepare for the potential for blackouts in extreme weather events.

Map: Electricity feeder network for the Apollo Bay region



If you'd like further information, please call us on 13 22 06
or visit our website at: www.powercor.com.au/REFCL

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