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Works ramp up to deliver Stawell bushfire safety device

Powercor has begun conducting significant upgrades to Stawell's electricity network as part of its work to install world-leading technology to improve the safety of powerlines in high bushfire-risk areas.

A device known as a Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter, or REFCL, is being installed at the Stawell Zone Substation and is a major part of Powercor's efforts to improve bushfire safety in the region.

The REFCL will protect more than 537km of powerlines, including in Stawell itself, Pomonal, Halls Gap, Landsborough, Rupanyup, Dadswell's Bridge, Minyip and surrounds.

Once installed, the REFCL will protect these powerlines by acting like a giant safety switch, reducing voltage levels within milliseconds to mitigate the risk of fire if a tree strikes powerlines or lines hit the ground.

Over coming months, Powercor crews will be upgrading parts of the local electricity distribution network to ensure powerlines and other infrastructure is compatible with the device.

Powercor REFCL program delivery manager, Andrew Bailey, said works would involve some planned power outages to safely upgrade assets and Powercor would notify customers directly in advance of any planned outages.

"We understand that any power outages are inconvenient and we take steps to minimise the impact on the community as much as possible," Mr Bailey said.

"This is about making our communities safer and we thank customers for their understanding as we work to further improve the safety of our network."

REFCL technology is being rolled out in response to the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission recommendations and Powercor has already installed them at 16 high bushfire risk areas.

"REFCLs have reduced the risk of fires starting from power assets, and this summer alone they have activated numerous times across the Powercor network," Mr Bailey said.

"REFCL technology works and is keeping communities safer."

The Stawell REFCL is due to be complete before next summer and Powercor is on track to complete the overall program rollout by April 2023, in line with the legislated requirements.

Powercor has completed its other VBRC commitments, including the installation of more than 1,200 enhanced Automatic Circuit Reclosures (ACRs), 220,000 armour rods and vibration dampers and 1,800 line spacers.

For more information about REFCLs visit <https://www.powercor.com.au/safety/bushfire-mitigation-program/rapid-earth-fault-current-limiter/>

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For more information call Powercor's media line on (03) 9683 4342



Background – Powercor

Powercor is the naming rights partner for the Stawell Gift Carnival for five years, beginning in 2021.

Powercor moves electricity to and from more than 843,000 homes and businesses across the western suburbs of Melbourne and through central and western Victoria to the South Australian and New South Wales borders.

Our network is made up of almost 90,000 kilometres of wires and more than 588,000 poles and associated infrastructure, and supports 11,200 medium, commercial and industrial businesses and 106,500 small businesses.

Powercor is playing a critical role in supporting Victoria's clean energy transition. More than 1765MW of solar, wind and other renewable generation is connected to our network, which is home to four of Victoria's Renewable Energy Zones, while 21 per cent of Powercor's residential customers are benefitting from rooftop solar.

We are at the forefront of finding innovative ways to support Victoria's energy transition through projects and trials investigating community batteries, smart charging for electric vehicles, and microgrids and other community energy projects.

Our teams operate from 13 depots, our Bendigo-based customer contact centre and our CBD headquarters, to deliver reliable, safe and affordable electricity by operating, managing and maintaining all network assets and metering services. This means managing a network that is reliable and safe, particularly in relation to bushfire risks.

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