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**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Order Instituting Rulemaking Regarding
Emergency Disaster Relief Program.

Rulemaking 18-03-011
(Issued March 22, 2018)

**COMMENTS OF CALIFORNIA WATER ASSOCIATION
ON THE ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER'S RULING AND PROPOSAL**

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April 3, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	NEED FOR RESILIENT NETWORKS AND OUTREACH	1
III.	PROPOSAL FOR ENSURING RESILIENCY IN COMMUNICATIONS PROVIDER NETWORKS	2
	A. Definition of Resiliency	2
	B. Backup Power Requirement	3
	C. Emergency Operations Plans	4
IV.	CONCLUSION.....	4

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Order Instituting Rulemaking to Establish a
Framework and Processes for Assessing the
Affordability of Utility Service.

Rulemaking 18-03-011
(Issued March 22, 2018)

**COMMENTS OF CALIFORNIA WATER ASSOCIATION
ON THE ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER’S RULING AND PROPOSAL**

I. INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to Article 1 of the Rules of Practice and Procedure of the California Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) and the March 6, 2020 *Assigned Commissioner’s Ruling and Proposal* (“Ruling”), California Water Association (“CWA”) respectfully submits these comments on President Batjer’s proposal for maintaining resilient and dependable communications networks (“Proposal”), which is attached as Appendix A to the Ruling. CWA is a statewide association representing the interests of water utilities subject to the Commission’s jurisdiction that serve safe, reliable, high-quality drinking water to approximately six million Californians.

As the Commission considers best practices for maintaining resilient and dependable communications networks, it must take into account the impact of communications outages on water utilities and the importance of maintaining water service during periods of emergency. CWA generally supports the measures set forth in President Batjer’s proposal, but recommends that the Commission include explicit requirements to ensure that water utilities and other entities necessary for public safety are included in communication and outreach plans.

II. NEED FOR RESILIENT NETWORKS AND OUTREACH

CWA agrees that “a reliable and resilient communications network is urgently needed to ensure public health and safety.”¹ A reliable communications network is an essential element in the normal operation of the water systems. Water utilities rely on communications networks to

¹ Ruling, p. 2.

monitor facilities, maintain contact with field personnel, and communicate both internally and externally. Losing the ability to communicate with crews or vendors for fuel, chemicals and other supplies during an earthquake, wildfire or PSPS could have serious consequences. Indeed, failure of any of these functions would hinder water utilities' ability to provide safe and reliable service. During times of emergency, it is crucial that communications service providers coordinate and remain in contact with water utilities, since a disruption in water service can lead to unsanitary conditions and health risks.

Communications network outages create significant challenges for water utilities. For example, during a 2019 public safety power shutoff ("PSPS") event, one water utility experienced a failure in the cellular network used for remote monitoring of tanks and treatment facilities. This monitoring is crucial in order to assess water quality and supply issues. Due to the cellular network failure, the water utility had to send field personnel into areas under mandatory evacuation orders to obtain critical information necessary for uninterrupted water service.

Water utilities provide water to first responders for fire protection and suppression, as well as essential drinking water service. To ensure that these water services are available during an emergency, the Commission should require communications providers to establish and maintain certain levels of backup power and to coordinate with entities essential to public safety, such as water utilities.

III. PROPOSAL FOR ENSURING RESILIENCY IN COMMUNICATIONS PROVIDER NETWORKS

A. Definition of Resiliency

The Proposal defines "resiliency" as "the ability to recover from or adjust easily to adversity or change," which is achieved through a variety of strategies, including communication and coordination.² The Proposal accurately notes that communications network operators "that establish clear lines of communication and coordinate with other Providers, other utilities, emergency responders, and the public are best positioned to maintain and restore service after a

² Proposal, p. 3.

power outage or disaster.”³ For the sake of clarity, CWA believes that it would be helpful to use the “public safety partners” term from the de-energization guidelines in discussions related to communications and coordination.

In D.19-05-042, the Commission adopted the following definition of “public safety partners”:

The term ‘public safety partners’ refers to first/emergency responders at the local, state and federal level, water, wastewater and communication service providers, community choice aggregators (CCAs), affected publicly-owned utilities (POUs)/electrical cooperatives, the Commission, CalOES and CAL FIRE.⁴

These public safety partners receive priority notification during de-energization events. In the context of the de-energization guidelines, it was important to define public safety partners so that the obligations of energy providers with respect to notification and outreach were clear. Adopting a similar definition in this proceeding will provide the specificity necessary for communications network providers to develop communication and coordination plans, and for the Commission to determine compliance with its directives.

B. Backup Power Requirement

CWA’s supports President Batjer’s proposal to require communications network operators to have on-site emergency backup power to support all essential communications equipment necessary to maintain service for a minimum of 72 hours immediately following a power outage.⁵ As noted above, water utilities rely on communications networks to maintain service, communicate with personnel and customers, and receive emergency notifications and critical information. Ensuring that communications network operators have reliable backup power will help water utilities maintain efficient and reliable service during an emergency.

³ *Id.*

⁴ D.19-05-042, p. 73.

⁵ Proposal, p. 3.

CWA also supports requiring backup power plans to identify the ability to support real time reporting on system outages.⁶ To effectively manage their systems and avoid potential harmful disruptions in service, water utilities must have access to information regarding network outages. This will allow water utilities to deploy resources or modify operations as needed to continue to provide safe and reliable water service and to maintain the availability of water for fire suppression or other emergency measures.

C. Emergency Operations Plans

The purpose of the proposed requirements for emergency operations plans is to “ensure that all Providers develop plans, that the plans have uniform requirements across all Providers, and that the plans are shared with the relevant emergency responders.”⁷ CWA recommends that the Commission expand the scope of these plans to also include communication and coordination with public safety partners, including water utilities, as defined above.

For example, the Proposal would require communications service providers to provide their emergency operations and plans and emergency contact information to “state emergency response organizations and local emergency response organizations within their service territories.”⁸ The Proposal would also require communications service providers to give emergency responders precise ZIP code updates of damaged or destroyed facilities, status of facilities on backup up, and facilities that are offline. The Commission should modify the Proposal to extend these provisions to include public safety partners in recognition of their critical role in ensuring public safety during an emergency.

IV. CONCLUSION

CWA supports President Batjer’s proposal to adopt resiliency and responsiveness requirements for communications service providers. CWA respectfully urges the Commission to adopt the modifications discussed above to address the impact of communication network

⁶ *Id.*, p. 4.

⁷ Proposal, p. 6.

⁸ *Id.*

outages on water utilities and to better ensure the availability of water service during periods of emergency.

Respectfully submitted,

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