Western holds public safety power shutoff forum

RIVERSIDE, CA – On Monday, Sept. 16, Western Municipal Water District held a forum on planning and communication related to Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS), the proactive power outages used by Southern California Edison (SCE) and other large utilities to help prevent wildfires.

The forum, at Western’s operational headquarters in Riverside, featured a presentation by SCE and two panel discussions: one on preparation to mitigate the effects of PSPS, and another on effective communications during PSPS events and other emergencies. Nearly 60 personnel from regional utility providers and other public agencies attended the forum.

California has authorized SCE to cut customers’ electric power – for hours or days, if necessary – to keep the utility’s equipment from igniting wildfires in hot, dry, windy weather. While intentional outages are not new, communities have yet to grapple with PSPS events of the length and scope contemplated today.

“How big of an event are we preparing for?” Craig Miller, Western’s general manager, asked at the forum.

During the half-day of dialogue, stakeholders explored this and other questions. Despite advanced weather forecasting, no one, including SCE, can predict how widespread any intentional outages may need to be.

At the forum, SCE Senior Business Analyst Luis Lara told the audience – including representatives of water agencies, cities, the Riverside Fire Department, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the offices of state and local elected officials – that Edison continues to enhance weather monitoring, upgrade wiring and equipment, and take other steps to reduce the effects of PSPS.

In the panel discussions that followed, water and fire officials and SCE shared planning methods – including GIS mapping by Western that overlays the district’s facilities with SCE circuits and high-risk fire areas – along with best practices for risk management, PSPS preparedness, and communicating with stakeholders before, during and after a PSPS event or other emergency.

Western is committed to reliably ensuring water and sewer service for its customers at all times, including during emergencies.

For more information about planning for emergencies, visit www.wmwd.com/474/Emergency-Preparedness. For details about PSPS, visit www.sce.com/safety/wildfire/psps.

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Western Municipal Water District provides water supply, wastewater disposal and water resource management to the public in a safe, reliable, environmentally sensitive and financially responsible