

Legislature Considers Governor's Proposal to Ease Wildfire Liability Standards for Utilities, Rural County Representatives of California Says

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July 28, 2018 - Earlier this week, the Wildfire Preparedness and Response Legislative Conference Committee (Committee) held an oversight hearing to begin laying out the issues the Committee will discuss before the end of August, when the legislative session comes to a close. The Committee was formed earlier this month to tackle various issues surrounding the ever-growing wildfire problem in California, driven largely by the devastation of last year's October and December fires in Northern and Southern California.

Since formation of the Committee, the issues under discussion have largely surrounded the role of California's investor owned utilities (IOUs) in preventing and preparing for wildfires. Governor Brown released proposed legislative language on Tuesday that would pose stricter requirements on IOUs with respect to construction and maintenance of their utility lines, development and approval of wildfire safety plans, and double the modest fine of \$50,000 to a still modest \$100,000 for safety violations.

While RCRC supports many of the Governor's proposals, his plan also includes a controversial provision to ease the way courts apply liability standards to IOUs when they are found in violation of state statute and legally negligent in causing a wildfire. The Governor's proposal has the potential to shift much of the costs to victims of fires, local governments, and insurers, potentially driving insurers who are already canceling and non-renewing policies in high fire risk areas out of those areas entirely. Many stakeholders at Wednesday's hearing even questioned the constitutionality of such a provision.

The Committee will resume its work once the Legislative session reconvenes on August 6, 2018.

Source: Rural County Representatives of California

<http://goldrushcam.com/sierrasuntimes/index.php/news/local-news/14869-legislature-considers-governor-s-proposal-to-ease-wildfire-liability-standards-for-utilities-rural-county-representatives-of-california-says>