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So-Cal Fires Force Key Transmission Line Out of Service

(Folsom, CA) Southern California firestorms burning under a key 500-kilovolt transmission link, tripped the line out of service this morning, preventing more than 900 megawatts of electricity from reaching San Diego. The Southwest Power Link (SWPL) is the import point for power from Arizona into Southern California.

Close coordination between the California Department of Forestry (CDF), San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) and the California Independent System Operator (ISO) helped prevent the loss of that line from causing a power outage for electric customers in San Diego. Fire and utility officials at the scene saw the fire approaching the critical power line and issued a warning to CDF headquarters in Sacramento where an ISO employee is stationed to report information to grid operators in Folsom. They were able to anticipate the situation and dispatch enough local power plants to make up for the possible loss of the line, which did, in fact, fail shortly after 10:00 a.m.

In addition to the SWPL, numerous transmission lines have tripped out of service for varying lengths of time since Friday, when the fires began. At this point, the Southwest Power Link is the only major transmission line that remains out of service, but the fire situation is very dynamic. Many more lines in Southern California are still threatened.

Along with fire-related transmission problems, Southern California Edison (SCE) is reporting that more than 600 power poles on their lower voltage, local distribution systems have been burned. SDG&E also reports loss of some distribution facilities. Between the two utilities, between 70,000 and 85,000 customers in Southern California are without power.

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The ISO is still urging conservation in Southern California. Reducing the demand for energy reduces the number of potential customers that suffer outages if transmission lines do trip out of service. The California ISO is asking all electrical customers in Southern California to reduce usage today, especially over the peak hours between 1:00 and 6:00 p.m.

However, due to poor air quality in the region because of heavy smoke, residents may need to continue to use their air conditioner today to prevent health problems. The ISO suggests other ways to conserve power, including turning off unneeded lights and appliances, turning off pool filters and pumps, turning off sprinklers, and avoiding use of washers, dryers and dishwashers through the peak afternoon hours.

The California ISO is a not-for-profit public benefit corporation charged with managing the flow of electricity along California’s open-market wholesale power grid. The mission of the California ISO is to safeguard the reliable delivery of electricity, and ensure equal access to a 25,000 circuit miles of “electron highway”. As the impartial operator of the wholesale power grid in the state, the California ISO conducts a small portion of the bulk power markets. These markets are used to allocate space on the transmission lines, maintain operating reserves and match supply with demand in real time.

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