10 March, 2021

Works begin to deliver Hamilton bushfire safety device

The final stage of one of the largest bushfire mitigation programs rolled out by Powercor in Victoria's south-west region is underway, with world-leading technology being installed in Hamilton.

Powercor crews have begun upgrading the local electricity network to accommodate the installation of a Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter (REFCL) at the Hamilton Zone Substation. It is the fifth and final location in the region to have the device installed and will improve the safety of powerlines in the high bushfire-risk area.

The device will protect more than 1,467km of powerlines serving 13,300 customers from Casterton in the west to Glenthompson in the east, Mooralla in the north to Macarthur in the south.

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.

Powercor REFCL program delivery manager, Andrew Bailey, said the devices were providing added safety measure, reducing the risk of fires starting from power assets.

"We've had REFCL technology on our network now for three years and these devices are keeping communities safer," Mr Bailey said.

Two REFCLs are already operating in Colac and Camperdown, and installation of the devices are being finalised in Koroit and Terang. When all South-West devices are completed, a network of 5,573km of high voltage powerlines will be protected, including 28 feeder lines covering 50,000 customers.

Over coming months, Powercor crews will be upgrading parts of the local electricity distribution network to ensure powerlines and other infrastructure are compatible with the device. Work will also occur at the Hamilton Zone Substation.

"We will need to conduct some planned power outages to allow our crews to safely upgrade the network and will 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."

"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 14 high bushfire risk areas.

The Hamilton REFCL is scheduled to be completed by April 2023, in line with legislated requirements.

Powercor has completed its other VBRC commitments, including the installation of more than 1200 enhanced Automatic Circuit Reclosures (ACRs), 220,000 armour rods and vibration dampers and 1800 line spacers.

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

ENDS

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

Background – Powercor

Powercor distributes electricity to 850,000 customers across the western suburbs of Melbourne and through central and western Victoria to the South Australian and New South Wales borders. Electricity is distributed in the region via a network comprising over 88,400 kilometres of wires, supported by more than 577,420 poles and associated infrastructure.

Residential households account for 86 per cent of connections. Our customers are dispersed over a wide geographic area in a density of just 12 people per square kilometre.

Our network also supports 11,200 medium, commercial and industrial businesses and 106,500 small businesses dominated by health care and social assistance, agriculture, forestry and fishing. These businesses generate 25 per cent of Victoria's Gross Domestic Product.

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.

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