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Media Release

Powercor to test new South-West bushfire safety device

Installation of bushfire safety technology to protect key parts of the South West has entered its final phase, with testing set to take place on the new device at the Koroit Zone Substation next week.

Once in-service, the Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter, or REFCL, will protect a broad area covering Koroit, Port Fairy, Killarney, parts of Warrnambool, Dennington, Yambuk and surrounds.

Testing will begin on Monday 1 February. No power outages are planned for the tests, but crews are in place to respond if unplanned outages occur.

Powercor Manager REFCL Program Delivery Andrew Bailey said the introduction of REFCL technology for the South West represented a huge leap in bushfire safety for the power network.

“This testing is an important part of the commissioning phase for our Koroit REFCL. It allows us to identify whether any further upgrades or changes are needed on the network to support the safety device, and confirm that the REFCL is operating in line with the performance levels required.” Mr Bailey said.

“While no outages are planned with this work, we have crews ready to respond as quickly and as safely as possible to get power back on to homes and businesses if unplanned outages do happen.”

This testing comes as REFCL technology was confirmed to be meeting and exceeding expectations with regards to bushfire mitigation, in a recent report commissioned for safety regulator Energy Safe Victoria.

Koroit will be one of five locations in the region to be protected by a REFCL, with devices already installed in Camperdown and Colac.

In March, a device in Terang is due to be commissioned, while construction work will start on the final South West-based REFCL, to be located at Hamilton.

Work started on the Koroit REFCL last June and 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.

Mr Bailey said on top of the work at the Koroit Zone Substation, crews worked for six months preparing the network for the introduction of the new technology, replacing cables and making other equipment upgrades at 1023 sites across the network, from Tyrendarra in the west to Framlingham in the east.

There were also about 200 localised planned outages required for crews to safely conduct the upgrade works in the second half of 2020.

“I’d like to thank all of our customers for their patience and understanding as we’ve worked on this significant safety upgrade for the network in the South West,” Mr Bailey said.

REFCL devices operate like a large safety switch on the network and minimise the chance of a spark occurring if a powerline comes into contact with the ground or a tree limb.

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



REFCL devices are already installed in 14 zone substations across the Powercor network, with those devices operating 240 times already this summer.

Last summer on Total Fire Ban days, REFCLs activated 13 times for permanent faults, 22 other faults and 75 temporary faults.

“REFCLs are working and are keeping communities safer,” Mr Bailey said.

Powercor is on track for its scheduled rollout of REFCL devices across central and western Victoria, which is due for completion in 2023 as per the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission (VBRC) recommendations.

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/>

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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.

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