30 March, 2021

Safety upgrades for Mildura electricity network

Work has started on an advanced bushfire safety device being installed on Mildura's local electricity network.

Powercor crews have begun upgrading the network to accommodate the installation of a Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter (REFCL) at the Merbein Zone Substation.

The works, along with those at the Zone Substation itself, will improve the safety of powerlines in the high bushfire-risk area.

The device will protect more than 363km of powerlines serving 10,000 customers across much of Mildura's central and western areas, and west along the river as far as Cullulleraine.

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 an added safety measure, reducing the risk of fires starting from power assets.

"We've had REFCL technology on our network since September 2016 and these devices are keeping communities safer," Mr Bailey said.

REFCL devices are already installed in 16 locations across the Powercor network, including in Ballarat, Bendigo, Maryborough, Charlton and Ararat.

Over coming months, Powercor crews will be upgrading parts of the Mildura electricity distribution network to ensure powerlines and other infrastructure are compatible with the device. Work will also occur at the Merbein 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 16 high bushfire risk areas.

The Merbein REFCL is scheduled to be completed by September 2021, ahead of the legislated requirement to complete the program by April 2023.

Powercor has completed its other VBRC commitments, including the installation of more than 1,200 enhanced Automatic Circuit Reclosures (ACRs), 220,000 armour rods and vibration dampers and 1,800 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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For more information call Powercor's media line on (03) 9683 4342

Background – Powercor

Powercor moves electricity to and from more than 843,000 homes and businesses across the western suburbs of Melbourne and through central and western Victoria to the South Australian and New South Wales borders.

Our network is made up of almost 90,000 kilometres of wires and more than 588,000 poles and associated infrastructure, and supports 11,200 medium, commercial and industrial businesses and 106,500 small businesses.

Powercor is playing a critical role in supporting Victoria's clean energy transition. More than 1765MW of solar, wind and other renewable generation is connected to our network, which is home to four of Victoria's Renewable Energy Zones, while 21 per cent of Powercor's residential customers are benefitting from rooftop solar.

We are at the forefront of finding innovative ways to support Victoria's energy transition through projects and trials investigating community batteries, smart charging for electric vehicles, and microgrids and other community energy projects.

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