

No quick fix for power grid

December 15, 2015 [David Harrison News](#)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-04/faulty-powerlines-could-spark-another-marysville-fire/7067152>

COMMENT

UNITED Energy recently letterboxed areas of the Mornington Peninsula with a letter informing householders of the diligent work it is doing in supplying safe and reliable power.

Some readers were less than impressed. Overnight a power cut had set every electronic clock in the district flashing. Again.

Also flashing, at the top of White Hill Rd and at the Red Hill village end of Arthurs Seat Rd, were the large signs advising that power line work was continuing “July to December”.

The month had recently been revised from “November”. Will it become “January” in a week or two?

About this time it was reported that many kilometres of United Energy overhead power lines needed to be replaced on the peninsula because they posed a bushfire risk.

And on December 1 *The News* reported that “linemen are scrambling to replace up to 30 kilometres of faulty power lines on the Mornington Peninsula amid fears they could cause bushfires”.

Several concerned residents wrote to United Energy stating there was “evidence that the ABC [twisted aerial bundled cable] power lines are faulty and explode periodically causing fires”.

They said a bushfire on 9 November was “a consequence of a failure of your power lines in Main Creek Rd”.

United Energy did not respond to *The News* before deadline – including questions about the safety of the ABC cable, some of which is barely five years old and said to have faulty insulation.

The company, which is responsible for all the peninsula’s poles and wires, tells a glowing story on its website.

Under the heading “Bushfire mitigation” it states: We are committed to operating our network in full compliance with the requirements of the Act and regulations administered by Energy Safe Victoria (ESV).

“Due to prevailing weather conditions and country environments conducive to bushfires, we acknowledge the need to act proactively in designing and operating our assets to minimise the possibility of a bushfire ignition.

“... [W]e acknowledge our responsibility to the local community to consider all relevant practical technologies available to minimise bushfire risk.”

Its website is silent on problems with its poles and wires. Some wires are estimated to be up to 30 years old.

It is also silent on what is believed to be a growing power supply crisis in the Blairgowrie-Portsea area.

The electricity grid problem coincides with release of a major new study that has found that humans are responsible for some 70 per cent of bushfires in south-east Australia.

The International Journal of Wildland Fund stated that population density explained the fire pattern in NSW and Victoria, the ABC reported.

“The higher the population density the more ignitions you get,” according to lead author Kathryn Collins of the University of Wollongong’s centre for environmental risk management of bushfires.

Official data from more than 113,000 bushfires between 1997 and 2009 across the two states indicated that 47 per cent were from accidental causes such as cigarettes, escaped burn-offs and campfires or sparks from equipment or powerlines.

Forty per cent were deliberately lit and 13 per cent were caused by lightning strikes, the study found.

The cause of 31 per cent of fires was undetermined.

The News reported Nepean MP Martin Dixon saying the Red Hill and Main Ridge power lines came from a “faulty batch that had not lasted as long as they were expected to and had already caused fires” – even though extra insulation was supposed to improve their fire safety capabilities.

The insulation appeared to be perishing quickly and breaking away and exposing the wires, which he described as “a recipe for disaster”.

Mr Dixon, scheduled to get a full briefing from United Energy last week, said he would be seeking to meet Energy and Resources Minister Lily D’Ambrosio and the Ombudsman on the issue.

On Friday afternoon Mr Dixon issued the following: “Further to my statements in the Parliament I have had no response from Minister D’Ambrosio in relation to replacing these faulty cables as a priority, and I am still awaiting a more detailed briefing prior to Christmas from United Energy officers.”

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Faulty powerlines on Mornington Peninsula could spark another 'Marysville' fire residents say

Updated yesterday at 9:09pm Mon 4 Jan 2016, 9:09pm



Photo: Powerlines at Red Hill are causing concerns for residents who fear a Black Saturday fire could be sparked by faulty powerlines. ([ABC News](#))

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-04/faulty-powerlines-could-spark-another-marysville-fire/7067152>

Map: [Red Hill 3937](#)

Residents on the Mornington Peninsula are worried a spark from faulty power lines in the Red Hill and Main Ridge area could cause a major fire.

The Country Fire Authority has dealt with five fires in those two areas sparked by power line faults in the past year.

It is believed faulty, so-called aerial bundled cables (ABC) caused a fire in Red Hill late last year and another one nearby last week.

The small grass fire last week happened across the road from Kevin Keele's home.

"The cabling had melted and some molten metal had fallen to the ground and started the grass fire," he said.

Fortunately, the fire was quickly put out but Mr Keele remains concerned.

"If the same thing had happened in a side street or a less-populated area, it could have been horrendously dangerous," he said.

"Our worry is that we might be looking at another Marysville or Kinglake situation.

"You only have to look around here to see how dry it is and this is one of the greener parts of Red Hill. Yeah [I'm] really worried."

Resident Peter Hercules called it "a recipe for a Black Saturday".

"It's a fact that these powerlines are exploding," he said.

"In my view there is incontrovertible evidence that there is a higher fire risk because of these power lines."

The Bushfires Royal Commission found five of the 11 major fires that swept the state on Black Saturday in 2009 were caused by electricity faults or failings.

It recommended the progressive replacement of power lines by insulating the cables or burying them underground.

That program is continuing, Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley said.

"It's about five years into a 10-year program and that means continuous improvement," he said.

"For a community member, if they see something that's not right with their power lines, ring triple-0."

United Energy concedes the original cables are not lasting as long as expected in some cases.

"In some cases the original non-metallic screened HVABC [high voltage aerial bundled cables] is not meeting our expected design life of approximately 25 years," the company said in a statement.

"A program to replace original HVABC with new metallic screened HVABC on the network is already in place.

"The first stage of the replacement program is nearing completion and we have accelerated the replacement of the remaining HVABC in areas of higher risk."