



Re: Survivor Compensation & Powerline Ignitions.

Good afternoon Chair Meek and members of the Committee:

I have worked on wildfire issues for nearly two decades. I have tracked and investigated the sources of the fires, documented the impacts from the fires, assisted with the recovery and followed the cases filed since the fires. For this hearing, I have pulled together a list of power line ignited fires in Oregon, as well as key issues and facts from the Pacificorp trial over the Santiam, South Obenchain, Two Four Two, and Echo Mountain Fires - **and I have submitted that information into the record.**

I know people who lost everything in these fires, and they need our support. Their lives will never be the same. Any settlements or awards resulting from cases holding those responsible should be paid to them in full without triggering tax liability. They have had to find temporary housing, struggle with losing everything, hire counsel at significant cost, and face more than most of us can imagine. If this bill does not pass, they will likely end up with far less than fair compensation. This is why I support SB 1520, a bill that provides tax relief for Oregonians who lost their homes and had their lives upended by



power line ignited fires. This bill seeks to treat payments to fire victims for what they are compensation for their loss, suffering and pain which was forced upon them by the carelessness of others. They need that compensation to rebuild their lives, we need this bill to avoid suddenly bumping up their income for the year, forcing them into higher tax brackets, jeopardizing essential benefits like health insurance discounts.

I also write today because fire survivors and all Oregonians would like to see us ***do everything we can to reduce or eliminate the chances of power line ignited fires in future east wind events***, which we can expect more of in the future.

As the climate warms, extended drought and heat events in the United States are driving an increase in acres burned and homes lost to wildfire. The most devastating wildfires happen when dry winds carry embers long distances, start new spot fires and enter into communities and ignite homes. **The burning homes then become the fuel that ignites other nearby homes, causing mass conflagrations.**

For example, the 2018 Camp Fire burned over 18,000 structures in and around the town of Paradise, California, and took 85 lives. The 2020 Labor Day Fires in Oregon burned over 5,000 homes. The recent fires in Maui burned Lahaina, 97 lives were lost and around a dozen people are still missing. Over the decade ending in 2020, the western US suffered a 246 percent increase in structures lost to wildfires. To prevent community destruction, experts in wildfire, forests and home safety are telling us that we need to



reduce human ignitions, and focus on preparing communities to be ignition resistant before fire comes.

Powerline fires have been and continue to be responsible for mass urban fire conflagrations in Oregon, across the West and in Hawaii, including Tubbs (Santa Rosa, CA), Camp (Paradise, CA), Archie Creek, (Umpqua River Basin, Oregon), Holiday Farm Fire (McKenzie River Basin, Oregon), Slater Fire (Happy Camp, Oregon), Santiam Canyon Fires (Gates, Mill City and Lyons, Oregon), Echo Mountain Complex (Otis, Oregon), 242 Fire (Chiloquin, Oregon), South Obenchain Fire (Jackson County, Oregon), Babb (Malden, WA), Marshall (Boulder, CO), Lahaina (Maui), Grey Fire (Spokane, WA).



Since 2015, energized power lines have been responsible for 7 of 20 of California's most destructive fires. Since 2017 PG&E has been blamed for more than 30 wildfires that wiped out more than 23,000 homes and businesses and killed more than 100 people. On average powerline ignited fires are 10 times the size of fires ignited by other sources. Why? Because these fires are often ignited during wind events. Since 2020, Pacificorp has been responsible for other fires in Oregon (McKinney). In 2023, an Oregon jury awarded damages against Pacificorp for the Santiam Canyon, 242, South Obenchain, Echo Mountain Complex fires. More recently, Pacificorp has settled suits filed against it (e.g. Archie Creek fire).

In sum, I support providing relief for survivors and doing everything we can to stop ignitions from occurring, particularly powerline ignitions during wind events. And we need to ensure Oregonians who are burned up by the negligence of utility operators are compensated. To that end, I write to say that I also ask you to take a look at the policies governing powerline ignitions in HB 4100, which was introduced this session. This represents an effort to have Oregon catch up to California in terms of regulations

around reporting ignitions from power utility equipment, and to provide fair compensation for fire survivors who have lost their homes and properties in these fires.

Oregon does not require immediate reporting of powerline ignitions, and reports cannot be used as evidence in investigations or by survivors seeking legal remedies. California, in stark contrast, requires immediate reporting of all power line ignitions, and the reports may be used to hold utilities accountable for these ignitions.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph Bloemers". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ralph Bloemers

Director of Fire Safe Communities

Green Oregon Alliance

