

WESTERN POWER — POLE-TOP FIRES

583. Hon STEVE MARTIN to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Energy:

I refer to pole-top fires on Western Power's electricity network.

- (1) How many poles has Western Power identified as requiring remediation work as at 30 April 2023?
- (2) How many poles have been remediated since 1 July 2022?
- (3) Noting that a safety incident led to a three-year pause in live line treatment from the ground, why did it take Western Power three years to find an alternative and safer practice?
- (4) What is the backlog of unmaintained poles as a result of that three-year pause?

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question. This long answer has been provided to me by the Minister for Energy.

- (1) Pole-top fire mitigation is an annual program of work. Over the next four years, 2024–25 to 2027–28, Western Power plans to remediate approximately 120 000 locations.
- (2) Approximately 2 000 locations have been remediated since 1 July 2022 through live line washing and siliconing, using helicopter and insulator/crossarm replacement at locations with high/extreme fire consequence ratings.
- (3) In January 2020, a Western Power employee was injured while undertaking land-based siliconing and washing of live, or energised, lines. The incident triggered Western Power to suspend live washing and siliconing by land-based crews until a safe practice or tool could be developed and implemented. As a result, mitigation measures have included insulator replacement and de-energised washing and siliconing, in conjunction with other asset replacement programs like conductor replacement, pole replacement and reinforcement, and vegetation management. De-energised silicon and washing affects customers' power supply as the work requires extended outages in terms of duration and, at times, over multiple days. It takes longer to complete the work, due to the switching required and the additional staff needed to do this work. All this increases the cost significantly.

Western Power therefore increased insulator replacements and network maintenance and renewal to improve power reliability where it could, to help prevent pole-top fires and associated consequences. In late 2022, Western Power carried out a trial to utilise helicopters for the live washing and siliconing program on the distribution network; this had previously only been done on live transmission lines. The trial focused on safety and effectiveness and Western Power engaged an independent consultant to facilitate a formal safety assessment. The outcomes and results of the trial were very positive and Western Power began the washing and siliconing of live powerlines via helicopter in late February 2023.

- (4) Approximately 30 000 sites.

The PRESIDENT: Honourable member, noting that the answer is long does nothing to address standing order 106. Similarly, asking open-ended questions does nothing to address standing order 105.