

August 9, 2021

Portland General Electric
Pacific Power
Idaho Power

Re: Utility disconnections and the upcoming heatwave

The signatory organizations respectfully request that your companies ensure that Oregonians have access to electric utility service during the heatwave that the National Weather Service forecasts for Oregon this week.¹ Electric utility service is key for people to be able to remain at safe temperatures at home when they have the equipment to do so. Given the vital nature of your service, the critical moment in our collective experience with COVID-19, and the devastating toll that the recent heatwave took on Oregonians, **pausing any disconnections scheduled for this week and reconnecting customers currently without power will save lives during the upcoming heatwave.**

We come to you with this request based on our collective experiences advocating for energy utility access for all Oregonians, specially those most vulnerable when facing disconnection. Our organizations work closely with Oregon's most vulnerable communities and have direct experience with the dire circumstances that many of Oregon's most vulnerable residents face, and with how the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed many of those residents into a further state of crisis. We have also seen how the impacts of the pandemic, like the impacts of climate change, have hit first and hardest rural communities, the elderly, low-income communities, and Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color communities. The heat dome that we experienced in June also disproportionately impacted members of vulnerable communities like the elderly and low-income people.

This week, we expect to see much of Oregon experiencing heat levels that will represent a high or very high risk for the entire population, especially those who are heat sensitive.² By voluntarily pausing disconnections and reconnecting customers in anticipation of the upcoming heatwave, you will protect the lives of the people that you serve. Oregonians are still mourning the devastating life losses as a result of the heat dome in late June.³ But that heat event happened at a time when the Public Utility Commission's moratorium on disconnections protected most Oregonians.

¹ National Weather Service, *Excessive Heat Watch* (Aug. 9, 2021) https://forecast.weather.gov/showsigwx.php?warnzone=ORZ006&warncounty=ORC051&firewxzone=ORZ604&local_place1=Lloyd%20Center%20OR&product1=Excessive+Heat+Watch&lat=45.5456&lon=-122.6575

² National Weather Service, *NWS Experimental HeatRisk* (consulted on Aug. 8, 2021) <https://www.wrh.noaa.gov/wrh/hil/?wfo=pqr>

³ A disproportionate number of heat related deaths took place in some of Oregon's most vulnerable communities like the elderly and people living in mobile home parks.

With the moratorium now over, even more people may be vulnerable than during the heatwave in June which caused an already precedent shattering number of heat related deaths. That increased vulnerability is not just a result of the heatwave but also of increasing the demand for space at cooling places at a time when COVID-19 numbers are on the rise. While the PUC maintained a set of protections, and your utilities and our organizations continue working to minimize the number of disconnections, people can easily fall through the cracks and end up disconnected from essential services. This week, falling through the cracks could endanger someone's life.

We thank you for considering our request and strongly encourage you to continue the commitment to protecting Oregonians that you courageously showed when in March of last year you voluntarily implemented a moratorium on disconnections. We look forward to continuing to work together on solutions to ensure our communities have essential utility services. In the meantime, we urge you to stop any disconnections slated for this week and to reconnect anyone without power in anticipation of the heatwave. Your actions today will reiterate your commitment to the communities you serve and will save lives.

Sincerely,

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CC: Public Utility Commission of Oregon