

Manhattan Beach, South Bay officials stand behind Muratsuchi's utility outage bill



Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi introduces AB 66 at a press conference Friday outside the Manhattan Beach Police/Fire facility, with support from Manhattan Beach councilmember Wayne Powell, Mayor David Lesser, Ranchos Palos Verdes Mayor Susan Brooks, SBCCOG Chairman Ralph Franklin and Ranchos Palos Verdes Councilman Jim Knight. Photo by Esther Kang

The Manhattan Beach City Council is among a group of officials to stand firmly behind Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi's new bill, which seeks to address and rectify the frequent, unplanned power outages plaguing a number of South Bay communities.

Under Assembly Bill 66, titled "Public Safety: Utility Outage Reporting," the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) would mandate electrical corporations to include information on its system reliability, such as the frequency and duration of service interruptions, in their annual

reliability reports. It would authorize the Commission to develop the geographic boundaries used in documenting the outages and require posting on its website.

With the support of Manhattan Beach as well as Rancho Palos Verdes, Rolling Hills Estate, the South Bay Cities Council of Government and CPUC, Muratsuchi (D-Torrance) is optimistic that the bill is on well on its way to the Governor's desk. Recently passed by the Senate Utilities, Energy and Communications Committee, AB 66 will be heard by the Senate Appropriations Committee early July.

"We are here to work with the electrical industry and our local communities to try to solve this problem," he said at a press conference Friday in the Manhattan Beach Civic Plaza. "... The bottom line [is], this bill increases transparency."

Manhattan Beach averages about one unplanned power outage every other month, said Mayor David Lesser. He explained that more often than not, the outages have stemmed not from unforeseen events, such as a car accident, a fallen tree or a mylar balloon caught in the wires, but from equipment and infrastructure failure, blown transformers and faulty equipment.

Alluding to a [power outage early this month](#) that left a majority of downtown homes, businesses and City Hall in the dark for several hours, Lesser said the impact of such power outages "on a small community like ours is significant."



Manhattan Beach Mayor David Lesser relays the impact of the June 1 power outage, which for several hours left downtown residents, businesses and City Hall in the dark. Photo by Esther Kang

“Our police/fire facility ... was put on generators,” he said. “Our police officers were dispatched to intersections to direct traffic in the dark, raising issues of safety for themselves as well as pedestrians and motorists ... [and] raising issues of how our police and firefighters can tend to their ordinary service calls.”

Ranchos Palos Verdes Mayor Susan Brooks relayed an even more urgent situation. Between 2008 and 2011, her city suffered more than 100 unscheduled outages, an average of 26 a year, which have not only frustrated residents and businesses but have raised concerns about open space fires.

“We have had three fires sparked as a result of electrical outages,” Brooks said. “ ... These are serious issues. Thousands of acres were burned terribly in one fire ... When these things happen, it really requires a lot of oversight.”

Muratsuchi said although Torrance, his longtime city of residence, doesn't suffer as many outages as other areas in the South Bay, he saw a pressing need for increased transparency and accountability for rate payers.

“This is an issue that I decided to embrace and champion after I started hearing first from the city of Ranchos Palos Verdes and then a growing number of South Bay communities,” Muratsuchi said. “It's a significant issue.”

In a press release, Southern California Edison said it is “neutral” on AB 66.

Edison stated that as part of a \$1 billion system-wide infrastructure upgrade, it is undertaking a five-year, \$50 million project to upgrade the power grid, built 50 to 60 years ago, throughout Rancho Palos Verdes, Palos Verdes Estates, Rolling Hills and Rolling Hills Estates. One project involves upgrading a distribution circuit in Ranchos Palos Verdes, replacing about 150 poles, 57, transformers and 2.75 miles of overhead power lines.

Inglewood Councilman Ralph Franklin, who chairs the South Bay Cities Council of Government, said while it's understood that electrical infrastructure in the South Bay is aging, unscheduled outages significantly impact quality of life as well as a city's economic development because “businesses will not locate to or stay in an area with unreliable electrical service.”

“We are in unison singing the same song,” Franklin said. “That is, the support of AB 66.”