

Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) — Bow Valley Corridor

Prepared for the BLLHA Board of Directors and Membership. The following questions and answers are compiled from written responses provided by [AltaLink](#) and [FortisAlberta](#) regarding Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) in the Bow Valley Corridor.

Q1. Looking back over the past 10 years, were there any weather events or wildfire-risk conditions in the Bow Valley where, with the benefit of hindsight, a PSPS would likely have been enacted? If so, are there specific dates or conditions that could be shared as examples?

AltaLink:

A PSPS event would be triggered when the Bow Valley has high wind gust (>60km/hr) AND a fire weather index (FWI) greater than 60. In the last 10 years, based on historical data, there has not been a time when a PSPS trigger in this area would have been met.

FortisAlberta:

Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) is a relatively new tool in Alberta. FortisAlberta introduced the program at the beginning of the 2025 wildfire season and AltaLink introduced the program prior to that in the Bow Valley Corridor. Based on historical data there weren't any instances where a FortisAlberta-initiated PSPS would have occurred in the past 10 years. Although historical fire-weather data provide valuable insight about wildfire risk, conditions change and should not be relied upon as a predictor of future outcomes. PSPS programs are designed for rare, extreme conditions where multiple high-risk factors overlap including: strong winds, very low humidity, dry vegetation (fuels), and elevated fire weather indices with rapid fire growth potential. These combined conditions create the potential for a fire to ignite and spread quickly, with significant impact to communities. Decisions to proactively turn off power are forward-looking and based on localized forecasts and real-time data rather than historical information.

Q2. How does the Bow Valley's electrical infrastructure and operating environment compare to other jurisdictions where PSPS programs are more established or used more frequently?

AltaLink:

The Banff and Lake Louise area is on a radial transmission line, meaning there is only one transmission line that feeds all of the power to the Town of Banff and Lake Louise area. There are 12 U.S. states and 2 Canadian provinces covering nearly 50 utilities within those states and provinces that currently use PSPS as a last resort measure in wildfire mitigation. These states and provinces would have areas that have similar electrical infrastructure and operating environment (i.e. radial line) as the Bow Valley corridor.

FortisAlberta:

The Bow Valley presents a unique operating environment compared to many jurisdictions due to: mountainous terrain and complex topography; dense forest fuels in proximity to infrastructure; high wind variability (including localized wind events); and proximity of communities and infrastructure to high-risk wildfire areas. FortisAlberta uses a third-party wildfire risk assessment to identify areas requiring enhanced mitigation measures, along with a suite of tools including grid hardening (covered conductors and specialized fuses), advanced technologies, strategically placed weather stations, forecasting and modeling tools, and staged operational procedures as wildfire risk increases. For example, Enhanced Powerline Safety Settings (EPSS) are used in escalating wildfire risk conditions that do not meet extreme levels, making the electric distribution system more sensitive to faults caused by vegetation or animals contacting the lines, helping to reduce the risk of ignition. In the Bow Valley Corridor, AltaLink (transmission) and FortisAlberta (distribution) operate independently, each with their own wildfire mitigation programs. This may not be the case in other jurisdictions, where a single utility may own both transmission and distribution. If AltaLink, the transmission provider, had a power outage, it would impact FortisAlberta customers in the affected area, requiring close coordination between both utilities.

Q3. In those jurisdictions, are PSPS programs commonly utilized, and are there infrastructure investments or mitigation measures that can reduce the likelihood of future shutoffs?

AltaLink:

Many of these jurisdictions have triggered a PSPS event. Each jurisdiction and situation is unique, and decisions are based on a range of conditions and triggers identified in each specific area. Similar to AltaLink, in these cases PSPS is considered a last-resort measure and is just one part of a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program that includes a number of measures to reduce wildfire risk. AltaLink's wildfire mitigation plan leverages data and risk modelling to guide operational procedures and capital investments that will cost-effectively reduce the risk of AltaLink's transmission system contributing to the ignition of a fire. This includes strengthening assets through modifications and upgrades, increased line inspections and vegetation management activities, enhancing situational awareness with the use of daily hazard forecasts, advanced weather stations and cameras, and expert advice from fire behavior analysts. All of these measures help reduce wildfire risk but do not replace the need to utilize a PSPS as a last-resort preventative measure in certain conditions, where the threat of sparking a fire is extreme.

FortisAlberta:

In the United States, PSPS programs are recognized as part of a mature wildfire risk mitigation plan. FortisAlberta has made significant investments to implement wildfire prevention measures in addition to PSPS to reduce wildfire risk, including: grid hardening (ignition-reducing upgrades such as covered conductor installations); enhanced vegetation management programs; advanced situational awareness (weather monitoring and wildfire



forecasting); and operational controls (such as Enhanced Powerline Safety Settings). These measures collectively reduce overall wildfire risk.

Q4. Are there any examples or guidance from other regions regarding how businesses and communities prepare for or recover from the operational impacts of a PSPS event?

AltaLink:

Power outages can happen for a number of reasons, not just PSPS. It is a best practice in emergency preparedness to encourage businesses to prepare for any emergency, including the potential of an extended power outage, with enough supplies that they may need to last for at least 72 hours.

FortisAlberta:

Learning from other jurisdictions is a great way to inform planning and preparedness for power outages. Taking a proactive approach, by establishing and practicing protocols in advance, can help make potential disruptions more manageable. Maintaining accurate contact information also ensures FortisAlberta can provide advance notice in the event of a power outage, if needed. FortisAlberta engages regularly with municipalities, including the Town of Banff and Lake Louise, to remain aligned on emergency response plans, and recommends businesses have a plan in place to minimize the disruption of a power outage. Guidance to help businesses and communities prepare for potential power outages is available through the Alberta Chambers of Commerce (Business Resiliency Tools for Alberta Companies). Key steps include:

- Stay informed: Keep contact information up to date with your retail service provider. Visit the FortisAlberta outage map and sign up for alerts. In addition to sending direct customer notification, FortisAlberta will work with local emergency response teams to request advisories are shared through the Voyent Alert System if extreme wildfire-risk conditions could lead to a Public Safety Power Shutoff.
- Assemble an outage kit: Make sure your kit is easy to access and that staff know where to find it. Include items such as flashlights, radios, backup battery chargers, and bottled water.
- Develop an Emergency Action Plan (EAP): Include business continuity measures to help minimize disruption during an outage. Your plan should consider: training employees on what to do if the power goes out (including safely shutting down sensitive equipment); protecting sensitive equipment with surge protectors; alternative ways to complete work (e.g. manual processes for computers and cash registers); backup power options where appropriate, including manual overrides for systems such as door locks; clear staff communication protocols; and potential impacts to reservations, services and operations.
- Practice your plan regularly: Test your procedures to ensure your business is safe and ready. For example, check that emergency lighting systems are in good working order.



A Note on Priorities

FortisAlberta recognizes the importance of reliable electricity for the hospitality sector. At the same time, both utilities have critical responsibilities: maintaining reliable service and keeping communities as safe as possible. Wildfire risk mitigation approaches are designed to keep these priorities aligned, a PSPS would only be considered in rare circumstances, when community safety outweighs the need to maintain service.

Sources & Further Information

- FortisAlberta wildfire safety information: www.fortisalberta.com/wildfiresafety
- Alberta Chambers of Commerce Business Resiliency Tools for Alberta Companies (ACC)

Both AltaLink and FortisAlberta have indicated they welcome the opportunity to meet with BLLHA to share further information about wildfire prevention tools used in the Bow Valley Corridor.

This FAQ was compiled from correspondence between BLLHA, FortisAlberta, and AltaLink.

