

Media statement – 3pm, 29 January 2013

Orion responds to fire risk

Electricity network company Orion has temporarily changed the way it operates its rural network to help minimise the risk of fire as the long dry spell in Canterbury continues.

Usually, a piece of equipment called a “recloser” automatically restores power to an overhead line after a momentary power cut. For instance, when a tree branch falls on a line in high winds it may cut power for a second or two. When the branch falls to the ground the recloser automatically reinstates the power to the line.

“Automatic reclosers are a great means of restoring power quickly. However, in extremely dry conditions such as those currently faced in Canterbury they can increase fire risk,” says Orion chief executive Rob Jamieson.

“This is because every time they try to reinstate the power, they can create a spark.”

Orion has shut down all automatic reclosers on its rural network and will manually check overhead lines to find the cause of any power cuts while the fire danger remains high.

“Unfortunately this means it will take longer to get the power back on, but we can’t take the risk of starting a fire in the current conditions. We need to make a tradeoff between the risk of power cuts and the risk of fire, and at the moment we believe it’s prudent to make this change,” says Mr Jamieson.

As Orion can’t guarantee that the power will stay on, it recommends that rural customers who rely on electricity for essential operations should have a generator available. For advice about safely connecting a generator to your property, call either Orion on 03 363 9898 or your local electrician.

ENDS

For further information contact:
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