



NEWS RELEASE 071

Contact: Kathy Carter
kathy.carter2@libertyutilities.com
(775) 813-1280

LIBERTY UTILITIES' ADDRESSES INCREASED TREE MORTALITY RISK

Lake Tahoe, CA June 1, 2018. With an increase in the number of dead and dying trees in the Lake Tahoe region, Liberty Utilities has tripled the number of inspectors they use to identify trees that pose a risk to the utility's infrastructure. The inspection program and subsequent removal of hazardous trees are designed to reduce the risk of power outages, potential wildfires, and to comply with State regulations.

"Years of drought have left many of the trees in our service territory vulnerable to disease, particularly damage by the bark beetle," explains Eliot Jones, Liberty Utilities' Manager of Vegetation Control and Regulatory Compliance. "We want to be as proactive as possible to reduce both outage and wildfire risks related to hazardous trees falling onto our poles and lines."

Liberty Utilities has been authorized by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to spend up to \$2.5 million each year on vegetation management programs in order to maintain the CPUC requirement to keep trees, branches and other vegetation surrounding utility infrastructure trimmed back to reduce outage risks. Liberty Utilities has increased its efforts this summer to go above and beyond its annual vegetation management program.

"In 2015 California declared a State of Emergency as a result of the vast tree mortality that has occurred in parts of California as a result of severe long-term drought and subsequent bark beetle infestation. The Lake Tahoe Basin includes two of the ten highest priority counties." Jones further explains. "The CPUC subsequently is allowing utilities to supplement their routine vegetation management practices which we are significantly ramping up this year."

Liberty Utilities hires qualified tree inspectors who are currently working along the 57-mile length of the utility's power line that serves the Tahoe City area. As high-risk trees are identified, another contractor will remove the hazards.

"We work closely with property owners to inform them about hazardous trees on or near their property that pose a risk to our lines," Jones added. "Often times, these trees can pose a risk to their homes too. While some of the identified trees may not look diseased or dying, our inspectors are able to determine whether bark beetles have compromised the tree."

Jones noted that any tree on private property that must be removed remains the property of the landowner. Liberty Utilities' contract crews will remove the tree limbs and dispose of them, but the tree log itself belongs to the property owner.

“We’ll often cut the tree log into 4 foot lengths so the property owner can more easily handle the wood as they see fit,” Jones added. “Overall we find that customers understand and appreciate the need to remove trees that pose a risk to our infrastructure, the forest and sometimes their homes.”

Jones expects that crews will continue their work in the Tahoe City area throughout June and will continue working along the west shore and other parts of the service territory affected by tree mortality as long as necessary. The goal is to remove all identified hazardous trees that have the ability to strike the high voltage power lines.

More information about Liberty Utilities’ vegetation management program can be found on its website at www.libertyutilities.com under the Safety link at the top. There is an FAQ document under Tree Safety that addresses many questions customers may have as well as a tree removal request form on the site.

About Liberty Utilities

Liberty Utilities Co. owns and operates regulated water, wastewater, natural gas and electric transmission and distribution utilities in 12 states, delivering responsive and reliable essential services to approximately 783,000 customers across the United States. With a local approach to management, service and support, we deliver efficient, dependable services to meet the needs of our customers. Liberty Utilities provides a superior customer experience through walk-in customer centers, locally focused conservation and energy efficiency initiatives, and programs for businesses and residential customers. We measure our performance in terms of service reliability, an enjoyable customer experience, and an unwavering dedication to public and workplace safety. Liberty Utilities currently operates in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma and Texas. For more information, please visit www.LibertyUtilities.com.