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Potentially disastrous fire prevented by new power line technology

Greg Gliddon

The simple box that may have prevented a bushfire at Ross Creek. Picture: Greg Gliddon

NEW power line conductor technology being trialled in Ross Creek may have already prevented a bushfire.

The technology, which is being tested across the western district and the north east of the state has uncovered a potentially disastrous fault, which, while unlikely to cause anything more than a power outage in winter, could have been disastrous had the line collapsed in summer.

The Early Fault Detection System has been placed on 61 power poles throughout the state by Victorian company IND.T in a state government funded trial of new technology aimed at reducing fire risk.

The technology is placed on power poles where it can detect faults as they develop.

Minister for Environment, Energy and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosiio said the government had committed $650,000 to the trial.

“We never want to see the repeat of the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires,” Ms D’Ambrosio said.

“Many of the bushfires that came from Black Saturday came from faults on single wire electricity lines, such as the ones these trials are being conducted on. Importantly, there was an event in May this year where two faults were detected which gave early warning signals to Powercor that there were faults in the line.

“We know that one of the faults detected was a similar fault to what caused the fires in Kilmore on Black Saturday. That is really a sobering reminder of how important these technologies and research into products like this is.”

The frayed wire discovered at Ross Creek, which had it have fallen could have caused a bushfire. Picture: Greg Gliddon

IND.T chairman Tony Marxsen said the technology was a world first.

“The box on the pole is sending data up to the cloud for processing every second and that is combined with data from other boxes up to 5km away,” Dr Marxsen said

“Any fault along that path at any time, will be signalled so the owner of the network can take action to remedy the fault before it turns into a fire or outage.

“The really good thing is we had a chance to trial it in rural areas where the fire risk was highest, the single wire lines are regarded as the worst type of lines that recorded the most damage at Black Saturday.”

The boxes were installed from November last year to February this year with the trial to continue until June next year.

Powercor general manager electricity networks Steven Neave said having an overhead network in a fire zone meant fires were bound to happen.

“It is our highest priority to mitigate the chance of bushfires and technology like this goes a long way to do that,” Mr Neave said.

“It’s relatively early stages, the trial will go until June, but what we can say is the results have been very promising and it’s worked the way it’s designed to.

“We’ll let the trial play out and then we’ll look at the deployment across our network.”

[Extracted from https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/5520930/potentially-disastrous-fire-prevented-by-new-power-line-technology/?cs=62 on 11 July 2018]